

Al-A'raf [The Heights]

Makkan Period

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

[1] *Alif. Lam. Mim. Sad.*

[2] This is a Book revealed to you. Let there be no qualm in your heart about it.¹ (It has been revealed to you) that you may thereby warn (the unbelievers), and that it may serve as a reminder to the believers.

[3] (O people), follow what has been revealed to you from your Lord and follow no masters other than Him. Little are you admonished.

[4] How many a township have We destroyed! Our scourge fell upon them at night, or when they were taking midday rest,

[5] And when Our scourge fell upon them their only cry was: "We are indeed transgressors."

[6] So We shall call to account those to whom Messengers were sent, and We shall call to account the Messengers (to see how dutifully they conveyed the Message, and how people responded to it).

[7] Then We shall narrate to them with knowledge the whole account. For surely We were not away from them.

1. The Prophet (peace be on him) is directed to preach his Message without fear or hesitation, and to disregard his opponents' response.

[8] The weighing on that Day will be the true weighing:² those whose scales are heavy will prosper,

[9] and those whose scales are light will be the losers, for they are the ones who have been iniquitous to Our signs.

[10] We assuredly established you in the earth and arranged for your livelihood in it. Little do you give thanks.

[11] We initiated your creation, then We gave you each a shape, and then We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam." They all prostrated themselves except *Iblis*: he was not one of those who fell prostrate.³

[12] Allah said: "What prevented you from prostrating yourself when I commanded you to do so?" He said: "I am better than he. You created me from fire, and him You created from clay."

[13] Allah said: "Then get you down from here. It does not behove you to be arrogant here. So be gone. You will be among the humiliated."⁴

2. *This means that when the Balance is fixed on the Day of Judgement, "truth" and "weight" will be identical. The more truth one has to one's credit, the more the weight in one's scale; and vice versa. One will be judged solely on the basis of this weight. In other words, no consideration other than truth will enter into the calculation.*

3. *This does not mean that Iblis was one of the angels. When the angels employed for managing the affairs of the earth were ordered to bow down before Adam it meant that all the creatures under the control of the angels should also submit to Adam. Of all these creatures Iblis was the one who declared that he would not bow down before Adam.*

4. *Implicit in the Qur'anic expression (saghirun) is the idea of contentment with one's disgrace and indignity, for saghir is he who invites disgrace and indignity upon himself. Now, Satan was a victim of vanity and pride, which could only bring upon him disgrace and indignity. Satan's degradation was, therefore, self-inflicted.*

[14] Satan replied: "Give me respite till the Day they shall be raised."

[15] Allah said: "You are granted respite."

[16] Satan said: "Since You have caused me to come to this end, I shall surely sit in ambush for them on Your Straight Path.

[17] Then I will come upon them from the front and from the rear, and from their right and from their left. And You will not find most of them thankful."

[18] Allah said: "Go away from here - disgraced and banished. I shall fill the Hell with all those that follow you.

[19] O Adam! Live you and your spouse in the Garden and both of you eat from it wherever you will, but never approach this tree or you shall become wrong-doers."

[20] But Satan made an evil suggestion to both of them that he might reveal to them their shame that had remained hidden from them. He said: "Your Lord has forbidden you to approach this tree only to prevent you from becoming angels or immortals."

[21] And he swore to them both: "Surely I am your sincere well-wisher."

[22] Thus Satan brought about their fall by deceit. And when they tasted of the tree, their shame became visible to them, and both began to cover themselves with leaves from the Garden. Then their Lord called out to them: "Did I not forbid you from that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan is your open enemy?"

[23] Both cried out: "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers."⁵

[24] Allah said: "Go down; you are enemies one of the other. For you there is dwelling and provision on the earth for a while."

[25] He continued: "You shall live there, and there shall you die, and from it you shall be raised to life."

[26] O Children of Adam! Indeed We have sent down to you a garment which covers your shame and provides protection and adornment. But the finest of all is the garment of piety. That is one of the signs of Allah so that they may take heed.

[27] Children of Adam! Let not Satan deceive you in the manner he deceived your parents out of Paradise, pulling off from them their clothing to reveal to them their shame. He and his host surely see you from whence you do not see them. We have made Satans the guardians of those who do not believe.

5. This shows that modesty and bashfulness are inherent in human nature. The primary manifestation of this instinct is seen in the sense of shame that one feels when one is required to expose the private parts of one's body in the presence of others. The very first stratagem adopted by Satan in his bid to lead man astray from the Right Path consisted of undermining man's sense of modesty to direct him towards lewdness and make him sexually deviant. Man is naturally drawn towards lofty ideals such as the attainment of an exalted spiritual station. Satan, therefore, was forced to present himself as man's sincere well-wisher and to promise him a more elevated position than the present one. This shows that the quality in man that distinguishes him from Satan is that on committing sin he repents and seeks God's forgiveness. In contrast, what brought disgrace and indignity upon Satan was that after disobeying he became adamant in transgression and resorted to rebellion.

[28] And when such people commit an indecent act they say: "We found our fathers doing that, and Allah has enjoined it on us."⁶ Say: "Surely Allah never enjoins any indecency. Do you say things regarding Allah that you do not know?"

[29] Say to them (O Muhammad): "My Lord enjoins justice; and that you set your faces aright at the time of every Prayer; and that you call upon Him, exclusively dedicating your faith to Him. You shall return to Him as you were created."

[30] A party He has guided to the Right Way, and for another party straying is justly its due for they have taken Satans, rather than Allah, as their guardians, for they think that they are rightly-guided.

[31] Children of Adam! Take your adornment at every time of Prayer;⁷ and eat and drink without going to excesses. For Allah does not like those who go to excess.

[32] Say (O Muhammad): "Who has forbidden the adornment which Allah has brought forth for His creatures or the good things from among the means of sustenance?" Say: "These are for the enjoyment of the believers in this world, and shall be exclusively theirs on the Day of Resurrection." Thus do We clearly expound Our revelations for those who have knowledge.

