

of Islamic Jurisprudence (*Usul al-Fiqh*) the Holy Qur'an has been defined as comprehending words and meaning both. In other words, if the meanings of the Holy Qur'an are expressed in a different language, or even if certain other Arabic words are substituted for the revealed ones, such a version shall not be entitled to the name "Qur'an", in spite of the meanings being intact. Consequently, if one were to recite this modified version in *Salah*, one's prayers shall not be valid. Similarly, a reading of this version shall not bring one the reward promised in the *Hadith* for the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, nor shall any of the injunctions related to the Holy Qur'an apply to it. Hence the *Fuqahā'* have forbidden the printing and publication of a translation of the Holy Qur'an without the Arabic text. It is quite wrong to speak of an "Urdu Qur'an" or "English Qur'an", simply because a translation of the original into any language whatsoever cannot properly be called "the Qur'an".

In short, the word *Yatlū* in the present verse leaves no doubt as to the fact that the "recitation of the verses" is an end in itself, for one does not "recite" meanings, but words. Of course, it goes without saying that Allah has sent the Holy Qur'an for us to understand it and to follow its guidance. To be content with memorizing the words alone and being indifferent to the meanings would merely show one's ignorance of the nature of the Book of Allah, and one's ungratefulness. But there are so many people these days who suppose that the Holy Qur'an is like other books, and believe that it is a waste of time to read or memorize its words without knowing what they mean. In view of this wide-spread error, we cannot insist too much on the truth that the recitation of the words of the Holy Qur'an is in itself a regular act of worship and brings a great reward.

This is borne out by the practice of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his blessed Companions. They knew the meanings of the Holy Qur'an as no one else can, and yet they never thought that once they had understood it and acted upon it, nothing more was required of them. On the contrary, they kept reciting the Holy Qur'an again and again as long as they lived. Some of the Companions used to recite the whole Book of Allah in a single day, some in two days, and some in three. Reciting the Holy Qur'an in one week has always been quite a

usual practice among the Muslims, which is indicated by the division of the Holy Qur'ān into seven stages (*Manāzil*). In fact, by instituting the recitation of the Holy Qur'ān as an act of worship, carrying a reward of its own, and by giving it a separate and regular position among the prophetic functions, Allah has been very merciful to those Muslims who are not for some reason yet able to understand the meanings, and has saved them from the misfortune of being indifferent to the words and thus being totally deprived of the blessings which flow from His Book. Even such Muslims should, no doubt, keep trying to understand the meanings too so that they may receive the blessings in full, and the ultimate purpose of the Revelation may be realized.

(2) According to the present verses, "teaching the Book" is a prophetic function distinct from "reciting the Verses". We can easily infer from it the principle that in order to understand the Holy Qur'ān it is not sufficient merely to know the Arabic language, but that it also requires the "teaching" of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. As every one knows, in order to learn a science or art - be it medicine or engineering, or something as ordinary as cookery - it is not enough to read a book or to be proficient in a language. Had it been the only qualification required, one could have easily mastered all the sciences and the arts on which one could find books written in the language one knew. To learn the meanest craft, then, one needs the regular and constant guidance of a teacher. This being so, how can one hope to understand, unaided, the Holy Qur'ān which has something to say on the most difficult subjects possible, ranging from theology to philosophy and physics? Had a competence in the Arabic language been sufficient for this task, scores of Jewish and Christian scholars and men of letters in the Arabic countries today would have been counted among the greatest commentators as would have been Abū Jahl and Abū Lahab in the days of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. By distinguishing "the teaching of the Book" from "the reciting of the verses" as a distinct prophetic function, the Holy Qur'ān has underlined the fact that in order to understand the Book of Allah properly it is not enough, even for those who know Arabic very well, merely to listen to a recitation of the verses, but that such an understanding can be acquired only through the teaching of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and that to separate the one from

the other, and to make an attempt at interpretation on one's own is no more than a self-delusion. Had it not really been necessary to explain and teach the meanings of the Holy Qur'ān, why should have Allah sent us a Messenger? There were many other ways of conveying His Book to men. But Allah knows everything, and is All-Wise. He knows that an understanding of His Book depends on the guidance of a teacher much more than that of human sciences and arts does - in fact, on the guidance, not of an ordinary teacher, but of one who in his turn receives guidance from Allah Himself directly through Revelation (*Wahy*), and who is designated in Islamic terminology as a *Nabiyy* (Prophet) and a *Rasūl* (Messenger of Allah). According to the Holy Qur'ān itself, Allah has sent the Holy Prophet ﷺ to men for the express purpose of explaining to them in detail the injunctions and the meanings of the Divine Book - لَتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ إِلَيْهِمْ - "So that you should explain to men what We have revealed for them". (16:44)

According to the present verse, the prophetic function of "teaching the Book" also includes the "teaching of *Hikmah*". As we have shown above, although this word carries various meanings in the Arabic language, yet, with reference to this verse and similar ones, the blessed Companions and their immediate successors have interpreted *Hikmah* as "the *Sunnah*" or the Way of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. It means that along with "teaching the Book" the prophetic functions include the teaching of the principles and modes of spiritual discipline. The Holy Prophet ﷺ has himself said, إِنَّمَا بَعَثْتُ مَعْلَمًا. "I have been sent only as a teacher." From this, it necessarily follows that his followers are required to be disciples, and that every Muslim, man or woman, should as a Muslim be a life-long student, keen to learn what the Holy Prophet ﷺ has taught. If one cannot for some reason master the different sciences connected with the Holy Qur'ān and the *Sunnah*, one must try to acquire at least a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the basic doctrines of Islam and of the fundamental injunctions of the Shari'ah which are absolutely indispensable for every Muslim.

(3) "Purifying the people" is also an essential prophetic function. The Arabic word *Tazkiyah* denotes purifying a thing or person from all kinds of filth, internal as well as external. One can see for oneself what the different kinds of external filth are - the Shari'ah has clearly

defined them. The internal varieties include, on the one hand, false beliefs like infidelity (*Kufr*), association (*Shirk*), or total reliance on some one other than Allah, and, on the other hand, pride, vanity, malice, jealousy, love of worldly things, etc. Although the evil nature of such beliefs and tendencies has been fully explained in the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah*, yet in making "the purification of the people" a distinct and separate prophetic function the present verse indicates that just as a mere knowledge of words and technical terms does not make one the master of a science or art, in the same way a knowledge, or even a proper understanding of its principles does not by itself make one perfect in the science or art concerned. To attain any degree of perfection one must also learn to put the principles into practice, and "realize" them in oneself and for oneself, which again requires the supervision of an authentic teacher and guide. In the Way of Sūfīs (*Tarīqah*) the function of the spiritual guide (*Shaykh*) is to help the disciple in obeying the injunctions of the Holy Qur'an and the *Sunnah* so thoroughly that it becomes a matter, not of effort, but of habit - so to say, his very "nature".³⁶

36. At this point, we must sound a note of warning. It has grown, in our day, almost habitual to speak of Islam as "the religion of action" - if not of "activism". In such phrases, the implication is never absent that "action" is to be considered as an anti-thesis of "thought", and "practice" as that of "theory" - as if there is a dichotomy, and the two activities can hardly be reconciled with each other. And there is always the insinuation that in order to be worthy of any respect one must make an either/or kind of choice in favour of "action" and "practice" as against "thought" and "theory".

Such formulations are no older than four centuries, and are the necessary products of certain dilemmas which historically arose in the society of the Christian West. They do not and cannot, as such, belong to a religious or metaphysical approach to things. In so far as an activity can be described as specifically "human", it cannot be purely automatic, but is preceded by thought. In other words, all "practice" is governed by a "theory", and all "action" guided by "thought" or some principle, good or bad. The rule is so general that it applies even to the action of those who have been promoting the dichotomy. As far as the Islamic way of looking at things is concerned, it goes without saying that no action or practice, however good, can have the slightest merit or

Now that we are on the subject of purification (*tazkiyah*), we might add another important consideration. From the days of the First Prophet to the days of the Last عليهم السلام, it has been the Way of Allah that in order to guide men and to show them the Straight Path, He has been sending them not only His Books but His prophets also. This indicates the general principle that for their guidance men need, on the one hand, a Divine Teaching revealed in the form of a Book, and, on the other, a human teacher in the form of a prophet who should train and discipline them into absorbing the divine guidance fully. Men need not merely one of these, but both. For, a man alone can be the teacher of another man, and not a book - which serves only as an aid. That is why Islam began with a Book and a Prophet, and the two, working together, produced a society of men who are unparalleled in history for their rectitude. For the coming generations too, the two basic principles of guidance have continued to function in the form of the Shari'ah and "the Men of Allah". The Holy Qur'an has emphasised the

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spiritual efficacy until and unless it carries a divine sanction. It logically follows that the foremost duty of a Muslim is to acquaint himself with divine commandments, and then to obey them. One can, if one likes, give to the first the name of "theory", and the second the name of "practice". But there is no dichotomy involved, nor any choice called for. No "practice" can be valid without being informed by "theory", and no "theory" can be of much avail without being put into "practice". It is "theory" which makes "practice" meaningful, and it is through "practice" alone that one acquires a true knowledge of "theory".

They are not two entities, but only two ways of considering the same reality. What finally matters is "realization" - or making the essential truths "real" to oneself.

In the West itself, and as late as the end of the Middle Ages, there were people who knew that *theoria* and *praxis* went together in the terminology of spiritual disciplines. In fact, the Greek word does, in its original meaning, say all that we have been trying to explain here. For, even if "theory" in modern European languages has come to mean just a 'speculation', or a 'supposition', even a 'fancy', the Greek verb *theoreo* signified "to see", and the noun *theoros* denoted the "man who sees". Thus, *theoria* was not merely a fancy, but a truth which could be "seen", or actively realized.

point again and again. Let us quote a few instances: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَكُونُوا مَعَ الصَّادِقِينَ : "O believers, fear Allah, and be with the truthful" (9:119). In summing up the qualities of "the truthful" (*Al-Sādiqūn*), another verse ends with the words: أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُتَّقُونَ : "It is they who are truthful, and it is they who are the God-fearing". (2:177) As we have explained in our commentary on the first chapter, the Sūrah "Al-Fātiḥah" is the quintessence of the Holy Qur'ān, and the essence of this Sūrah is the guidance towards the Straight Path (*Al-Ṣirāṭ al-Mustaqīm*). Now, in order to indicate the Straight Path the Holy Qur'ān has, instead of calling it the Path of the Qur'ān or the Path of the Prophet or the Path of the *Sunnah*, spoken of the Men of Allah who can show the Straight Path to the seeker. Says the Holy Qur'ān: ... صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ : "... the path of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not of those who have incurred Your wrath, nor of those who are misguided". (1:7) Another verse provides greater specification - فَأُولَئِكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ وَالصِّدِّيقِينَ وَالشُّهَدَاءِ وَالصَّالِحِينَ : "Those on whom Allah has bestowed His grace - the prophets, the truthful, the martyrs and the righteous." (4:69) Similarly, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has, for the benefit of all the later generations of Muslims, explicitly named certain personalities who should be followed in religious matters: يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنِّي تَرَكْتُ فِيكُمْ مَا كَانَ أَحَدُهُمْ بِهِ كَنٍ : "I am leaving behind me two things; if you stand firm by them you will never fall into misguidance - firstly, the Book of Allah, and, secondly, my descendants and the members of my family." (Tirmidhī) A *ḥadīth* reported by Al-Bukhārī says: إِتَّقُوا بِالَّذِينَ مِنْ بَعْدِي أَبِي بَكْرٍ وَعُمَرَ : "After me, follow Abū Bakr and 'Umar." And a third *ḥadīth* says: عَلَيْكُمْ بِسُنَّتِي وَسُنَّةِ الْخُلَفَاءِ الرَّاشِدِينَ : "You must adopt my way (the *Sunnah*) and the way of *Al-Khulafā' al-Rāshidīn*" - that is, the first four rightly-guided Caliphs.