6. *This refers to the pre-Islamic Arabian practice of circumambulating the Ka 'bah in stark nakedness. Many of the people of those days circumambulated during Hajj in a state of nakedness. The women were even more shameless than men. They considered it a ritual which had both religious sanction and merit.*

7. *The word zinah which occurs in this verse refers to full and proper dress. While performing Prayer people are required not only to cover the private parts of their body but also to wear a dress that serves the two-fold purpose of covering the body and giving a decent appearance. One dresses up decently to meet a respectable person. In the same way one should put on a fine dress at the time of Prayer (when one goes, as it were, to meet one's Lord).*

[33] Tell them (O Muhammad): "My Lord has only forbidden indecent acts, whether overt or hidden; all manner of sin; ⁸ wrongful transgression; ⁹ and (He has forbidden) that you associate with Allah in His Divinity that for which He has sent down no sanction; and that you ascribe to Allah things of which you have no sure knowledge that they are from Him."

[34] For every community there is an appointed term; and when its term arrives, they cannot delay it by a moment, nor can they hasten it.

[35] Children of Adam! If Messengers come to you from amongst yourselves, rehearsing to you My Signs, then those who shun disobedience and mend their ways shall have nothing to fear, nor shall they grieve.

[36] And those who reject Our revelations as false and arrogantly turn away from them, they shall be the inmates of Hell; and there they shall abide.

[37] Who is more unjust than he who invents a falsehood, ascribing it to Allah, or who rejects His revelation as false? Their full portion of God's Decree shall reach them, ¹⁰ until Our deputed angels come to them to take charge of their souls, and say: "Where are the deities now, those whom you invoked besides Allah?" They will say: "They are all gone away from us." And they shall bear witness against themselves that they were unbelievers.

8. *The word ithm denotes negligence, dereliction of duty. Here it implies being slack in obeying the Lord.*

9. *That means to exceed the limits set by God and to enter an area which has been declared out of bounds for man.*

10. *All persons, whether good or bad, have been granted a definite term in this world which they will spend and obtain their share of worldly happiness and misery.*

[38] Allah will say: "Enter the Fire of Hell and join the groups of *jinn* and humans that have gone before you." As a group enters Hell, it will curse the one that went before it, and when all are gathered there, the last of them shall say of the first: "Our Lord! These are the ones who led us astray. Let their torment be doubled in Hell-Fire." He will answer: "Each will have a doubled torment; although you do not know."¹¹

[39] Then the preceding ones will say to the succeeding ones: "You were in no way superior to us; taste, then, this torment for your deeds."

[40] Surely the gates of Heaven shall not be opened for those who reject Our Signs as false and turn away from them in arrogance; nor shall they enter Paradise until a camel passes through the eye of a needle. Thus do We reward the guilty ones.

[41] Hell shall be their bed, and also above them their covering. Thus do We reward the wrong-doers.

[42] As for those who believe and do good, We do not impose upon any of them a burden beyond his capacity. They are the people of Paradise. And there they shall abide.

[43] We shall strip away all rancour from their hearts, and rivers shall flow beneath them, and they shall say: "All praise be to Allah Who has guided us on to this. Had it not been for Allah, Who granted us right guidance, we would not be on the Right Path. Surely the Messengers of our Lord came down with the Truth." Then a voice will cry out to them: "This is the Paradise which you are made to inherit as a reward for your deeds."

11. The torment resulting from wrong-doing, to which is added the punishment for being an evil influence on others. The punishment for one's own sins is doubled by the crime of leaving behind a legacy of sins which one's followers will indulge in.

[44] And the people of Paradise shall cry to the people of Hell: "Surely we have found our Lord's promise to us to be true; have you also found true what your Lord had promised you?" "Yes", they shall answer; and a herald shall cry out among them: "Allah's curse be upon the wrong-doers;

[45] upon those who hinder people from the path of Allah and seek to make it crooked, and disbelieve in the Hereafter."

[46] And between the two there will be a barrier, and on the Heights will be some other people who will recognize each person by his mark and will cry out to the people of Paradise: "Peace be to you." These will be the ones who had not yet joined them in Paradise, though they long to do so.¹²

[47] And when the eyes of the people of the Heights will be turned towards the people of Hell they will say: "Our Lord! Do not cast us with the wrong-doing people."

[48] And the people of the Heights will cry out to the prominent people (of Hell) whom they would recognize by their marks: "Neither your host nor the riches of which you were proud availed you.

[49] Are these (people of Paradise) not the ones about whom you swore that Allah shall grant them no part of His mercy?" To such it will be said: "Enter Paradise. You have no cause to fear, nor shall you grieve."

12. The people of A'raf (Heights) will be the people who are neither righteous enough to enter Paradise nor wicked enough to be cast into Hell. They will, therefore, dwell at a place situated between the two and will look forward to God's Mercy to be allowed to enter Paradise.

[50] And the people of the Fire will cry out to the people of Paradise: "Pour out some water on us or throw at us something of what Allah has bestowed upon you." They will reply: "Allah has forbidden both of these to the deniers of the Truth,

[51] who had made their religion a sport and play, and who were beguiled by the life of the world. So on that Day We shall forget them in the manner they forget their meeting of this Day with Us and persisted in denying Our revelations."

[52] Surely We have brought them a Book which We expounded with knowledge; a guidance and a mercy to those who believe.

[53] Are they waiting for the fulfilment of its warning? On the Day that warning is fulfilled, those that have neglected it before will say: "The Messengers of Our Lord did indeed bring forth the Truth. Are there any intercessors who will now plead on our behalf; or, can we be restored to life that we might perform differently from that which we did?" They surely ended in utter loss, and the lies they had fabricated failed them.

[54] Surely your Lord is none other than Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days, ¹³ and then ascended His Throne, ¹⁴ Who causes the night to cover the day and then the day swiftly pursues the night, Who created the sun and the moon and the stars making them all subservient to His command. Lo! His is the creation and His is the command. ¹⁵ Blessed is Allah, ¹⁶ the Lord of the whole Universe.

13. The word "day" in the above verse has been used either in the usual sense of the twenty-four-hour unit of time, or in a more general sense of "period" of time.