In short, whether it be religion or the different sciences and arts, the acquisition of knowledge in the proper sense of the term depends on profiting from authentic books and authentic teachers. In the case of religion, however, people are, while turning to these two modes, liable to fall into the error of putting exclusive or excessive emphasis on one of them alone, which brings them more harm than good. Thus, there are, on the one hand, people who neglect the Book of Allah, and begin to adore their scholars and spiritual masters, without taking the

trouble of finding out whether they are obedient to the Shari'ah or not. In fact, this has been the characteristic malady of the Jews and the Christians. Speaking of them, the Holy Qur'an says: **اتَّخَذُوا أَحْبَارَهُمْ وَرُهَبَانَهُمْ أَرْبَابًا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ** : "They have taken their rabbis and their monks as their lords apart from Allah." (9:31) Obviously, this is the royal road to *Shirk* (association) and *Kufr* (infidelity), on which millions have perished, and go on perishing. On the other hand, there are people who claim that the Book of Allah is by itself sufficient for them, and that in order to understand it they do not need the guidance of a teacher or a scholar or a spiritual master. This too is a form of misguidance, for an attempt to interpret the Book of Allah on one's own, without the aid of reliable specialists, inevitably draws one into all sorts of errors, makes one a slave of one's own desires and inclinations, and may, in some cases at least, lead one straight outside the pale of Islam. So, what one is required to do is to put each of these two means of knowledge in its proper place, and to profit from both. One should be quite clear about the basic principle in this respect - to Allah alone belongs the authority to lay down a commandment, and it is Allah alone we have been called upon to obey, while the Holy Prophet ﷺ is a means of helping us to know how Allah is to be obeyed, and one obeys Him on the ground that to obey the Holy Prophet ﷺ is to obey Allah Himself. Besides that, one should, when faced with difficulties in understanding the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadith* or in acting upon them, turn for help, willingly and respectfully, to the words and deeds of the masters in these subjects, and consider it to be the key to the door of salvation.

There is a second conclusion to be drawn from the fact that the present verse includes the teaching of the Book among the prophetic functions. As we know, Allah has promised to safeguard the Holy Qur'an Himself: **إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ الْخَافِضُونَ** : "It is We who have revealed the Guidance, and it is We who watch over it." (15:9) Consequently, every single word, every consonant and every vowel of the Holy Qur'an has remained intact upto this day, and shall remain intact as long the world lasts. Now, according to the present verse, the teaching of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is absolutely indispensable for a proper understanding of the Holy Qur'an, and without this guidance it is not possible to act upon the Holy Qur'an in a real sense. It logically

follows from it that the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ should also receive divine protection in their own degree, and remain intact as a whole till the end of the world; otherwise, the preservation of the words of the Holy Qur'an would not, by itself, fully serve the purpose for which Allah has revealed it. It goes without saying that the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ are identical with what is called the *Sunnah* or the *Ḥadīth*. Although Allah has not promised the same degree of protection to the *Ḥadīth* as to the Holy Qur'an, and the words of the *Sunnah* have not been preserved exactly in the same manner as the words of the Holy Qur'an, yet the prophetic interpretations too must, according to the present verse, remain intact, and it has, taken as a whole, remained intact upto this day. Whenever an attempt has been made to distort a *Ḥadīth* or to invent spurious ones, the specialists in the science have always exposed the fraud.

Thus, in accordance with the prediction implicit in the present verse, Allah has preserved the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ from the days of the blessed Companions to our own day through fully authentic collections of the *Aḥādīth* and through the masters of this subject. And this divine protection shall continue to the last day of the world. For, the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself has assured us that in his *Ummah* there shall always remain till the end of the world a group of authentic scholars who shall jealously and watchfully guard the Holy Qur'an and the *Ḥadīth* against all attempts at distortion or misrepresentation. This *ḥadīth* by itself gives the lie to some contemporary writers who have, for the ulterior motive of discrediting the injunctions of the Islamic Shari'ah, been trying to propagate the notion that the whole body of the *Aḥādīth* we possess is inauthentic and hence unreliable. But anyone who has eyes to see can easily understand the stratagem - if one cannot trust the *Ḥadīth*, one can no longer trust the text of the Holy Qur'an. And this is exactly what the Westerners and their local allies want to accomplish - that is, to make the Muslims turn away from the Holy Qur'an.

In the end, let us note that the three prophetic functions which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام referred to in his prayer, and which the Holy Prophet ﷺ was sent to perform, were fulfilled in his own life-time. In order to have an idea of the great transformation which

the recitation of the Holy Qur'an, the teaching of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his purifying influence brought about in men, it is enough to see what the Holy Qur'an says in praise of his Companions (رضى الله عنهم اجمعين):

وَالَّذِينَ مَعَهُ أَشِدَّاءُ عَلَى الْكُفَّارِ رَحِمًا بَيْنَهُمْ تَرَهُمْ رُكْعًا سُجَّدًا يُبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانًا

"Those who are with him are hard against the disbelievers, merciful to one another; you see them bowing and prostrating themselves (in prayers), seeking the bounty of Allah and His pleasure". (48:29).

Verses 130 - 132

وَمَنْ يَرْعُبْ عَنِ مِلَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِلَّا مَنْ سَفِهَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَقَدْ اصْطَفَيْنَاهُ فِي الدُّنْيَا وَإِنَّهُ فِي الْآخِرَةِ لَمِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ۝ إِذْ قَالَ لَهُ رَبُّهُ أَسْلِمْ قَالَ أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ۝ وَوَصَّى بِهَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ بَنِيهِ وَيَعْقُوبَ ط يٰبَنِيَّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ اصْطَفَى لَكُمُ الدِّينَ فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ ۝

And who turns away from the faith of Ibrahim except the one who has debased himself in folly. And indeed We have chosen him in this world, and in the other world he is certainly among the righteous. When his Lord said to him, "Submit!" He said, "I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds." And Ibrahim exhorted the same to his sons, and so did Ya'qub: "My sons, Allah has certainly chosen for you the Faith. So, let not death overtake you but as Muslims." (Verses 130 - 132)

The earlier verses have defined the basic principles of the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, called upon men to follow it, and warned them against the dangers involved in turning away from it. They have also refuted the claims of the Jews and the Christians to be the followers of this religion, while indicating Islam as the only religion which is now faithful to the Abrahamic Tradition, and which has, in its essentials, been the religion common to all the prophets. The present verses show the solicitude of the prophets عليهم السلام in giving religious and spiritual instruction and guidance to their descendants.

The Ibrahimic Way

Verse 130 speaks of the superiority of the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, from which arises his own spiritual station and glory in this world and in the other. This being so, anyone who turns away from this religion only displays his own stupidity.³⁷ Anyhow, the point is that only he can turn away from this religion who does not possess any understanding, or has totally lost it, for this alone is the religion of "Nature", and no one can deny it so long as his "nature", in the essential and integral sense of the word, remains intact. The superiority of this religion is shown by the simple fact that Allah conferred a special honour on Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام in this world and in the next on account of this very religion. As for the honour and greatness he received in this world, everyone knows how *Namrūd* (Nimrod) with all his might failed to impress him, how he accepted gladly to be thrown into the fire rather than give up the worship of the One God, and how the Lord of the worlds changed the fire into a garden for him, so that believers and non-believers alike finally came to recognize his uprightness and his unalloyed faith. The associators of Arabia were, after all, his progeny, and had, in spite of their idol-worship, always continued to hold him in great esteem, and even claimed to be his followers. Certain remnants of his religion were still present among them, though somewhat distorted by their ignorance - for example, the Hajj, the annual sacrifice of animals, hospitality etc. These are the manifestations of the special divine grace which had designated "the Friend of Allah" (*Khalīlullāh*) as the 'Imām' of people. (2:124) So much for his greatness in this world. As to the next, Verse 130 has announced the exalted station Allah has granted him in the Hereafter.

Verse 131 defines the basic principle of the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. Allah asked him to submit himself, and he willingly and gladly agreed to submit himself to "the Lord of the worlds." Let us add that the word of command employed in this verse is *Aslim*, which

37. Let us note that the relevant phrase in the Arabic text of this verse can be translated into English in three ways: (a) Such a man is stupid in himself (b) he has besotted himself, and allowed himself to become stupid (c) he is ignorant of his own self.

comes from the same root as the word Islam. It is difficult to find an exact English equivalent, for the word signifies "to obey, to submit oneself, to surrender one's will." Anyhow, we should notice that in reply to the divine command, he did not say, as one would have expected, **أَسْلَمْتُ لَكَ** : "I submit myself to you," but, more elaborately: **أَسْلَمْتُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ** : "I submit myself to the Lord of the worlds." This particular form of reply expresses the attitude of respect and awe proper to the occasion, and includes the praise of Allah which the moment of receiving the honour of divine address demanded. It also carries a recognition of the fact that in submitting himself to the Lord of the worlds he was only performing the essential duty of a servant towards the Master of All, and doing it for his own benefit. The reply makes it clear that the basic principle of the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, and its very essence is contained in one word, Islam, which signifies total obedience and willing submission of oneself to Allah. It was to show to the world his perfect adherence to this principle that he was made to pass through all the trials before attaining his exalted station. *Islām*, or submission to Allah, is what the world has been created for; it is the end all the prophets and all the divine books have been sent to serve.

We also learn from this verse that the religion common to all the prophets عليهم السلام and the point on which all of them come together is Islam. Beginning with Sayyidnā Ādam upto the Last Prophet ﷺ, every messenger of Allah and every prophet has called men to Islam alone, and enjoined upon his followers to keep to this Straight Path. The Holy Qur'an is quite explicit on this subject: **إِنَّ الدِّينَ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ** : "Certainly, in the eyes of Allah the only religion is Islam" (3:19) and **وَمَنْ يَتَّبِعْ غَيْرَ الْإِسْلَامِ وَبِنَا فُلْنَ يَفْبَلْ مِنْهُ** : "Whoso desires a religion other than Islam, it shall not be accepted of him." (3:85) In order to put the question in the proper perspective as also to avoid the risk of misunderstanding let us add a few remarks. All the religions which different prophets brought to the world had a divine sanction behind them, were essentially instituted by Allah Himself, and each of them was, in its own time, "accepted" in the sight of Allah. Consequently, each of these religions - whether one calls it Judaism or Christianity or something else - must in its essence be Islam, in the general sense of the word - namely, total submission to Allah.

But the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام is distinguished from others by a peculiar characteristic - that is, he gave to his religion the name of Islam, and to his followers the name of Muslims. We have already seen in Verse 128 how he prayed for himself, his son and his progeny: "رَبَّنَا وَاجْعَلْنَا مُسْلِمِينَ لَكَ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِنَا أُمَّةً مُسْلِمَةً لَكَ : "And, our Lord, keep us both obedient (*Muslimayn*) to you, and make of our progeny a people (*Ummah*) obedient (*Muslimah*) to you." And now in Verse 132 we find him advising his descendants not to die without being sure that they have been Muslims. After him this distinction of being specifically called Muslims and "the Islamic *Ummah*" passed on, according to his own instruction, to the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Addressing the Muslims, the Holy Qur'an says: "مِلَّةَ أَبِيكُمْ إِبْرَاهِيمَ هُوَ سَمَّاكُمُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ مِنْ قَبْلُ وَفِي هَذَا : "Be steadfast in the religion of your father, Ibrāhīm. He named you Muslims before this as well as in this (the Holy Qur'an)." (22:78) When the Holy Qur'an was revealed, the Jews and the Christians, and even the idol-worshippers of Arabia used to make the claim, each group on its own part, that they were the followers of the Abrahamic religion, but the Holy Qur'an and its followers have made it quite evident that in this last phase of human history the religion of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and this alone, is the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام - the religion of quintessential "Nature" (*Al-fitrah*).

In short, the essence of all the divine books, all the Shari'ahs and the teachings of all the prophets is Islam - that is, turning away from one's desires in order to obey divine commandments, and giving up individual opinion in order to submit oneself to divine guidance. But we are grieved to see that there are thousands of Muslims today, who have forgotten this basic truth, and wish to pursue their own desires in the name of Islam. What appeals to them is that kind of interpretation (rather, misinterpretation) of the Holy Qur'an and the *Hadith* which should flatter their desires. In fact, what they strive to do is to distort the Shari'ah to suit their fancies, and to do it so cleverly that the idols they really worship should appear in the garb of religion.

Such men are, indeed, trying to be clever with Allah Himself who knows every particle of the universe and who can look into the deepest

recesses of the human heart - the Almighty before whom nothing avails but complete surrender and total submission.

What Islam requires of man is that he should set aside all his desires and inclinations, and seek, in everything he does, the pleasure of his Lord. And he can find this pleasure only when he knows the commandments of his Lord, and also performs these tasks exactly in the manner He has prescribed. This is what 'Ibādah or worship is, in the real sense of the word. It is the perfection of this total obedience and submission and love which constitutes the final stage of man's spiritual development, which is known as the Station (*Maqām*) of 'Abdiyyah (عَبْدِيَّة : Servanthood). This is the station where Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام received from Allah the title of *Khalīlullāh* (the Friend of Allah), and the Last of All the Prophets the title of عَبْدُنَا : 'Abduna (Our Servant). On the subsidiary levels of the Station of Servanthood stand the *Abdal*, the *Aqtāl*, the *Awliyā*, the men of Allah - the 'saints' of the Islamic *Ummah*, each in his own degree. This is the essence of *Tawhid* (the realization of unicity), on attaining which all one's fears and hopes become bound with Allah, and with no one else.

Thus, Islam signifies total obedience to Allah, and this obedience is possible only when one follows the *Sunnah*, the Way of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. The Holy Qur'an has laid down the principle in very explicit words:

فَلَا وَرَبِّكَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ حَتَّىٰ يُحَكِّمُوكَ فِيمَا شَجَرَ بَيْنَهُمْ ثُمَّ لَا يَجِدُوا فِيْ
أَنفُسِهِمْ حَرَجًا مِّمَّا قَضَيْتَ وَيُسَلِّمُوا تَسْلِيمًا ۝

"By your Lord, they will never be true Muslims till they make you the judge regarding the disagreements between them, and find in themselves no resistance against your verdict, and surrender themselves in full submission." (4:65).

In the end let us clarify an important point. As reported in Verse 132, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام made his descendants promise that before they died they should make sure that they had been Muslims. It means that one should steadfastly follow the teachings of Islam throughout one's life, so that one receives the grace of Allah and remains a Muslim upto the last breath. A number of *aḥādīth* too say that one would die in the state which one has maintained in one's life,

and one would, on the Day of Resurrection, rise from the grave in the same state. This is the usual way of Allah with men - if His servant makes up his mind to do good deeds and also strives in this direction as best as he can, Allah helps him and makes the task easy for him. This principle does not in any way stand in opposition to what has been said in another *ḥadīth* to this effect:-

A man keeps doing the kind of good deeds for which Paradise has been promised and it seems that there is only an arm's length between him and Paradise, and then all of a sudden his destiny overcomes him, and he starts doing what would lead him to Hell, and finally he reaches Hell; on the other hand, a man keeps doing what would lead him to Hell, and it seems that there is only an arm's length between him and Hell, and then his destiny overcomes him, and he starts doing what would make him worthy of Paradise, and finally he enters Paradise.

We have said that there is no contradiction involved, for some texts of this *ḥadīth* mention a proviso too - "as it appeared to people." That is to say, the first of these two men appeared in the eyes of the onlookers to be performing good deeds, while in fact he was doing just the opposite; similarly, the second man had from the outset been doing what would make him worthy of Paradise, though people thought him to be a sinner. (Ibn Kathīr) We conclude this discussion with the remark that the man who has been steadfast in doing good deeds, should trust the divine promise, rely on the usual way of Allah with His creatures, and hope that through the grace of Allah he would depart from this world in this blessed state.

Verses 133-134

أَمْ كُنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءَ إِذْ حَضَرَ يَعْقُوبَ الْمَوْتُ إِذْ قَالَ لِبَنِيهِ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ
 مِن بَعْدِي قَالُوا نَعْبُدُ إِلَهَكَ وَإِلَهَ آبَائِكَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ
 وَإِسْحَاقَ إِلَهًا وَاحِدًا وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ۝ تِلْكَ أُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا
 مَا كَسَبَتْ وَلَكُم مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ وَلَا تُسْأَلُونَ عَمَّا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ۝

Or were you present when death approached Yaqub, when he said to his sons: "What will you worship after me"? They said, "We will worship your God and the God of

your fathers, Ibrāhīm, Ismā‘īl and Iṣḥāq, the one God, and to Him we submit ourselves." Those are a people who have passed away. For them what they earned, and for you what you earned. And you shall not be questioned as to what they have been doing. (Verses 133-134)

The previous verses have defined the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and the essence of Islam. Now, these two verses bring before us another aspect of the question. Call it the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام or Islam, it is in any case meant for the whole world. Then why have the descendants of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ya‘qūb عليهم السلام been specifically mentioned here, and why should have these two great prophets been so particular in giving this counsel to their sons? We shall say that these specifications show that love for one's progeny and solicitude for their well-being is in no way incompatible with the station of prophethood or even with that of "the Friend of Allah." For, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, who was, on one occasion, not only willing but happy to be sacrificing his son in obedience to the commandment of Allah, did on a different occasion pray for the well-being of his progeny in this world and the other, and wished, while departing from this world, to offer them what was the greatest blessing in his eyes - namely, Islam. Verses 132 and 133 suggest this very principle. So, even prophets love their children, the only difference being that while ordinary men consider the good things of this world alone to be worthwhile and wish to leave to their children as much of these as they can, in the eyes of the prophets and their genuine followers the only thing that counts is *Īmān* (faith) and good deeds - in one word, Islam - and it is this eternal wealth which they wish and strive to transmit wholly to their descendants.

This practice of the prophets provides a special guidance to parents: just as they are keen to secure the worldly comfort and happiness of their children, they should pay equal, if not greater, attention to the discipline of their external and internal behaviour according to the requirements of the Shari'ah. Is it at all reasonable that one should strain every nerve to protect one's children from the heat of the sun, but leave them exposed to the fire of Hell?

From this example of the prophets we also learn that it is the duty of the parents and the right of the children that one should first of all

take care of the spiritual health of one's own children, and worry about others only afterwards. This principle rests on three considerations. Firstly, one's children are, on account of the special relationship with the parents, likely to accept the counsel more easily and thoroughly than others, and may later on be of great help in the efforts which one makes in the service of Islam.

Secondly, the easiest and the most effective way of transmitting the Truth to a whole people is that the head of each family should take upon himself the responsibility of teaching and training the members of his family. Employing a current and popular term, we may say that this localized and decentralized method distributes the responsibility over a large number of individuals, and teaching the families separately amounts finally to teaching the society as a whole. The Holy Qur'an itself has laid down the principle: يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا قُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَأَهْلِيكُمْ نَارًا : "O believers, guard yourselves and your families against a Fire." (66:6) In fact, the Holy Prophet ﷺ himself who is the Messenger of Allah for the whole of humanity and whose guidance shall remain valid upto the last day of the world, was commanded to convey the Truth first of all to the members of his family. Thus, the Holy Qur'an says: وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ وَأُمَّرْ أَهْلَكَ : "And warn your clan, your nearest kin." (26:214) and بِالصَّلَاةِ وَأَصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا : "And bid your family to offer *Salāh*, and be regular in them yourself." (20:132) And the Holy Prophet ﷺ always fulfilled these commandments.

Thirdly, one can observe for oneself that if the close relations or the members of his family do not support a man in what he wishes to teach, or do not seem to be acting upon it, his teachings do not succeed so well with others. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ took upon himself the prophetic function, the usual reply of his listeners was that he should first convince his own clan, the Quraysh, before turning to others. But when his own clan accepted Islam and the process had been completed at the time of the conquest of Makkah, the world saw, as the Holy Qur'an reports يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا : "People entering Allah's religion in throngs." (110:2)

The main reason for the ignorance and the indifference towards Islam which is wide-spread among the Muslims today, is that even when the parents themselves are good Muslims in every way, they

leave their children to themselves and let the social environment mould them in its own fashion. Their only worry is to see their children doing well in this world, and they never think of what will happen to them in the next. Let us pray that Allah, in His mercy, grant all of us the solicitude for the other world, and help us to make a genuine effort for acquiring the only wealth that can ever be: faith and rectitude!

Injunctions and related considerations

Verse 133 reports that the sons of Sayyidnā Ya'qūb (Jacob) عليه السلام promised to worship **إِلَهَ آبَائِكِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ**: "The God of your father, Ibrāhīm and Ismā'īl and Iṣḥāq." This phrase indicates that the term "father" includes the grand-father as well. The blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه has deduced from this verse the rule that in matters of inheritance the grandfather shall be treated like the father.

Verse 134 tells us that the good deeds of one's forefathers shall not suffice one, if one has not been performing good deeds oneself, and that, similarly, one shall not have to suffer for the misdeeds of one's forefathers, if one's own account is clean. It follows upon this principle that children of *mushrikīn* (associators) and *Kafirīn* (infidels), if they die before having come of age, shall not be punished in the other world on account of the disbelief of their parents. The verse also refutes the claim of the Jews that irrespective of what they had been doing they would go to Paradise on account of the good deeds of their forefathers.

Let this be a warning to those Muslims who, being the descendants of the Holy Prophet ﷺ or of a saint, delude themselves with the hope that their sins would go unpunished in consideration of this privileged position. In fact, the Holy Qur'ān is very explicit and very insistent on this point. For example:

وَلَا تَكْسِبُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ إِلَّا عَلَيْهَا وَلَا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ

"Each man shall reap the fruits of his own deeds, and no one shall bear the burden of another" (6:164).

Addressing his own clan, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said:

"Beware, O Banu Hashim, let it not be that on the Day of

Judgment while others bring their good deeds with them, you on your part, having neglected good deeds, bring with you only the trust in being my relations, and so I have to tell you that on that day, I cannot save you from the wrath of Allah."

Another *ḥadīth* says: من يطابه عمله لم يسرع به نسبه: "He who has been pulled back by his deeds cannot be pushed forward by his ancestry."