14. It is quite difficult to fully appreciate the exact nature of the Qur'anic statement: that (Allah) ascended the Throne. This is a figurative expression whose precise meaning cannot be established.

15. God is not merely the sole creator but also the only One Who commands and governs. It is not true to imagine that after creating He has detached Himself from His creation, leaving it to the care of others who might rule over it as they please.

16. To say that God is full of barakah means that His goodness knows no bounds; that endless beneficence emanates from Him.

[55] Call upon your Lord with humility and in secret. Surely He does not love the transgressors.

[56] And do not make mischief in the earth after it has been set in order, ¹⁷ and call upon Him with fear and longing. Surely Allah's mercy is close to those who do good.

[57] And it is He Who sends forth winds as glad tidings in advance of His mercy, and when they have carried a heavy-laden cloud We drive it to a dead land, then We send down rain from it and therewith bring forth fruits of every kind. In this manner do We raise the dead that you may take heed.

[58] As for the good land, vegetation comes forth in abundance by the command of its Lord, whereas from the bad land, only poor vegetation comes forth. Thus do We expound Our Signs in diverse ways for a people who are grateful.

17. Do not corrupt, by your perversity and folly, the right order of human life that has been established in hundreds and thousands of years by the efforts of God's Prophets and reformers.

[59] Indeed We sent forth Noah to his people, ¹⁸ and he said: "O my people! Serve Allah, you have no other god than Him. Indeed I fear for you the chastisement of an awesome Day."

[60] The leading people of his nation replied: "We see that you are in palpable error."

[61] He said: "O my people! There is no error in me, but I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Universe.

[62] I convey to you the messages of my Lord, give you sincere advice, and I know from Allah that which you do not know.

[63] Do you wonder that admonition should come to you from your Lord through a man from amongst yourselves that he may warn you that you may avoid evil and that mercy may be shown to you?"

[64] But they charged him with falsehood. Thereupon We delivered Noah and those who were with him in the Ark, and caused those who rejected Our signs as false to be drowned. Surely they were a blind folk.

[65] And to 'Ad We sent forth their brother Hud.¹⁹ He said: "O my people! Serve Allah, you have no other god than He. Will you, then, not avoid evil?"

[66] The unbelievers among the leading men of his people said: "Indeed we see you in folly, and consider you to be a liar."

18. The people of Noah inhabited the land presently known as Iraq.

19. The people of 'Ad lived mainly in the Ahqaf region which lies between Hijaz, Yemen and Yamamah. It was from there that the people of 'Ad spread to the western coast of Yemen and established their hegemony in 'Uman, Hadramawt and Iraq.

[67] He said: "O my people! There is no folly in me; rather, I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Universe.

[68] I convey to you the messages of my Lord, and I give you sincere advice.

[69] Do you wonder that an exhortation should come to you from your Lord through a man from amongst yourselves that he may warn you? And do call to mind when He made you successors after the people of Noah and amply increased you in stature. Remember, then, the wondrous bounties of Allah²⁰ that you may prosper. "

[70] They said: "Have you come to us that we should worship none other than Allah and forsake all whom our forefathers were wont to worship? Then bring upon us the scourge with which you have threatened us if you are truthful!"

[71] Hud warned them: "Surely punishment and wrath from your Lord have befallen upon you. Do you dispute with me about mere names that you and your forefathers have concocted²¹ and for which Allah has sent down no sanction? Wait, then, and I too am with you among those who wait."

[72] Then We delivered Hud and his companions by Our mercy, and We utterly cut off the last remnant of those who gave the lie to Our signs and would not believe.

20. The word ala' used in the above verse stands for bounties, wondrous works of nature, and praiseworthy qualities.

21. They had appointed for themselves gods of rain, and gods of wind, and gods of wealth, and health. But none of these enjoys Godhead; these titles are merely empty words, bereft of the qualities attributed to them. All argumentation aimed at justifying these titles amounts to a lot of sound and fury about nothing.

[73] And to Thamud We sent forth their brother, Salih.²² He said to them: "O my people! Serve Allah, you have no other god than He. Truly there has come to you a clear proof from your Lord. This she-camel from Allah is a Divine portent for you.²³ So leave her alone to pasture on Allah's earth, and touch her with no evil lest a painful chastisement should seize you.

[74] And call to mind when after 'Ad He made you their successors and gave you power in the earth so that you took for yourselves palaces in its plains and hewed out dwellings in the mountains. Remember, then, the wondrous bounties of Allah and do not go about creating mischief in the land.

[75] The haughty elders of his nation said to those believers who had been oppressed: "Do you know that Salih is one sent forth with a message from his Lord?" They replied: "Surely we believe in the message with which he has been sent."

[76] The haughty ones remarked: "Most certainly we disbelieve in that which you believe."

[77] Then they hamstrung the she-camel,²⁴ disdainfully disobeyed the commandment of their Lord, and said: "O Salih! Bring upon us the scourge with which you threatened us if you are truly a Messenger (of Allah)."

22. *The Thamud lived in the north-western part of Arabia which is still called al-Hijr. In the present time there is a station on the Hijaz railway between Madinah and Tabuk. This is called Mada'in Salih, which was the capital town of Thamud and was then known as al-Hijr, the rock-hewn city. It survives to this day.*

23. *From the details of this story that can be gleaned from the Qur'an one learns that the Thamud themselves had asked the Prophet Salih to produce some sign which would support his claim to be God's Messenger. Responding to it, Salih pointed to the she-camel.*

24. *Although the she-camel was killed by an individual, as we learn also from Surahs al-Qamar (54) and al-Shams (91), the whole nation was considered guilty since it stood at the killer's back. He was a mere tool for carrying out the collective will of the nation. The whole nation was therefore held guilty.*

[78] Thereupon a shocking catastrophe seized them so that they lay prostrate in their dwellings.

[79] And Salih left them, saying: "O my people! I conveyed to you the message of my Lord and gave you good advice; but you have no liking for your well-wishers."

[80] And remember when We sent Lot (as a Messenger) to his people and he said to them: ²⁵ "Do you realize that you practise an indecency of which no other people in the world were guilty of before you?"