Verses 135 - 136

وَقَالُوا كُونُوا هُودًا أَوْ نَصَارَى تَهْتَدُوا قُلْ بَلْ مِلَّةَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ حَنِيفًا وَمَا كَانَ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ ۝ قُولُوا آمَنَّا بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْنَا وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْمَاعِيلَ وَإِسْحَاقَ وَيَعْقُوبَ وَالْأَسْبَاطِ وَمَا أُوتِيَ مُوسَىٰ وَعِيسَىٰ وَمَا أُوتِيَ النَّبِيُّونَ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ لَا نَفَرُّ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْهُمْ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُسْلِمُونَ ۝

And they said, "Become Jews or Christians, and you will find the right path." Say: "Instead, (we shall remain) the followers of Ibrāhīm, the upright, - and he was not one of the associators." Say (O, Muslims): "We believe in Allah, and in what has been revealed to us, and in what has been revealed to Ibrāhīm, Ismā'il, Iṣḥāq, Ya'qūb and his children, and in what has been given to Mūsā and 'Isā (Jesus) and what has been given to the prophets from their Lord: We make no difference between any of them. And to Him we submit ourselves." (Verses 135 - 136)

The earlier verses have defined the religion (*Millat*) of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and established that its present form is Islam. Now, the Jews and the Christians, in spite of their pretension to be his followers, did not in actual fact follow his religion. Each of these two groups, instead of accepting Islam, used to ask the Muslims to accept its own religion in order to find true guidance. No doubt, each of these two religions was, in its own time and for its own time, a genuine religion, but in its present form each had become distorted, and had also been abrogated by Allah. So, in answer to them, Allah asks the Holy Prophet ﷺ to declare on his own behalf and on that of his followers that they are and shall remain steadfast in the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام who shunned all kinds of association

(*Shirk*), who adored nothing but the One God and obeyed no one but Him, and whose religion, therefore, did not have even a trace of distortion. Then, in the second of these verses Allah asks the Muslims to declare the basic tenets of this religion too, which are as follows:- (1) Muslims believe in Allah and in the guidance which He has sent them through the Holy Prophet ﷺ. (2) They also believe in all the prophets Allah has sent from time to time - some of whom have been mentioned in this verse. (3) Some of the prophets may in some ways be superior to others, but it is essential for a Muslim to believe in all the prophets without making any distinction. (4) Muslims believe that the Shari'ahs of all the prophets mentioned here were instituted by Allah Himself, but they have now been abrogated. So, Muslims follow the Shari'ah of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, for this alone is now valid. (5) Muslims ultimately obey Allah alone, and submit themselves totally to Him.

In the second of these verses the progeny of Sayyidnā Ya'qūb (Jacob عليه السلام) has been described as 'Asbāt or "tribes." The reason is that he had twelve sons, and the offspring of each son came to form a tribe. Allah so blessed his seed that in Egypt, Sayyidnā Yūsuf (Joseph عليه السلام) and his brothers made up a group of twelve men, but their lineage flourished, and when the Israelites left Egypt along with Sayyidnā Mūsā (Moses), their number ran into thousands. Another form of this blessing was that the progeny of Sayyidnā Ya'qūb عليه السلام included a large number of prophets.

Verses 137 - 138

فَإِنْ آمَنُوا بِمِثْلِ مَا آمَنْتُمْ بِهِ فَقَدِ اهْتَدَوْا وَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَإِنَّمَا هُمْ
فِي شِقَاقٍ ۖ فَسَيَكْفِيكَهُمُ اللَّهُ ۗ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ ۝ صِبْغَةَ
اللَّهِ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ صِبْغَةً وَنَحْنُ لَهُ عَابِدُونَ ۝

So, if they believe in the like of what you believe in, they have certainly found the right path. And if they turn away, they are nothing but in antagonism. Then Allah will suffice you against them, and He is the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing. The colouring of Allah! And who is better in colouring than Allah? And we are to worship none but Him. (Verses 137 - 138)

The definition of 'Īmān

From the beginning of the Sūrah Al-Baqarah upto this place, different verses have been explaining the nature and essence 'Īmān (faith), sometimes succinctly and sometimes in detail. Verse 137 defines 'Īmān in a simple and short phrase which is at the same time so comprehensive that all possible details and explanations are inherent in it. The earlier verses having established that the only religion which is valid at present is Islam, this verse assures the Muslims that the Jews and the Christians can find the guidance only "if they believe just as you believe", or, in other words, "if they believe in what you believe in." The immediate addressees of the phrase "you believe" are the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his blessed Companions. Thus, in doctrinal matters above all, their 'Īmān has been placed before us as a model, and the verse is essentially a divine commandment, laying down the fundamental principle that the only 'Īmān acceptable to Allah is the one which was adopted by the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his blessed Companions, and that any doctrines or beliefs that deviate from it in the least are neither valid nor acceptable to Allah. That is to say, one should believe in Allah and His attributes, in the angels, in the Books of Allah, in the messengers and prophets of Allah and in their teachings exactly in the same manner as the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the blessed Companions did, without adding or subtracting anything on one's own part and without advancing one's own interpretations or distorting the authentic meanings of the doctrines. Nor is one allowed to assign to the angels or the prophets a station higher or lower than the one assigned to them by the word or deed of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Moreover, one is also required to be sincere and pure in one's faith, for the contrary would amount to hypocrisy (*Nifāq*).

This explanation helps us to see in its true proportions the situation of the heterodox sects among the Muslims - of those who make tall claims as to the genuineness of their 'Īmān, but do not possess 'Īmān in the full sense of the term. As for that, even the idolators of Arabia used to proclaim the authenticity of their 'Īmān as do the Jews and the Christians even today, and as do even the heretics in every age, but since their faith in Allah, in the prophets and the angels, and in the Day of Judgment etc. did not conform to the 'Īmān of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, it was not acceptable to Allah and was summarily rejected.

To give a few examples, some of the associators of Arabia used to deny the very existence of angels, while others considered them to be the daughters of God. Some groups among the Jews refused to obey the prophets and were so hostile to them that they came to assassinate a number of them, while other groups among the Jews and the Christians began to revere the prophets so extravagantly as to identify them with God Himself, or to place them on the level of God or to consider them the sons of God. These two attitudes are the two extremes of deviation, and are clearly seen, in the light of this verse, to be only two forms of misguidance.

According to the Shari'ah, it is, of course, obligatory for every Muslim to respect and love the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and if one lacks in this respect and love, one cannot be said to possess 'Imān in the true sense of the term; all the same, let it be clearly understood that it is misguidance and association (*Shirk*) to make him the equal of Allah with respect to an attribute like knowledge or power. For, according to the Holy Qur'an, the essence of *Shirk* lies in making someone other than Allah the equal of Allah with respect to a divine attribute, as is indicated by this verse: *إِذْ نَسْتَوِيكُمْ رَبِّ الْمَلِئِينَ* : "And when we used to make you equal of the Lord of the worlds." (26:98) There are some Muslims who consider the Holy Prophet ﷺ to be omniscient and omnipresent like Allah Himself, and, in doing so, congratulate themselves upon showing the respect and love which is required of a Muslim, while they are only disobeying the Holy Prophet ﷺ and going against his teachings. They should learn from this verse that the respect and love for the Holy Prophet ﷺ which Allah demands from a Muslim is only that kind of respect and love which his blessed Companions had for him - neither more nor less than this, for either would be a deviation and a sin.

The terms *Zilli* and *Burūzi* are not valid

On the other hand, there are people [like the group called the Qadiānīs or the Aḥmadīs of Lahore] who have been deying the unambiguous and clear declaration of the Holy Qur'an that Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ is the last of all the prophets, and trying to make room for a new prophet. In order to serve this evil purpose, they have out of their own fantasy manufactured exotic forms of prophethood, and given to them equally fanciful names like *Burūz* (incarnation) or *Zill* (manifestation). The

present verse exposes this fraud as well, for the *'Imān* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and of his blessed Companions does not show any trace of a belief in prophets of this genre, and anyone who pretends to such a belief is an avowed heretic.

Similarly, there are people whose minds and hearts are so befogged in modern materialism and the so-called "rationalism" that they find it difficult to accept the idea of the other world and the things that pertain to it, and then try to subject them to crooked interpretations, which they suppose to be an effort to make Islam more acceptable to the modern mind, and hence a great service to Islam. But, insofar as these interpretations transgress the commandment indicated in this verse - that is to say, they do not conform to the *'Imān* of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and of his Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين - they are totally false, and must be rejected. It is obligatory for a Muslim to believe without demur in what the Holy Qur'ān and the *Ḥadīth* tell us with regard to the other world and all that pertains to it. For example, it is quite inadmissible to maintain that on the Day of Judgment men will be resurrected only "spiritually" and not bodily, or that the reward and the punishment in the other world will be "spiritual" and not physical, or that the "weighing of the deeds" is only a metaphorical expression. Let us insist once again that all such interpretations are doctrinally false and unacceptable to Allah - as the present verse has established.

Having defined the *'Imān* which is acceptable to Allah, Verse 137 also points out that the enemies of Islam may yet remain unconvinced out of sheer obstinacy and malice. Allah asks the Holy Prophet ﷺ not to worry about them, for Allah will deal with them Himself, and protect His prophet. This promise has been made more explicitly in another verse: وَاللَّهُ يَعْصِمُكَ مِنَ النَّاسِ : "And Allah will protect you against these people." (5:67) Subsequent events showed the fulfilment of this promise.

The Colour of Allah

Verse 138 delineates Islam as the "colouring of Allah", and explains this "colouring" as the unalloyed worship of Allah and total submission to Him. Verse 135 has identified Islam with "the religion of Ibrāhīm." If we put Verse 135 and 138 together, it becomes clear that essentially Islam - or any authentic religion, for that matter - is

the religion of Allah, and that the association of a religion with the name of a prophet can only be symbolised.

Verse 138 presents religion as "colouring" (*Şibghah*). The expression carries within itself several levels of meaning. But the immediate allusion is to a certain ceremony of the Christians. On the seventh day of its birth, they used to bathe an infant in coloured (probably yellow) water, which was supposed to be a substitute for circumcision, and a sufficient guarantee for the external and internal purification of the infant - the fast and indelible "colouring" of Christian faith, so to say. The verse suggests that this colour is wasted away with the water, without leaving a trace outside or inside, nor does this kind of baptism serve the purpose of circumcision and cleanse a man of physical impurity. And the verse declares that the only colouring worth the name is the colouring of a genuine and unabrogated religion - that is, Islam - the only colouring which can guarantee physical and spiritual purification, and the only one which shall remain. Then, the word *Şibghah* or "colouring" has a deeper meaning too. Just as a certain colour is openly and clearly visible to the beholder, the signs of genuine and pure *ʿImān* should shine through the face, the movements, the habits and the behaviour of a Muslim. In this sense, the verse is a commandment, asking Muslims "to dye" themselves in the "colouring of Allah", outwardly and inwardly by offering unalloyed worship to Him alone, by submitting themselves totally to His commandments, and by gladly accepting His will.