[81] You approach men lustfully in place of women. You are a people who exceed all bounds."

[82] Their only answer was: "Banish them from your town. They are a people who pretend to be pure."

[83] Then We delivered Lot and his household save his wife who stayed behind,

[84] and We let loose a shower (of stones) upon them.²⁶ Observe, then, the end of the evil doers.

25. *The Prophet Lot was a nephew of the Prophet Abraham. God bestowed prophethood upon him and assigned to him the mission of reforming his misguided people who inhabited the land which is situated either somewhere near the Dead Sea, or presently lies submerged under it.*

26. The "rainfall" in the verse does not refer to the descent of water from the sky. It rather refers to the volley of stones that rained upon them, as stated at other places in the Qur'an.

[85] And to Midian²⁷ We sent forth their brother Shu'ayb. He exhorted them: "O my people! Serve Allah, you have no god other than He. Indeed a clear proof has come to you from your Lord. So give just weight and measure and diminish not to people their things, and make not mischief on the earth after it has been set in good order. That is to your own good, if you do truly believe."²⁸

[86] And do not lie in ambush by every path (of life) seeking to overawe or to hinder those who believe from the path of Allah, nor seek to make the path crooked. Remember, how you were once few, and then He multiplied you, and keep in mind what was the end of the mischief-makers.

[87] And if there are some among you who believe in the message that I bear while some do not believe, have patience till Allah should judge between us. He is the best of those who judge."

[88] The haughty elders of his nation said: "O Shu'ayb! We shall certainly banish you and your companions-ire faith from our town, or else you shall return to our faith." Shu'ayb said: "What, even though we abhor (your faith)?

[89] If we return to your faith after Allah has delivered us from it we would be fabricating a lie against Allah; nor can we return to it again unless it be by the will of Allah, our Lord. Our Lord has knowledge of all things, and in Allah do we put our trust. Our Lord! Judge rightly between us and our people, for You are the best of those who judge."

27. The territory of Madyan (Midian) lay to the north-west of Hijaz and south of Palestine on the coast of the Red Sea and the Gulf of 'Aqaba, and a part of the territory stretched to the northern border Of the Sinai Peninsula. The Midianites were traders and their towns were situated at the crossroads of the trade routes from Yemen through Makkah and Yanbu'to Syria along the Red Sea coast, and from Iraq to Egypt.

28. This clearly shows that the people concerned claimed to be believers.

[90] The disbelieving elders of his nation said: "Should you follow Shu'ayb, you will be utter losers."²⁹

[91] Thereupon a shocking catastrophe seized them, and they remained prostrate in their dwellings.

[92] Those who had charged Shu'ayb with lying became as though they had never lived there; it is they who became utter losers.

[93] Shu'ayb then departed from his people, and said: "O my people! Surely I conveyed to you the message of my Lord, and gave you sincere advice. How, then, can I mourn for a people who refuse to accept the Truth?"

[94] Never have We sent any Prophet to a place without trying its people with adversity and hardship that they may humble themselves.

[95] Then We changed adversity into ease until they thrived and said: "Our forefathers had also seen both adversity and prosperity." So We suddenly seized them without their even perceiving it.³⁰

29. *Such attitudes have not, however, been confined to the tribal chiefs of Shu'ayb, People who stray away from truth, honesty and righteousness, regardless of their age and clime, have always found in honesty a means of great loss. People of warped mentalities in every age have always believed that trade, politics, and other worldly pursuits can never flourish unless they resort to dishonest and immoral practices. The pursuit of truth, in their view, spells one's material doom.*

30. *After narrating individually the stories of how various nations responded to the Message of their Prophets, the Qur'an now spells out the general rule which has been operative throughout the ages. First, before the appearance of a Prophet in any nation, conditions that would be conducive to the acceptance of his Message were created. This was usually done by subjecting the nations concerned to a variety of afflictions and punishments so that they should incline to heed the words of warning and to turn to God in humility. But if the people continued to refrain from embracing the Truth they were subjected to another kind of test - that of affluence. This last test signalled the beginning of their destruction. Rolling in abundant wealth and luxury in spite of their refusal to heed the moral admonition of their Prophet, they thought that there was no God above them Who could call them to account. This made them arrogant and vain, leading them to being punished by God.*

[96] Had the people of those towns believed I and been God-fearing, We would certainly have opened up to them blessings from the heavens and the earth; but they gave the lie (to their Prophets) and so We seized them for their deeds.

[97] Do the people of those towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them at night while they are asleep?

[98] Or, do the people of those towns feel secure that Our punishment will not come upon them by day while they are at play?

[99] Do they feel secure against Allah's design? None can feel secure against Allah's design³¹ except the utter losers.

[100] Has it not, then, become plain to those who have inherited the earth in the wake of the former generations that, if We had so willed, We could have afflicted them for their sins, (they, however, are heedless to the basic facts and so) We seal their hearts so that they hear nothing.

31. *The expression makr signifies a secret design of which the victim has no inkling until the decisive blow is struck. Until then, the victim is under the illusion that everything is in good order.*

[101] To those (earlier) communities - some of whose stories We relate to you -there had indeed come Messengers with clear proofs, but they would not believe what they had once rejected as false. Thus it is that Allah seals the hearts of those who deny the Truth.

[102] We did not find most of them true to their covenants; indeed, We found most of them to be transgressors.

[103] After them We sent forth Moses to Pharaoh³² and his nobles with Our Signs, but they treated Our Signs iniquitously. Observe, then, what happened to the mischief-makers!

[104] And Moses said: "O Pharaoh! I am a Messenger from the Lord of the Universe.

[105] It behoves me to say nothing about Allah except what is true. I have come to you with a Clear Sign of having been sent from your Lord. So let the Children of Israel go with me."

[106] Pharaoh said: "If you have brought a Sign, then bring it forth if you are truthful."

[107] Thereupon Moses threw his rod, and suddenly it was a veritable serpent.

[108] Then he drew out his hand, and it appeared luminous to all beholders.

[109] The elders of Pharaoh's nation said: "Surely this person is a skilful magician

[110] who seeks to drive you out from your land.³³ What would you have us do?"

32. Pharaoh literally means "the offspring of the sun-god". The ancient Egyptians called the sun Ra, worshipped it as their supreme deity, and Pharaoh - Ra's physical manifestation and representative -was named after it. This was not the name of any individual but the title of Egyptian kings, like Czar and Chosroes, the titles of the Russian and Iranian kings, respectively.

33. Moses' claim to prophethood implied the call to total change, obviously including political change. For if a person lays claim to be God's Messenger, it implies that people should obey him unreservedly. For God's Messengers are not sent to the world to obey other human beings and live in subordination to them as that would be inconsistent with their position as Prophets; they rather ask others to accept them as their leaders and rulers. It is this which explains why Pharaoh and his coterie felt threatened by an all-out revolution - political, economic and social - when Moses came forth with his call and they apprehended that if he succeeded they would lose their political power.

[111] Then they advised Pharaoh: "Put off Moses and his brother for a while, and send forth heralds to your cities

[112] to summon every skilful magician to your presence."

[113] And the magicians came to Pharaoh and said: "Shall we indeed have a reward if we win?"

[114] Pharaoh replied: "Certainly, and you shall be among those who are near to me."

[115] Then they said: "O Moses, will you (first) throw your rod, or shall we throw?"

[116] Moses said: "You throw." So when they threw [their rods], they enchanted the eyes of the people, and struck them with awe, and produced a mighty sorcery.

[117] Then We directed Moses: "Now you throw your rod." And lo! It swallowed up all their false devices.

[118] Thus was the Truth established, and their doings were shown to be false.

[119] Pharaoh and his comrades were defeated and put to shame,

[120] and the magicians flung themselves prostrate,

[121] saying: "We believe in the Lord of the whole Universe,

[122] the Lord of Moses and Aaron."³⁴

34. Thus God turned the tables on Pharaoh and his courtiers. They had arranged the magic show in the hope that it would convince the people that Moses was just a sorcerer, and thus make them sceptical about his claim to prophethood. But the actual outcome was quite the opposite. The sorcerers who had been assembled were defeated. Not only that, it was also unanimously acknowledged that the signs displayed by Moses in support of his claim were not feats of magic. Rather, his signs manifested the might of God, the Lord of the Universe, and hence could not be overcome by magic.

[123] Pharaoh said: "What, do you believe before you have my permission? Surely this is a plot you have contrived to drive out the rulers from the capital. So you shall see,

[124] I shall cut off your hands and feet on the opposite sides, and then crucify you all."

[125] They replied: "We shall surely return to our Lord.

[126] Will you punish us just because we believed in the Signs of our Lord when they came to us? Our Lord! Shower us with perseverance and cause us to die as those who have submitted (to You)."³⁵

35. Faced with utter failure Pharaoh finally resorted to branding the whole magic tournament as a conspiracy concocted by Moses and his accomplice sorcerers. Under threat of death and physical torture he asked the sorcerers to confess that they had acted in collusion with Moses. This last move by Pharaoh was ineffectual. For the sorcerers readily agreed to endure every torture, clearly proving thereby that their decision to accept Moses' message reflected their sincere conviction and that no conspiracy was involved, The tremendous and instantaneous change which took place in the characters of the sorcerers as a result of belief is also of significance. The sorcerers had come all the way from their homes with the purpose of vindicating their ancestral faith and receiving pecuniary reward from Pharaoh for overcoming Moses. However, the moment true faith illumined their hearts, they displayed such resoluteness of will and love for the Truth that they contemptuously turned down Pharaoh's offer, and demonstrated their full readiness to endure even the worst punishments for the sake of the truth that had dawned upon them.

[127] The elders of Pharaoh's nation said: "Will you leave alone Moses and his people to spread mischief in the land, and forsake you and your gods?" Pharaoh replied: "We will kill

their male children and spare their female ones.³⁶ For indeed we hold irresistible sway over them.”

[128] Moses said to his people: “Seek help from Allah and be steadfast. The earth is Allah’s He bestows it on those of His servants He chooses.³⁷ The end of things belongs to the God-fearing.”

[129] The people of Moses replied: “We were oppressed before your coming to us and after it.” Moses said: “Your Lord will soon destroy your enemy and make you rulers in the land. Then He will see how you act.”

[130] We afflicted the people of Pharaoh with hard times and with poor harvest that they may heed.

[131] But whenever prosperity came their way, they said: “This is our due.” And whatever hardship befell them, they attributed it to the misfortune of Moses and those who followed him. Surely, their misfortune had been decreed by Allah -but most of them do not know that.

[132] And they said to Moses: “Whatever Sign you might produce before us in order to enchant us, we are not going to believe you.”

36. There were two periods of persecution. The first was during the reign of Rameses II and took place before Moses' birth, whereas the second period of persecution started after Moses was designated a Prophet. Common to both periods is the killing of the male issue of Israelites while the female was spared. It was a calculated design to rob the Israelites of their identity and to bring about their forcible assimilation.

37. Nowadays some people pick out for special attention the words "The earth is Allah's" and ignore the next part of the statement, viz. "He bestows it on those of His servants He chooses."

[133] Then We afflicted them with a great flood and locusts, and lice, and frogs, and blood. All these were distinct Signs and yet they remained haughty. They were a wicked people.

[134] Each time a scourge struck them they said: "O Moses! Pray for us to your Lord on the strength of the prophethood He has bestowed upon you. Surely, if you remove this scourge from us, we will truly believe in you, and will let the Children of Israel go with you."

[135] But when We removed the scourge from them until a term - a term which they were bound to reach - they at once broke their promise.

[136] So We inflicted Our retribution on them, and caused them to drown in the sea because they gave the lie to Our Signs and were heedless of them.

[137] And We made those who had been persecuted inherit the eastern and western lands which We had blessed.³⁸ Thus your Lord’s gracious promise was fulfilled to the Children of Israel, for they had endured with patience; and We destroyed all that Pharaoh and his people had wrought, and all that they had built.