Verse 139 - 141

قُلْ اَتَحٰجُّوْنَآ فِى اللّٰهِ وَهُوَ رَبُّنَا وَرَبُّكُمْ ؕ وَاِنَّا اَعْمَالُنَا وَلكُمْ
 اَعْمَالُكُمْ ؕ وَنَحْنُ لَهُ مُخْلِصُونَ ۝ اَمْ تَقُولُونَ اِنَّ اِبْرٰهِيْمَ
 وَاِسْمٰعِيْلَ وَاِسْحٰقَ وَيَعْقُوْبَ وَاَلْسَبٰطَ كَانُوْا هُوْدًا اَوْ نَصْرٰى
 قُلْ اَنْتُمْ اَعْلَمُ اِم اللّٰهُ ؕ وَمَنْ اَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ كَتَمَ شَهَادَةً عِنْدَهُ مِنَ
 اللّٰهِ ؕ وَمَا اللّٰهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ۝ تِلْكَ اُمَّةٌ قَدْ خَلَتْ لَهَا
 مَا كَسَبَتْ وَاَكْتَسَبَتْ لَكُم مَّا كَسَبْتُمْ ؕ وَلَا تُسْتَلَوْنَ عَمَّا كَانُوْا يَعْمَلُونَ ۝

Say: "Would you argue with us about Allah, when He is

our Lord as well as your Lord? For us our deeds, and for you your deeds! And to Him we are faithful. Or, would you say that Ibrāhīm Ismā'il, Ishāq, Ya'qūb and their children were Jews or Christians?" Say: "Do you know better or does Allah?" And who can be more unjust than the one who conceals the testimony he has from Allah? And Allah is not unaware of what you do. Those are a people who have passed away. For them what they earned, and for you what you earned. And you shall not be questioned as to what they have been doing. (Verses 139 - 141)

These three verses bring to an end the section of the Sūrah in which certain claims of the Jews and the Christians have been refuted -- for example, their assertion that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm (Abraham), Sayyidnā Ismā'il (Ishmael), Sayyidnā Ishāq (Isaac), Sayyidnā Ya'qūb (Jacob) and the prophets in his lineage -- عليهم السلام -- were either Jews or Christians, and the claim that they were the chosen people and would have the exclusive privilege of being sent straight to Paradise which would be denied to Muslims. The earlier verses have established that the religion of all these prophets was Islam, in the general sense of the term, but that the earlier Shari'ahs have now been abrogated, and the title of "Islam" been specially given to the religion of Sayyidnā Muḥammad ﷺ. Should the Jews and the Christians still continue, in their stubbornness, to deny, Allah asks the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the Muslims to declare in plain and simple words that Allah, being the Lord of All, cannot show any special favour to any particular group of His creatures, and that on the Day of Judgment He will assess the Jews and the Christians as well as the Muslims according to what each has believed in and how each has been behaving - a principle which was accepted by the People of the Book too. The Muslims have also been asked to announce that they on their part recognize no other god but Allah, and have purified their religion of all traces of association (*Shirk*) - as against the Jews and the Christians who consider Sayyidnā 'Uzayr (Ezra عليه السلام) and Sayyidnā 'Īsā (Jesus عليه السلام) respectively to be "the Son of God", and whose religions have, moreover, been abrogated. In this respect at least, Muslims have a superiority over them. If the People of the Book should, on account of their affiliation with the earlier prophets, still keep insisting on their

own rectitude, the Muslims may ask them a basic question - who knows the truth better, Allah or the People of the Book? Allah has definitely and finally announced the truth in the Last Revelation, and the People of the Book themselves know that the religion of the earlier prophets was Islam. Yet they are trying to conceal the truth, and being unjust, in the gravest sense of the term. Allah knows what they have been doing, and will judge them according to their own deeds, and not according to the deeds of their ancestors. Thus, at the end of this section, Verse 141, which is a repetition of Verse 134, warns them against the consequences of their vanity and pretentiousness, and advises them to take care of themselves rather than relying on ancestral glory.

Verse 139 brings out the essential and peculiar characteristic of the Islāmic *Ummah* - it has purified itself of all possible admixture of *Shirk* (association), and devoted itself, externally and internally, to Allah. The Arabic word in the text is *Mukhlisūn*, the plural of *Mukhlis* which signifies "one who has purified himself", and which is allied to the word *Ikhhlāṣ*, "the act of purifying oneself." According to Sa'īd ibn Jubayr, *Ikhhlāṣ* consists in worshipping no one but Allah, associating no one with Allah, and doing good deeds only for the sake of obeying Allah, and not for the purpose of winning the admiration of the people. Certain spiritual masters have said that *Ikhhlāṣ* is a deed which can be identified neither by men, nor by angels nor by Satan, and that it is a "secret" between Allah and His servant.³⁸

38. The word *Ikhhlāṣ* is usually rendered into English as "sincerity" and *Mukhlis* as "sincere." It is to be doubted whether the word "sincerity" did, at any time and in any Western language, carry the full gamut of the meanings of the Arabic word *Ikhhlāṣ*. Anyhow, the sense of the word "sincerity" has, in current usage, become not only perverted but sometimes actually inverted. The word used to imply a harmony between external action and inner inclination, along with the tacit assumption that the external action concerned was, if nothing else, at least socially acceptable to some degree. But "sincerity", as employed in our days, suggests a compliance with one's emotions or even with one's instincts. As such, the concept of "sincerity" is being used to justify and authorize fornication, or even murder. It is easy to see that such an idea of "sincerity" is the exact anti-thesis of *Ikhhlāṣ*. For, one cannot attain even the lowest degree of

Verse 142

سَيَقُولُ السُّفَهَاءُ مِنَ النَّاسِ مَا وَلَّهُمْ عَن قِبَلِهِمُ الَّتِي كَانُوا
عَلَيْهَا أَقْلٌ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ يَهْدِي مَنْ يَشَاءُ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ
مُّسْتَقِيمٍ ۝

The foolish among the people will say: "What has turned them away from their Qiblah which they used to observe?" Say: "To Allah belong the East and the West. He guides whom He wills to a straight path." (Verse 142) ³⁹

Continued

Ikhlāṣ without forming a clear intention to obey the injunctions of the Shari'ah as against letting oneself be guided by one's instinctual urges or emotional inclinations while the concept of "sincerity" in vogue requires one to ignore the Shari'ah or even mundane considerations and to do the bidding of one's impulse of the moment, thus reducing man to an automaton at the mercy of his reflexes. Nor should we forget another serious aspect of the problem. There is another allied notion of "sincerity" which has been disturbing the peace of many pious people even in the past, but which has acquired a devastating intensity in our own days. This notion of "sincerity" demands one to seek fixity and unrelieved continuity in an emotional state, which is, of course, not possible for man as he is constituted. It so happens with some pious people that once they start seeking this kind of "sincerity" in offering their enjoined prayers, they find that they cannot keep up an unbroken concentration of mind, and are so frightened by this lapse that they sometimes give up offering their prayers, believing such worship to be "insincere" and hence invalid. Let us make it clear once for all that the only thing the Shari'ah requires from us is to have the correct intention and attitude when we begin our prayers or perform any other good deed. This alone is the pre-requisite for attaining *Ikhlāṣ*, which, anyhow, is not a matter of emotions and affective states. In short, Islam requires us to perfect the quality of *Ikhlāṣ* as defined by the Shari'ah, and not to seek "sincerity" in the Western sense of the term, ancient or modern. For an elaborate treatment of the subject, see *Tarbiyyah al-Sālik* by Maulanā Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī .

39. Some of the considerations arising from this verse have already been dealt with under Verses 114 and 115. As one can see, the present verse deals with taunts of the enemies of Islam - Jews, Christians and the *mushrikīn* (associators) - with regard to the change of the Qiblah (orientation) for *Salāh* .

The orientation of Qiblah

"Qiblah" signifies the direction to which one turns one's face. It goes without saying that a true Muslim turns in every form of worship towards Allah alone, and Allah is not limited to any particular direction but transcends all dimensions. The logic of this fact requires that in worshipping Him everyone should be free to choose any orientation that he likes, and that he should have the allowance to keep changing his orientation as it suits him. But Divine Wisdom found it more in the fitness of things that all the worshippers should turn to the same direction, and have a fixed orientation. For, worship has several forms, some of which pertain to a single individual, while others have a collective aspect too. Among the first are included fasting, remembrance of Allah (*dhikr*) etc. which can be performed in privacy, while the *Ṣalāh* and the Ḥajj are performed openly and in a congregation. The latter, beside being forms of worship, have a secondary function as well - that of providing a social and collective discipline to the Muslims. Obviously, the basic principle of social organization is the unity and integration of the individuals, on the firmness and solidity of which depends the strength of the social organization, whereas an improper emphasis on individuality encourages a disintegrating and fissiparous tendency.

As to what the principle of unity and integrity should be, different people have chosen different ways at different times. For example, some have adopted race or colour as the integrating principle, others have opted for the homeland or the geographical region, still others for language. But all these considerations are purely arbitrary and accidental; instead of bringing men together, they divide them, and produce, (as the newspapers show us every day) world-wide concussions. So, the revealed religions and the Shari'ahs of the prophets عليهم السلام - the collective name for which is "*Islām*" - have not shown unnecessary regard to such arbitrary and accidental factors, but have, in determining the principle of integration and unity among men, established themselves on the only basis which can possibly be valid - that is, the unity of mind arising out of doctrinal unity.

In other words, Islam has called upon men not to become divided in the worship of a thousand false gods, but to join together in the

worship of the True God, the One, the Incomparable - the only worship which can draw men from the four corners of the world, men of the past, of the present and of the future, all into a single body of the Faithful. Then, in order to give this inner unity a visible form and also to reinforce it, certain external expressions of unity have also been prescribed. But in both the cases the basic principle has been that the unity in view should not be imposed by circumstances, but arise from an act of will and choice, and produce a spiritual brotherhood.

As to the accidental factors like race or colour or birth-place, Islam has given them their proper place in the social life of man, but has not allowed any of them to usurp the central position. It is only in the field where human will can exercise its power to choose that Islam has sought to establish unity among men, internal as well as external. Moreover, the consideration inherent in the relevant injunctions and regulations has been that the things which are to serve as the point of unity should be of such a nature that every human being - man or woman, literate or illiterate, townsman or rustic - can choose and adopt them with equal ease.

It is hence that the Islamic Shari'ah has not imposed a single and rigid mode of dress or food or housing on all the peoples of the world, for, the climatic conditions and the needs and even the preferences of people living in different regions being different, such a uniformity would have made life difficult for them. Supposing that in making a certain form of dress obligatory, a certain minimum had been prescribed, such a regulation would, beside being inconvenient for some, have gone against the principle of moderation, and amounted to a rejection of Allah's bounties; on the other hand, if a more elaborate dress had been made compulsory, it would have been impossible for the poor to fulfil the conditions. So, instead of prescribing a uniform for all the Muslims, the Shari'ah has permitted the different modes of dressing current among different peoples or regions, and has only laid down certain necessary restrictions - for example, the dress should cover a certain area of the body, specified separately for men and women; in choosing a particular form of dress one should avoid being prodigal or vain, nor should a dress be chosen for the sake of imitating non-Muslims.

In short, Islam has established as points of unity for the Muslims only such things as can be the objects of a free choice, are easy to adopt and do not entail undue hardship or expense - for example, keeping the ranks straight in congregational prayers; following the movements of the *ʿImām* in such prayers strictly; adopting a single form of dress while performing the Ḥajj, etc.

Among these, one of the most important is the Qiblah or the orientation for the *Ṣalāh*. As we have said, Allah Himself is free of all dimensions whatsoever, but the establishment of a single and definite Qiblah provides an easy and concrete unifying principle for men. Now, had the matter of choosing a Qiblah been left to men to decide for themselves, it would in itself have become a cause of dissension and a conflict among them. So, it was necessary that a thing of such import be determined by Allah Himself. In fact, the angels had already laid the foundation of the Ka'bah, the House of Allah, even before Sayyidnā Ādam عليه السلام was sent down to the earth. This was the first Qiblah of mankind.

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ۝

"Certainly, the first House which was built for men is the one at Makkah - blessed, and a guidance for the worlds" (3:96).