[138] And We led the Children of Israel across the sea; and then they came upon a people who were devoted to the worship of their idols. They said: "O Moses, make for us a god even as they have gods."³⁹ Moses said: "You are indeed an ignorant people."

38. The Israelites were made the inheritors of Palestine. It is the land of Palestine and Syria about which the Qur'an says at several places that blessing was bestowed on it by God.

39. Though the Israelites were Muslims they had imbibed these influences during the centuries of living together with the idolatrous people of Egypt.

[139] The way these people follow is bound to lead to destruction; and all their works are vain.

[140] Moses said: "Should I seek any god for you other than Allah although it is He Who has exalted you above all?"

[141] And call to mind when We delivered you from Pharaoh's people who perpetrated on you a terrible torment, putting your males to death and sparing your females. Surely in it there was an awesome trial for you from your Lord.

[142] And We appointed for Moses thirty nights, to which We added ten, whereby the term of forty nights set by his Lord was fulfilled. And Moses said to Aaron, his brother: "Take my place among my people, act righteously, and do not follow the path of those who create mischief."

[143] And when Moses came at Our appointment and his Lord spoke to him, he said: "O my Lord! Reveal Yourself to me that I may look upon You!" He replied; "Never can you see Me. However, behold this mount; if it remains firm in its place, only then will you be able to see Me." And as soon as his Lord unveiled His glory to the mount, He crushed it into fine dust, and Moses fell down in a swoon. And when he recovered, he said: "Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance, and I am the foremost among those who believe,"

[144] He said: "O Moses! I have indeed preferred you to others by virtue of the Message I have entrusted to you and by virtue of My speaking to you. Hold fast, therefore, to whatever I have granted you, and give thanks."

[145] And We ordained for Moses in the Tablets all manner of admonition, and instruction concerning all things, and said to him: "Hold to these, with all your strength, and bid your people to follow them in accord with their best understanding. I shall soon show you the habitation of the wicked.

[146] I shall turn away from My Signs those who, without any right, behaved haughtily in the earth. Even if they may witness each and every Sign, they shall not believe therein. And even if they see the Right Path, they shall still not follow it; but if they see the path of error, they shall choose it for their path. This is because they rejected Our signs and were heedless to them.

[147] Vain are the deeds of those who reject Our signs as false and to the meeting of the Hereafter as false. Shall they be recompensed, except according to their deeds?"

[148] And in the absence of Moses his people made the image of a calf from their ornaments, which lowed. Did they not observe that it could neither speak nor give them any guidance? And still they made it an object of worship. They were indeed wrong-doing.⁴⁰

[149] And when they were afflicted with remorse and realized that they had fallen into error, they said: "If our Lord does not have mercy on us and does not pardon us, we shall be among the losers."

[150] And when Moses returned to his people, full of wrath and sorrow, he said: "Vile is the course you have followed in my absence. Could you not patiently wait for the decree of your Lord?" And he threw down the Tablets (of the Law) and took hold of his brother's head, dragging him to himself. Aaron said: "My mother's son, the people overpowered me and almost killed me. So let not my enemies gloat over me, and do not number me among the wrong-doing folk."

40. Their cow-worship was another manifestation of the Israelites' slavish attachment to the Egyptian traditions at the time of the Exodus. It is well-known that cow-worship was widespread in Egypt. The Israelis were so deeply influenced by this practice that no sooner had their Prophet left than they made for themselves the image of a calf to worship.

[151] Thereupon Moses said: "O Lord! Bestow forgiveness upon me and my brother and admit us to Your Mercy, for You are Most Merciful of the Merciful."

[152] In reply they were told: "Verily those who worshipped the calf will certainly incur indignation from their Lord, and will be abased in the life of this world. Thus do We recompense those who fabricate lies.

[153] As for those who do evil, and later repent and have faith, such shall find their Lord All-Forgiving, All- Compassionate after (they repent and believe)."

[154] And when the anger of Moses was stilled, he took up the Tablets again, the text of which comprised guidance and mercy to those who fear their Lord.

[155] And out of his people Moses singled out seventy men for Our appointment.⁴¹ Then, when a violent shaking seized them, he addressed his Lord: "Had You willed, O my Lord, You could have destroyed them and me long ago. Will You destroy us for the misdeeds of the fools amongst us? That was nothing but a trial from You whereby You mislead whom You will and guide whom You will. You alone are our Guardian. Forgive us, then, and have mercy upon us. You are the best of those who forgive.

[156] And ordain for us what is good in this world and in the World to Come for to You have we turned." He replied: "I afflict whomsoever I wish with My chastisement, As for My Mercy, it encompasses everything. I will show Mercy to those who abstain from evil, pay Zakah, and have faith in Our Signs."

41. Moses was summoned for the second time to Mount Sinai along with seventy chiefs of his nation in order that they might seek pardon for their calf-worship and renew their covenant with God.

[157] (Today this Mercy is for) those who follow the *ummi* Prophet, ⁴² whom they find mentioned in the Torah and the Gospel that they have. He enjoins upon them what is good and forbids them what is evil. He makes the clean things lawful to them and prohibits all corrupt things and removes from them their burdens and the shackles that were upon them. ⁴³ So those who believe in him and assist him, and succour him and follow the Light which has been sent down with him, it is they who shall prosper.

[158] (Say, O Muhammad): "O people! I am Allah's Messenger to you all - of Him to Whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. There is no god but He. He grants life and deals death. Have faith, then, in Allah and in His Messenger the *ummi* Prophet who believes in Allah and His words; and follow him so that you may be guided aright."

42. Reference to the Prophet (peace be on him) in this verse as ummi is significant as the Israelites branded all other nations as Gentiles (ummis). Steeped in racial prejudice, they did not consider members of other nations as their equals, let alone accept any person not belonging to them as a Prophet. The Qur'an also states the Jewish belief that they would not be taken to task for whatever they might do to non-Jews. (See Al-Imran 3:75.) Employing the same term which they themselves had used, the Qur'an tells them that their destiny was linked with the ummi Prophet. By obeying him they would become deserving of God's Mercy. As for disobedience to the Prophet (peace be on him), it would continue to arouse God's wrath which had been afflicted upon them for centuries.