As we have pointed out above in our commentary on Verse 125, this continued to be the Qiblah upto the time of Sayyidnā Nūh (Noah عليه السلام), when the Ka'bah was destroyed by the Deluge. It was rebuilt, under divine command, by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ismā'īl (Abraham and Ishmael عليهم السلام), and became their Qiblah. After that, the *Baytul-Maqdis* at Jerusalem was established as the Qiblah for the Hebrew prophets and their people. Even so, these prophets, according to Abū al-ʿĀliyah, used to offer their prayers in the *Baytul-Maqdis* in such a way that they should be facing not only the Rock (*Ṣakhrāh*) but the Ka'bah also. (Qurtūbī)

When *Ṣalāh* was made obligatory for the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the Qiblah appointed for him was, according to some scholars, the Ka'bah which had already served as the Qiblah for his ancestor, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. Some time after the *Hijrah* (his migration from Makkah to Madinah), or, as some scholars maintain, a little before

that event, he received a divine commandment to turn towards the *Baytul-Maqdis*. (This particular commandment has not been reported in the Holy Qur'an - a fact which shows the hollowness of the claim that the Holy Qur'an can be fully understood without the help of the *Hadith*.) According to a *hadith* reported by Al-Bukhāri, he offered his prayers with the *Baytul-Maqdis* as his Qiblah for sixteen or seventeen months. The spot where he offered his prayers in this manner is still marked off in the mosque at Madīnah. (Qurṭubī)

The Holy Prophet ﷺ was, of course, obedience personified, and he continued to offer his prayers with the *Baytul-Maqdis* as his Qiblah according to the divine commandment, but at the same time he longed that the Ka'bah, which had been the Qiblah of Sayyidnā Ādam and Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليهم السلام may be established as his also. The Way of Allah being that He, in His grace, often fulfils the wishes of those of His servants who have found His favour, the Holy Prophet ﷺ hoped that Allah would grant this wish. The Holy Qur'an describes the situation thus:

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ

"We have been seeing you turn your face to heaven. So, We will certainly assign to you a Qiblah that you would like.

Now, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (*Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*) (2:144).

One should notice that the verse we have just cited does not employ the terms, "Ka'bah" or *Baytullah*, but the expression *Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* (the Sacred Mosque). It indicates that for those who live far away from Makkah it is not necessary, while offering *Ṣalāh*, to have the Ka'bah itself exactly in front of them, but turning one's face in the direction of the "House of Allah" is quite sufficient. On the other hand, for those who are present in the Sacred Mosque or can see the Ka'bah from a distance, it is necessary to have the Ka'bah or some part of it exactly in front of them, failing which the prayers will not be valid.

Now, when the Ka'bah was finally established as the Qiblah sixteen or seventeen months after the *Hijrah*, some Jews, associators and hypocrites began to scoff at the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين for being so capricious in the matter of

their Qiblah. The Holy Qur'an reports this objection, adding that such an objection can come only from stupid people - just as earlier in this Sūrah those who turn away from the religion of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام have been described as people who have besotted themselves. In replying to this objection, the second part of the verse shows that their stupidity lies in not realizing that the East and the West both belong to Allah Himself, and that He guides whomsoever He likes on the straight path. The verse, thus, explains the meaning of adopting an orientation - that is to say, neither does the Ka'bah nor the *Baytul-Maqdis* by itself possess any exclusive merit in this regard, and it is the divine commandment alone which gives to it the distinction of being the Qiblah - it could have as easily chosen some other place to serve the purpose. Moreover, the only merit in adopting a particular Qiblah lies in one's obedience to the divine commandment and in one's total submission to the will of Allah, which is the basic principle of the religion of the founder of the Ka'bah, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. In fact, the Holy Qur'an itself explains this truth in clear terms:

لَيْسَ الْبِرُّ أَنْ تَوَلَّوْا وُجُوهَكُمْ قِبَلَ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ وَلَكِنَّ الْبِرَّ مَنْ آمَنَ بِاللَّهِ

"Righteousness is not that you turn your faces to the East or the West; but righteousness is that one believes in Allah..."

(2:177).

Or in an earlier Verse: أَيَسَاءُ تَوَلَّوْنَا فَمَنْ وَجْهَ اللَّهِ : "So whichever way you turn, there is the Face of Allah." (2:115) These verses clearly define the meaning and significance of adopting an orientation - that is, the place which has been chosen to serve as the Qiblah does not possess any merit in its own right, but the special merit arises from its having been chosen by Allah, and similarly turning towards it constitutes a meritorious act only insofar as it shows a readiness to obey divine commandment. The *raison d'être* of changing the Qiblah for the Holy Prophet ﷺ might well be to show to the people in a visible form that a Qiblah is not an idol to be worshipped but only a concrete expression of divine commandment, and may hence be changed as and when Allah wills. In fact, the very next verse (2:143) explicitly says that when the *Baytul-Maqdis* was earlier appointed as the Qiblah, it was intended to show who was willing to obey the Holy Prophet ﷺ and who was not.

Verse 142, thus, fully refutes the antagonists of Islam, and points

out that Allah guides whosoever He wills on the Straight Path - the Straight Path, of course, being the readiness to obey divine commandment without demur. And this Straight Path was granted to the Muslims by the grace of Allah. There is also the suggestion that in the matter of the injunctions of the Shari'ah rectitude lies in obeying each and every divine commandment unquestioningly without being too curious about the *raison d'etre* of such a commandment. For, those who seek a *raison d'etre* usually do so because they wish to deny or denigrate or disobey the Shari'ah.

According to a *ḥadīth* reported from Sayyidah 'Ā'isha رضى الله عنها in the "Musnad" of Imām Aḥmad, the People of the Book are specially jealous of the Muslims for three things - (1) in answer to the divine commandment to every *Ummah* (or religious community) to set aside a day in the week for worship, the Jews chose Saturday and the Christians, Sunday, while the Muslims opted for Friday which happened to be the favourite of Allah; (2) the Ka'bah was appointed as the Qiblah for the Muslims, and not for others; (3) the Muslims were given the privilege of saying *Āmin* while offering *Ṣalāh* behind an *'Imām*.

Verse 143 . . .

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ
وَيَكُونَ الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا . . .

And in the same way We made you a moderate *Ummah* (community), so that you should be witnesses over the people, and the Messenger a witness to you. (Verse 143) 40

The verse qualifies the Islamic nation (*Ummah*) with the objective *Wasat* which signifies "moderate, middle or central", and is usually applied to a thing considered to be the best of its kind. According to a

40. The earlier verse has dealt with the subject of the Qiblah or the orientation for *Ṣalāh* and has indicated that the "Straight Path" is identical with a willing acceptance of the divinely ordained injunctions of the Shari'ah. Since the Islamic *Ummah* has accepted these injunctions without the least hesitation, the present verse says, by way of parenthesis, a few words of praise for it, bringing out the superiority of the Islamic *Ummah* over other Traditional communities. (Bayān al-Qur'ān)

ḥadīth reported by al-Tirmidhī from the blessed Companion Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī, the word *Wasat* is to be interpreted as "just" - in the sense of being "the best" (Qurṭubī). The verse points out that just as Allah has granted to the Muslims a Qiblah which is superior to all other orientations, in the same way He has bestowed upon the Islamic *Ummah* the unparalleled distinction of being moderate, balanced and just - in short, the honour of occupying the central position among all the Ummahs or Traditional communities. This distinction will manifest itself in its full resplendence on the Day of Judgment. Those among the earlier Ummahs who had been denying their prophets would, on that day, pretend that they had never received a book from Allah nor had any prophet given them any kind of guidance. The Islamic *Ummah* would, then, be called upon to bear witness, and it would, testify that prophets had been coming from Allah in every age, and providing guidance to each and every people. The earlier Ummahs would raise the objection that since the Islamic *Ummah* did not exist at that time and could not possibly know what had been happening before it came into being, its testimony against the earlier peoples could not be valid. In reply to this, the Islamic *Ummah* would maintain that even if it was not an eyewitness to the events of the past, yet it had received an authentic report from the most reliable source of information that can possibly be - that is, from the Last Prophet ﷺ and from the Last Book of Allah. The Holy Prophet ﷺ himself would be called in as a witness, and he would confirm the testimony of his *Ummah*. (For details, see the various *Aḥādīth* reported in the collections of al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī, al-Nasāʿī and Imām Aḥmad).

The most moderate of all people

According to the present verse, the characteristic quality which confers a superiority on the Islamic *Ummah* over others is its being *Wasat* - (a word which has been variously translated into English as "midmost, moderate, just, intermediary, middle, central or justly balanced.") In order to explain the implications of the word *Wasat*, commentators have usually made use of another Arabic adjective *Mu'tadil* (signifying "moderate or temperate") and the noun *I'tidāl*

which means "being equal"; both the words come from the root 'Adl which signifies "to be equal, or to make equal."⁴¹

In this regard one would like to know why the superiority of a human group or individual should be made to depend on the quality of moderation. Let us begin this discussion with a quite tangible fact. All the medical systems, old or new, are unanimous in accepting the principle that the health of the human body depends on the temperateness of the different elements of which it is composed, and that illness or disease comes from a disturbance of this equilibrium. According to the ancient Greek medicine, which was further developed by the Muslims, these elements or "humours" are four in number - blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile -, and the humours produce four physical states in the body - heat, cold, wetness and dryness. As long as the four states are properly balanced against one another, the human body enjoys good health; but as soon as there is an immoderate increase or decrease in any one of them, the body becomes diseased, and if the balance is not properly restored in time, it may succumb to the forces of death. Similarly, in the ethical and spiritual sphere too health depends on temperateness and inner equilibrium, and illness arises out of intemperance and disequilibrium, which, if allowed to grow, results in spiritual death. At the same time, anyone who has eyes to see would readily discover for himself that the essence of manhood which places man at the head of all created beings, does not lie in the physical states of his body - that he, in fact, shares with all the animals - but in something higher and subtler: namely, spiritual perfection. As the great Sūfī poet Rūmī has said: "Manhood does not reside in the flesh, or in the fat or in the skin; manhood is nothing else than seeking to please the Friend." As to those who ignore this essential attribute of man and allow it to be destroyed in themselves, Rūmī says: "These people you see all around are non-human; they are not men, but only wear the masks of man."

The Universal Man

This being so, we are naturally led to the conclusion that he alone

41. So, for the purpose of the present discussion we shall choose the English word "moderation" in order to explain certain essential features of the Islamic *Ummah*.

can deserve the title of *Al-Insān al-Kāmil* ("the Universal Man") who has attained ethical and spiritual equilibrium along with physical equilibrium. This quality has specially been granted to all the prophets عليهم السلام, and, in its most perfect form, to the Holy Prophet ﷺ who is thus "the Universal Man" par excellence. As for humanity in general, Allah has, on the other hand, created a stable and complex system of medicines, instruments and physicians for the physical well-being of man; similarly, He has, on the other hand, sent His prophets who bring divine guidance for man, and who are provided with a certain amount of requisite physical force too, so that they may promulgate this law of equilibrium and moderation in the world. The Holy Qur'ān defines the purpose of sending prophets and messengers of Allah to men, and of giving them Divine Books:

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ
بِالْقِسْطِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ

"Indeed, We have sent Our messengers with the clear signs, and We have sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that men might uphold justice. And We have sent down iron in which there is great might, and many uses for men."
(57:25)

Let us add by way of explanation that "the Book" is meant for producing inner equilibrium and temperateness in men, and "the Balance" for producing equilibrium in their social conduct and economic transactions - the "Balance" may also stand for the Shari'ah of every prophet which helps us to define what "equilibrium" really is in its various applications in the different spheres of human life, and which serves to establish justice in the world.

Now, let us recall that the verse under discussion characterizes the Islamic *Ummah* with the word *Wasat* ("moderate, middle, central"). Our discussion must have made it clear that this simple word comprehends all the qualities which it is possible for an individual or a community of men to possess in this world. Through such a characterization of the Islamic *Ummah*, the Holy Qur'ān has thus indicated that this *Ummah* possesses the essential quality of manhood to a degree of perfection that no other *Ummah* does, and that it is superior to all others in serving the purpose for which the whole

cosmic order has been created, and for which all the prophets and divine books have been sent.

The Universal Community

Certain other verses of the Holy Qur'an define this essential quality of the Islamic *Ummah* in more specific terms. For example: **وَمِنْ خَلَقْنَا أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِالْحَقِّ وَبِهِ يَعْدِلُونَ** : "Among those We have created there is an *Ummah* which guides by the truth, and by it dispenses justice." (7:181) That is to say, the Islamic *Ummah* displays its spiritual equilibrium in giving up the pursuit of individual desires and interests in order to follow divine guidance and try to make others too do the same, and in settling all kinds of disputes in the light of divine law without being influenced by the vested interests of a person or a group. Another verse is still more specific:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ

"You are the best *Ummah* that has been brought forth for men, bidding to good deeds and forbidding evil deeds and believing in Allah." (3:110)

It is the best *Ummah*, for it has been granted a unique Prophet ﷺ who taught us to respect all other prophets, and a Book which is the most comprehensive and the most perfect of all the Divine Books, and has in itself been endowed with the quality of temperateness, moderation and equilibrium to a degree as no other *Ummah* does enjoy; it has been destined to be the recipient of the most subtle modes of knowledge, to outshine others in all the forms of faith and practice, and, above all, in the fear of Allah - its field of action not limited to any one country or race but extending all over the world, and infusing all the spheres of human existence. The phrase **أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ** : "raised for mankind." (3:110) indicates that the very purpose for which it has been brought into being is to work for the good of men, and to help them find the way to salvation and to Paradise, its function and, so to say, its very insignia as an *Ummah* being to guide people towards good deeds and to dissuade them from evil deeds. This role of the Islamic *Ummah* has been formulated very succinctly in a *hadith*: **الْدِينُ النَّصِيحَةُ** : "Religion consists in having the good of others at heart" - particularly of other Muslims. Let us add that the good deeds towards which this

Ummah is meant to guide others are those which have been defined as such by the Shari'ah, while the evil deeds from which it is to dissuade them include infidelity (*Kufr*), association (*Shirk*), innovations in religion (*Bid'ah*), sins of different kinds, illegitimate customs, transgression of divine commandments, immoral or indecent actions, etc. As to dissuading people from evil deeds, this too may take various forms - it may require the use sometimes of the tongue, sometimes of the hand, sometimes of the pen and sometimes of the sword - in fact, it would include all the forms of *Jihād*. As far as the extensive and intensive display of this particular quality is concerned, no other *Ummah* can compare with the Islamic *Ummah*.

Moderateness: A Comparative View

Let us now consider how far the temperateness or the moderation of this *Ummah* is borne out by actual facts. Since it is not possible here to make a detailed comparative study of the respective beliefs and practices of all the *Ummahs*, we shall give only a few examples which would, we hope, satisfactorily establish the superiority of this *Ummah* over others.

First of all, let us take up the doctrinal aspect. In the case of the earlier *Ummahs* one would observe that on the one hand they took their prophets to be the sons of Allah and started worshipping them - **قَالَتِ الْيَهُودُ عِزْرَارَ بْنَ اللَّهِ وَقَالَتِ النَّصْرَى الْمَسِيحُ ابْنُ اللَّهِ** : "The Jews said, 'Ezra is the son of Allah', and the Christians said, 'Christ is the son of Allah'." (9:30) -, and that on the other hand some people from among them, in spite of having recognized and acknowledged their prophet on the basis of his oft-repeated miracles, refused to obey him when he asked them to take part in a holy war, and bluntly said: **إِذْ هَبْ أَنْتَ وَرَبُّكَ فَقَاتِلَا إِنَّا هُنَا مُعِدُّونَ** : "Go forth, you and your Lord, and fight; we will be sitting here." (5:24) We sometimes see even the spectacle of prophets being tortured by their own followers. On the contrary, we have the Islamic *Ummah* which has such a deep love for the Holy Prophet ﷺ that Muslims have, in every period of their history, taken it to be the greatest blessing to be able to sacrifice their own lives and even the lives of their wives and children at his call, and yet it has never exceeded the limit, and has placed the Holy Prophet ﷺ only in the station of a prophet and not in the station of Allah. In spite of knowing him to be the most perfect of

all the prophets, it has been calling him *عبدالله ورسوله* : "the servant of Allah, and His messenger." The doctrinal position with regard to him, as defined in the famous Arabic poem "*Qaṣīdah al-Burdah*", is that, short of attributing "the sonhood of Allah" to him (which the Christians do in the case of Christ, and which constitutes an act of infidelity), anything that one says in his praise would be correct; or, in the words of a Persian poet, addressing the Holy Prophet ﷺ :

بعد از خدا بزرگ تویی قصه مختصر

"In short, after God, you are the greatest."

When we turn from the doctrinal aspect to a consideration of the actual attitudes and practices in the matter of worship and rites, we again find similar excesses and aberrations on the part of earlier Ummahs. On the one hand, we see their religious scholars misinterpreting or changing the injunctions of their Shari'ah and even distorting the Sacred Books for a few pieces of silver, and inventing all kinds of ruses to get rid of divinely ordained rites; on the other hand, we find people giving up the world altogether, imprisoning themselves in monastic cells, refusing to accept their share in the blessings of the physical world which Allah has not only granted to man but the enjoyment of which also He has permitted, and, in short, believing that imposing hardships on oneself carries the highest merit and is in itself an act of worship par excellence. The history of Islamic Ummah, on the contrary, presents a totally different picture. On the one hand, it has never adopted monasticism as the supreme form of religious life - in fact, Islam forbids such an attitude. On the other hand, through its readiness to sacrifice property and life, even children and all for the sake of the commandments of Allah and His Prophet ﷺ, the Ummah established its sway even politically over a considerable area of the world. It has demonstrated in its practice as no other Ummah has that religion is meant to be put into action in the market-places and the halls of power as much as in the mosques and the contemplative retreats. It is the Islamic Ummah which has shown the world how the poor in spirit can move about in the robes of kings, and the kings in spirit conceal themselves in the garb of beggars - all because the king as well as the beggar knows that the greatest dignity lies in being the servant of Allah.

In the sphere of human and social relations too, the earlier Ummahs have in their behaviour been guilty of excess in one way or another. On the one hand, we see an indifference to human rights and particularly an utter disregard of the rights of women, and, in general, a pursuit of individual interests and desires irrespective of the question of right and wrong. On the other hand, we have the display of an exaggerated sentimentality which forbids the eating of animal flesh, in spite of Allah having made it lawful, and which frowns upon the killing of an insect even accidentally. It was the Islamic *Ummah* and its Shari'ah which established an equilibrium and a just order in the field of human relations. On the other hand, it set down a clear code of human rights, extended them to women as well, and prescribed that not only in times of peace but on the battle-field itself the enemies too must enjoy certain inalienable rights. On the other hand, it clearly demarcated every right and every duty, and put down every act of falling back from the prescribed mark or exceeding it as a crime. The Islamic Shari'ah also taught that one should try to fulfil all of one's obligations towards others, but if one saw one's own rights suffer, one should exercise patience and forgiveness.

In the economic sphere too, the other Ummahs have been a prey to excesses of different kinds. For example, in our own age we have, on the one hand, the Capitalist system which pays no heed to the distinction between the lawful and the unlawful, and is totally blind to the welfare of the people, but exalts the amassing of wealth as the highest virtue; on the other hand are certain economic systems which have no respect for personal property. In actual fact, the essence of these two hostile systems is the same - the pursuit of worldly things as the be-all and the end-all of human life. Contrary to this, the Islamic Shari'ah brings the conflicting elements into an equilibrium, giving to each its proper place. On the one hand, it does not allow the amassing of wealth to be made the ultimate end of man's effort, nor does it make human dignity depend on the considerations of money or rank or office. On the other hand, it promulgates certain principles for the distribution of wealth in a balanced manner so that no member of a society should be deprived of the basic necessities of life, nor should an

individual or a group appropriate all the available wealth. The things which can be shared in common by all the members of a society have been entrusted to public or joint control, while in certain specific things the right to private property has been fully respected. It made a clear-cut distinction between lawful (*Ḥalāl*) possessions and unlawful (*Ḥarām*) possessions, insisting on the spiritual merit of lawful possessions and laying down the rules for making use of them.

Injunctions and related considerations

(1) According to the present verse, Allah has made the Islamic *Ummah* an equitable and just, and hence a trustworthy community, "so that" it may be qualified to bear witness. From this we infer the legal principle that one who is not 'Ādil (trustworthy - as defined by the Shari'ah) cannot be acceptable as a witness in a court of law.

(2) According to al-Qurṭubī, this verse establishes *Ijmā'*: (إِجْمَاعٌ), or the consensus of the Islamic *Ummah*, as one of the four deciding agencies in the matter of legislation. For, the very fact that Allah Himself has accepted this *Ummah* as a trustworthy witness as against the other traditional communities, shows that the consensus of this *Ummah* is a deciding factor in legislative matters, and that it is necessary (*Wājib*) to act upon it. Thus, the consensus of the blessed Companions has to be accepted by their successors, and that of the latter by the next generation.

According to Al-Tafsīr al-Mazharī, this verse establishes the principle that the deeds and actions of this *Ummah* which have been approved by a consensus are all of them commendable, for, if one were to admit the possibility of a consensus on an error, the *Ummah* cannot be characterized as being moderate and just.

Imām al-Jaṣṣāṣ adds that the dependability of the consensus is not particular to the time of the Holy Prophet ﷺ or of the blessed Companions, but that the consensus of the Muslims in any age whatsoever is equally trustworthy, for this verse is addressed to the whole *Ummah* which includes not only the contemporaries of the Holy Prophet ﷺ but also the succeeding generations of Muslims upto the

Day of Judgment. Thus, the Muslims living in any age whatsoever qualify as the witnesses of Allah whose agreement on a certain point becomes a deciding factor in matters of legislation, and who cannot arrive at a consensus on anything which should constitute an error or a deviation. ⁴²

... Verse 143

... وَمَا جَعَلْنَا الْقِبْلَةَ الَّتِي كُنْتَ عَلَيْهَا إِلَّا لِنَعْلَمَ مَنْ يَتَّبِعُ
الرَّسُولَ مِمَّنْ يَنْقَلِبُ عَلَى عَقْبَيْهِ وَإِنْ كَانَتْ لَكَبِيرَةً إِلَّا عَلَى
الَّذِينَ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُضِيعَ إِيمَانَكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
بِالنَّاسِ لَرَعُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ۝

And We did not appoint the Qiblah which you used to observe except to know him who follows the Messenger as distinct from him who turns on his heels. And, it was burdensome indeed, but not on those whom Allah guided. And Allah is not to let your faith go waste. Certainly Allah is very kind, very merciful to the people. (Verse 143)

The History of the Qiblah

There is some difference of opinion among the blessed Companions and their Successors as to whether it was the *Baytullah* at Makkah or the "*Baytul-Maqdis*" at Jerusalem which was appointed as the Qiblah, when the five daily prayers were made obligatory in *Makkah al-Mukarramah* before the *Hijrah* (the migration of the Holy Prophet ﷺ from Makkah to Madinah). According to the blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, the first Qiblah was the *Baytul-Maqdis*, and continued to be so even after the *Hijrah* for some sixteen or seventeen

42. Let us not, however, forget that consensus or *Ijmā'* in this context does not at all imply a sort of referendum on the basis of adult franchise, but means the agreement of a majority of such scholars as fulfil the necessary conditions for pronouncing a judgment in the matters of the Shari'ah - that is to say, those who possess the authority to exercise *Ijtihād*. It goes without saying that once a consensus of this kind has been arrived at in any matter, the majority of the *Ummah* accepts it, and holds by it.