43. The Israelites had fettered their lives by undue restrictions which had been placed on them by the legal hair-splitting of their Jurists, the pietistic exaggerations of their spiritual leaders, the introduction of superstitions and self-contrived laws and regulations by their masses. The Prophet (peace be on him), by relieving them of every unnecessary burden and releasing them from every unjustified restriction, in fact liberated their shackled lives.

[159] Among the people of Moses there was a party who guided others in the way of the Truth and established justice in its light.

[160] And We divided them into twelve tribes, forming them into communities. When his people asked Moses for water We directed him: "Smite the rock with your rod." Then twelve springs gushed forth from the rock and every people knew their drinking-places. And We caused thick clouds to provide them shade, and sent down upon them manna and quails, saying: "Eat of the clean things that We have provided you." They wronged not Us, but it was themselves that they wronged.

[161] And recall when it was said to them: "Dwell in this town and eat plentifully of whatever you please, and say: 'Repentance,' and enter the gate prostrate. We shall forgive you your sins and shall bestow further favours on those who do good."

[162] Then the wrong-doers among them substituted another word in place of the one told to them. So We sent upon them a scourge from the sky as a punishment for their wrong-doing.

[163] And ask the people of Moses concerning the town situated along the sea: ⁴⁴ how its people profaned the Sabbath when fish came to them breaking the water's surface on Sabbath days, and it would not come to them on other than Sabbath days. Thus did We try them because of their disobedience.

44. Most scholars identify this place with Eilat, Eilath or Eloth. The seaport called Elat which has been built by the present state of Israel (which is close to the Jordanian seaport of 'Aqaba), stands on the same site.

[164] And recall when a party of them said: "Why do you admonish a people whom Allah is about to destroy or punish severely?" They said: "We admonish them in order to be able to offer an excuse before Your Lord, and in the hope that they will guard against disobedience."

[165] Then, when they forgot what they had been exhorted, We delivered those who forbade evil and afflicted the wrong-doers with a grievous chastisement because of their evil-doing.

[166] And when they persisted in pursuing that which had been forbidden We said: "Become despised apes."⁴⁵

45. This shows that the people in that town were of three categories. One, those who flagrantly violated God's commands. Two, those who were silent spectators to such violations and discouraged those who admonished the criminals, pleading that their efforts were fruitless. Three, those who, moved by their religious commitment, actively enjoined good and forbade evil so that the evil-doers might make amends. In so doing, they were prompted by a sense of duty to bring back the evil doers to the Right Path, and if the latter did not respond to their call, they would at least be able to establish before their Lord that for their part they had fulfilled their duty to admonish the evil-doers. So, when the town was struck by God's punishment, only the people belonging to the last category were spared for they had displayed God-consciousness and performed the duties incumbent upon them. As for the people of the other two categories, they were reckoned as transgressors and were punished in proportion to their crimes. But the punishment of transforming the persistent evil-doers into apes was confined only to the people of the second category.

[167] And recall when your Lord proclaimed that He would continually set in authority over them, till the Day of Judgement, those who would ruthlessly oppress them. Surely, your Lord is swift in chastising; and yet He is All-Forgiving, All-Merciful.

[168] And We dispersed them through the earth in communities - some were righteous, others were not -and We tested them with prosperity and adversity that they may revert (to righteousness).

[169] Then others succeeded them who inherited the scriptures, and yet kept themselves occupied in acquiring the goods of this world and kept saying: "We shall be forgiven." And when there comes to them an opportunity for acquiring more of those goods, they seize it. Was not the covenant of the Book taken from them that they would not ascribe to Allah anything but the Truth? And they have read what is in the Book and know that the abode of the Hereafter is better for the God-fearing. ⁴⁶ Do you not understand?

[170] Those who hold fast to the Book and establish Prayer -We shall not allow the reward of such righteous people to go to waste.

[171] And recall when We shook the mountain over them as though it were a canopy, and they thought that it was going to fall over them, and We said: "Hold firmly to that which We have given you, and remember what is in it, that you may guard against evil."

[172] And recall, (O Prophet), when your Lord brought forth descendants from the loins of the sons of Adam, and made them witnesses against their own selves, asking them: "Am I not your Lord?" They said: "Yes, we do testify."⁴⁷ We did so lest you should claim on the Day of Resurrection: "We were unaware of this."

46. The above verse has two renderings. It may be either translated as above or it may be rendered thus: "For the righteous, only the home in the Hereafter is the best."

47. This event, according to several traditions, took place at the time of the creation of Adam. Apart from the prostration of the angels before Adam and the proclamation that man would be God's vicegerent on earth, all the future progeny of Adam were gathered and were endowed with both existence and consciousness in order to bear witness to God's lordship.

[173] Or say: "(It was our forefathers) before us who associated others with Allah in His Divinity; we were merely their offspring who followed them. Would You destroy us for the deeds of the unrighteous?"

[174] Thus do We expound the Signs⁴⁸ that they may turn back (to the Right Path).

[175] And recite to them, (O Muhammad), the story of the man to whom We gave Our Signs and who turned away from them; then ultimately Satan caught up with him and he was led astray.

[176] Now, had We so willed We could indeed have exalted him through those Signs, but he clung to earthly life and followed his carnal desires. Thus his parable is that of the dog who lolls out his tongue whether you attack him or leave him alone.⁴⁹ Such is the parable of those who reject Our Signs as false. Narrate to them these parables that they may reflect.

48. "Signs" here refer to the imprints made by the knowledge of the Truth on the human heart which help in the cognition of the Truth.

49. According to commentators this statement is applicable to numerous people belonging to the times of the Prophet (peace be on him) as well as ancient times, though the identity of the particular person referred to here has not been revealed. However, this applies to any person who bears such character. God likens him to a dog who lolls out his tongue and salivates all the time testifying to his insatiable greed and avarice. The basis of this metaphor is the same for which a person blinded by worldly greed is called a dog of the world.

[177] Evil is the example of the people who reject Our Signs as false and perpetrate wrong against their own selves.

[178] He whom Allah guides, he alone is rightly guided; and he whom Allah lets go astray- it is they who are the losers.

[179] And certainly We have created for Hell many of the *jinn* and mankind; they have hearts with which they fail to understand; and they have eyes with which they fail to see; and they have ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle - indeed, even more astray. Such are utterly heedless.⁵⁰

[180] Allah has the most excellent names. So call on Him by His names and shun those who distort them. They shall soon be required for their deeds.⁵¹

[181] And of those whom We have created there is a party who guide people through the Truth and act justly according to it.

[182] As for those who reject Our Signs as false, We shall lead them, step by step, to their ruin without their even perceiving it.

50. Even though God has bestowed upon people the faculties of observation, hearing and reasoning, some people do not use them properly. Thus, because of their own failing, they end up in Hell.

51. The "most excellent names" used of God express His greatness and paramountcy, holiness, purity, and the absoluteness of His attributes. The commitment of ilhad in naming God mentioned in the verse consists of choosing names which are below His majestic dignity and inconsistent with the reverence due to Him; names which ascribe evil or defect to God, or reflect false notions about Him.

[183] And (for this purpose) I shall grant them respite. My design is incontrovertible.

[184] Have they not pondered that their companion (i.e. the Prophet Muhammad) is not afflicted with insanity?⁵² He is only a plain warner.

[185] Have they not observed the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and all that Allah has created, and that their term of life might have drawn near? After this warning from the Prophet, what will it be that will make them believe?

[186] For those whom Allah lets go astray, there is no guide; and He will leave them to stumble blindly in their transgression.

[187] They ask you concerning the Hour, when will its coming be? Say: "The knowledge of it is with my Lord alone: none but He will disclose it at its time. That will weigh heavily on the heavens and the earth, and it shall come upon you all too suddenly." They ask you, as if you are eagerly inquisitive about it. Say to them: "The knowledge of it lies with none except Allah. But most people are unaware of this reality."

52. *The word "companion" here refers to the Prophet (peace be on him), who was born, brought up, and grew into youth, in short, spent his whole life including his old age in their midst. Before the advent of his prophethood, Muhammad (peace be on him) was known to all the Quraysh as good-natured and of sound mind. However, as he started calling people to accept the Message of God, they immediately dubbed him insane. Now it is obvious that they were not attributing insanity to him as regards his pre-prophetic life. The charge of insanity, therefore, was levelled against the Message he began to preach when he was designated a Prophet. The Qur'an, therefore, asks them to give serious thought to the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him) and to see if there is anything that is inconsistent with sanity, or is meaningless and irrational.*

[188] Tell them (O Muhammad): "I have no power to benefit or harm myself except as Allah may please. And had I knowledge of the Unseen, I should have amassed all kinds of good, and no evil would have ever touched me. I am merely a warner and the herald of glad tidings to those who have faith."

[189] It is He -Allah - Who created you from a single being, and out of it He made its mate, that he may find comfort in her. And when he covers her, she bears a light burden and goes about with it. Then, when she grows heavy, they pray to their Lord: "If You bestow upon us a healthy child, we will surely give thanks."

[190] But when He bestows upon them a healthy child, they attribute to Him partners in what Allah had bestowed upon them.⁵³ Exalted is Allah above that which they associate with Him.

[191] Do they associate (with Allah in His Divinity) those who can create nothing; rather, they themselves are created?

[192] They have no power to help others, nor can they help themselves.

[193] And if you call them to True Guidance, they will not follow you. It is all the same for you whether you call them to True Guidance or keep silent.⁵⁴

53. *God holds absolute power over the entire process leading to man's birth. No one has the power to change the form of His creation if He caused a woman to give birth to an animal or to some odd creature, or to a physically or mentally handicapped baby. This fact is equally acknowledged by monotheists and polytheists that in the final stage of pregnancy, people are inclined to turn to God and pray for the birth of a sound and healthy baby. However, when the prayer is granted and a sound and healthy baby is born as a result of God's will, man makes offerings at the altars of false gods, goddesses, or saints. Occasionally; the names given to the child also indicate that man feels grateful to others than God and regards the child as a gift from others rather than God.*

[194] Those whom you invoke other than Allah are creatures like you. So invoke them and see if they answer your call, if what you claim is true.

[195] Have they feet on which they can walk? Have they hands with which they can grasp? Have they eyes with which they can see? Have they ears with which they can hear? Say (O

Muhammad): "Invoke all those to whom you ascribe a share in Allah's Divinity, then scheme against me and grant me no respite.

[196] My Guardian is Allah Who has revealed the Book, and it is He Who protects the righteous.

[197] Those whom you invoke other than Allah, they can neither help themselves nor you.

[198] If you were to call them to True Guidance, they will not hear; and you observe them looking at you whereas they have no power to see."

[199] (O Prophet) Show forgiveness, enjoin what is good, and avoid the ignorant.

[200] And if it happens that a prompting from Satan should stir you up, seek refuge with Allah. He is All-Hearing, All-Knowing.

[201] If the God-fearing are instigated by any suggestion of Satan, they instantly become alert, whereafter they clearly perceive the Right Way.

[202] As for their brethren (the satans), they draw them deeper into error and do not relax in their efforts.

54. As to the false gods set up by the polytheists, what is the extent of their power? Not only do they not have the power to guide others, they do not even have the power to follow others or even to answer the call of their devotees.

[203] (O Prophet), when you do not produce before them any miracle, they say: "Why do you not choose for yourself a miracle?" Say to them: "I follow only what is revealed to me by my Lord. This is nothing but a means of insight into the Truth, and Guidance and Mercy from your Lord to the people who believe."

[204] So when the Qur'an is recited, listen carefully to it, and keep silent so that you may be shown mercy.

[205] And remember, (O Prophet), your Lord in your heart with humility and fear and without raising your voice; remember Him in the morning and evening, and do not become of those who are negligent.

[206] (The angels) who are near to your Lord, never turn away from His service out of arrogance; they rather glorify Him and prostrate themselves before Him.⁵⁵

55. Whoever recites or hears this verse should fall in prostration. There are fourteen verses in the Qur'an after reciting which one is required to perform prostration.