months, and it was only then that Allah commanded that the *Baytullah* be taken as the Qiblah. However, the practice of the Holy Prophet ﷺ at Makkah was that he used to offer his prayers between *al-Hajar al-Aswad* ("the Black Stone") and *al-Rukn al-Yamāniyy* ("the corner facing Yemen") so that his face should be turned towards the *Baytullah* and the *Baytul-Maqdis* both at the same time. But this was no longer possible when he migrated to Madinah, and hence his keen desire that the *Baytullah* be appointed as the new Qiblah. (Ibn Kaṭṭīr) But other Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين are of the view that when the five daily prayers were made obligatory at Makkah, it was the *Baytullah* which served as the Qiblah for the Muslims as it had for Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليهم السلام. As long as the Holy Prophet ﷺ stayed at Makkah, he continued to observe this Qiblah. But after the *Hijrah*, Allah ordained a change in the orientation, and the *Baytul-Maqdis* was appointed as the Qiblah, which it continued to be for sixteen or seventeen months. Then came a new commandment, and the *Baytullah* was restored as the Qiblah. Al-Qurṭubī, relying on the authority of Abū 'Amr, prefers the second view to the first. The *raison d'être* of these changes of orientation has been explained like this. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ came to Madinah, he had to deal with the Jews, and in order to familiarize them with Islam he adopted their Qiblah under divine commendment. But, by and by it became evident that a stubborn people like the Jews would not easily give up their hostility to Islam. So, Allah allowed him to go back to the original Qiblah, which, being the Qiblah of his forefathers, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Sayyidnā Ismā'īl عليهم السلام, was naturally dearer to him. In fact, the mosque of Sayyidna Salih عليه السلام was oriented towards the *Baytullah*, as is shown by an incident reported by al-Qurṭubī from Abū al-'Āliyah al-Riyāhī. The latter once had a debate with a Jew concerning the orientation adopted by Sayyidnā Mūsā (Moses عليه السلام). The Jew insisted that the great prophet turned in his prayers towards the *Sakhrāh*, The Dome of the Rock in the Sacred Mosque at Jerusalem, while Abū al-'Āliyah maintained that he stood near the *Sakhrāh*, but his face was turned towards the *Baytullah*. Finally, the latter suggested that the dispute could be decided by having a look at

the mosque of Sayyidnā Ṣālih عليه السلام situated on a hill below the *Baytul-Maqdis*. And, on visiting the mosque, they found that it was oriented towards the *Baytullah*.

Now, according to those who prefer the first of the two views, the *raison d'être* was that it was necessary at Makkah to differentiate the Muslims from the idol-worshippers and to emphasize the distinction between the two, and hence the *Baytul-Maqdis* was appointed as the Qiblah of the Muslims instead of the *Baytullah* which was at that time the Qiblah of the *mushrikin*. Then, after the *Hijrah*, there arose a new need at Madīnah - that of highlighting the distinction between the Muslims and the Jews. So, the Qiblah of the Jews was given up, and the *Baytullah* was adopted as the Qiblah of the Muslims.

On account of the difference between these two views, the phrase "the Qiblah which you used to observe" has also been interpreted in two ways. On the basis of the first view, "the Qiblah" referred to in the present verse can only be the *Baytul-Maqdis* which was the first and earlier Qiblah; on the basis of the second, it can also be the Ka'bah which was the earliest and the first Qiblah. Anyhow, the real import of the verse remains the same in either case - the commandment with regard to the change in orientation is a test of the faith of those who claim to be the followers of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, which would openly demonstrate the distinction between those who are genuinely obedient to Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, and those who follow their individual opinion. History records that after this verse had been revealed, those who were weak in their faith, or were just hypocrites, forsook Islam, and even accused the Holy Prophet ﷺ of having gone back to the ways of his own people - that is, of the *mushrikin*.

Injunctions and related considerations

(1) The present verse shows that sometimes an injunction based on the *Sunnah*, or the Tradition of the Holy Prophet ﷺ is abrogated by the Holy Qur'an. As Imām al-Jaṣṣāṣ points out in his "*Aḥkām al-Qur'an*", the Noble Qur'an does not specify that the Holy Prophet ﷺ was ever commanded, before the *Hijrah* or after, to turn in his prayers towards the *Baytul-Maqdis*: we find the relevant evidence only in the

Ḥadīth and the *Sunnah*. It comes to mean that a practice which had been established by the *Sunnah* was abrogated by this verse of the Holy Qur'an, appointing the *Baytullah* as the Qiblah.

(2) This verse also goes to show that the *Ḥadīth* of the Messenger of Allah too, in a certain respect, cannot be delinked from the Holy Qur'an, and that the Holy Qur'an recognizes the legitimacy of those injunctions which find no mention in the Holy Qur'an but have been instituted by the *Ḥadīth* alone. For, the present verse clearly states at the end that prayers which had been offered, taking the *Baytul-Maqdis* as the Qiblah, as commanded by the Holy Prophet ﷺ, are altogether valid and acceptable to Allah.

(3) This verse helps us to resolve a delicate problem in Islamic jurisprudence pertaining to the "*Khabar al-Wāḥid*" (which is a *Ḥadīth* reported by one or two persons only). The question which arises in this respect is whether an injunction laid down in the Holy Qur'an, or definitely authenticated otherwise, can be abrogated by such a *ḥadīth*. The Hanafī school of jurisprudence holds that it cannot, while the reports concerning this verse suggest that it can do so, if strong indications are present to establish the authenticity of such a *ḥadīth*. The Hanafī school of jurisprudence holds that it cannot, while the reports concerning this verse suggest that it can do so, if strong indications are present to establish the authenticity of such a *ḥadīth*. For, al-Bukhārī, Muslim and nearly all the authentic collections of the *Aḥādīth* report the following circumstances from several Companions رضى الله عنهم اجمعين. When the divine commandment changing the Qiblah came down, the Holy Prophet ﷺ offered his prayers at the time of 'Asr (or, according to other reports cited by Ibn Kathīr, at the time of *zuhr*) facing the *Baytullah*. Some Companions, departing from the mosque, happened to pass by the mosque of the Banī Salamah tribe, and found these people offering their prayers in the direction of the *Baytul-Maqdis*. So, they called out to inform them that the Qiblah had now been changed, and that they had just offered their prayers along with the Holy Prophet ﷺ in the direction of the *Baytullah*. On hearing this, those people at once changed their orientation to *Baytullah* even in the course of the prayers. Nuwaylah Bint Muslim relates that women who were in the back row came forward, so that when the orientation had been changed, men were again in the front row and women in the back row. (Ibn Kathīr) Thus the Banū Salmah tribe adopted the new Qiblah the very same day. But the news

reached *Qubā* the next day in the course of the *Fajr* prayers - as reported by Al-Bukhārī and Muslim from the blessed Companion Ibn 'Umar -, and the people of *Qubā* too turned towards the *Baytullah* in the course of the prayers. (Ibn Kathīr and Jaṣṣāṣ)

After citing these reports, Imām al-Jaṣṣāṣ concludes.

هذا خبر صحيح مستفيض في أيدي أهل العلم قد تلقوه بالقبول فصار في
حيز التواتر الموجب للعلم

"Although this *ḥadīth* is essentially a solitary report, (that is, *Al-Khabar al-Wāhid*), yet, having been generally accepted and also being supported by strong indication with regard to its authenticity, it has acquired the status of a *ḥadīth* that has been related by a number of trustworthy reporters in an uninterrupted succession -- a fact which always leads to certitude."

The Ḥanafī jurists agree with this conclusion. They must, however, face another question. This *ḥadīth* acquired general acceptance only much later, while the news of the change in the orientation must have been conveyed to the Banū Salamah tribe and this *ḥadīth* immediately without its being widely known? Al-Jaṣṣāṣ replies that not only these people but all the Companions already knew that the Holy Prophet ﷺ wished the *Baytullah* to be appointed as the Qiblah and had even been praying for it, and had begun to consider it quite probable that the injunction to retain *Baytul-Maqdis* as the Qiblah may not remain operative in the future. In other words, the probability of a change had made the continuation of the *Baytul-Maqdis* as the Qiblah a bit uncertain, and not definite. In view of this element of uncertainty, the *Khabar al-Wāhid* was considered to be quite sufficient for abrogating the earlier commandment. Otherwise, a *Khabar al-Wāhid* cannot justifiably abrogate a definite and final injunction laid down by the Holy Qur'an.

(4) The present verse helps to resolve an important problem which has been the subject of a controversy: if the 'Imām uses a microphone in leading *Ṣalāh*, would it be legitimate for the congregation to obey his call in their movements? If they can hear no more than the sound coming out of the loud-speaker, would it not invalidate their prayers?

As we have already noted, Al-Bukhārī reports a *ḥadīth* from the

blessed Companion 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, relating how the people of *Qubā* turned towards the *Baytullah* even in the course of their prayers as soon as they heard the commandment about the change in orientation. Commenting on this incident, the great Ḥanafī scholar al-'Aynī says: "This *ḥadīth* establishes the rule that a man who is not offering his prayers may teach or instruct the man who is engaged in his prayers." In another place, al-'Aynī also adds that from this *ḥadīth*, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī has derived the rule that if a man engaged in his prayers hears the words spoken by one who is not so engaged, it does not invalidate his prayers ('Umdah al-Qarī).

Of course, the Ḥanafī jurists in general hold that if a man engaged in his prayers obeys the call of another man who is not participating in these prayers, it invalidates his prayers. What they, however, mean is that obeying someone other than Allah in the course of *Salah* invalidates it, but if one is actually obeying a divine commandment and the other man is acting only as a means of communicating this injunction to him, it does not invalidate the prayers at all. An example would make the point clear. If a man, joining the congregational prayers, finds that there is no room left in the first row, and that he would be the only one to stand in the second, he should, according to the jurists, pull someone back from the first row and make him join the second row along with himself. Now, on the face of it, the man who allows himself to be pulled back is obeying someone other than Allah in the course of the prayers, and this should invalidate his prayers. But, in fact, it is not so. The most authoritative book of Ḥanafī jurisprudence, "Al-Durr al-Mukhtār", lays down the rule that the prayers of this man are perfectly valid. As to why his prayers would not be invalidated, Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī explains that this man has not actually been obeying the new-comer, but following a divine commandment conveyed to him by the Holy Prophet ﷺ. Let us add that there are two different ways in which a man engaged in his prayers may obey the call of another man who is not participating with him in these prayers. (a) He may wish to please this man and to obey him. In such a case, the prayers would become invalid. (b) He obeys a commandment of the Shari'ah, conveyed to him by the other man. In this case, he is essentially obeying a divine commandment, and hence his prayers would not become invalid. (Ṭaḥṭāwī)

This discussion should make it easy to resolve the problem about the use of a microphone by an 'Imām in leading the congregational prayers. Technical experts hold that the sound coming out of a loudspeaker is exactly the sound produced by the 'Imām. If it is so, there is no question of the prayers being invalid. But if we suppose that the sound transmitted by a microphone is not exactly the sound produced by the 'Imām, but only an imitation of the sound, or a report of what he has been saying, even then it would be improper to suspect that the people offering their prayers have been obeying the command of the microphone. For, it is obvious enough that they have been obeying the commandment of the Holy Prophet ﷺ to follow the movements of the 'Imām - the microphone does no more than inform them that the 'Imām has, for example, bowed himself down or prostrated himself, and in accepting this information and following his movements, they obey the 'Imām and not the instrument. And it is, of course, a divine commandment which requires us to obey the 'Imām in the congregational prayers.

(5) There is a phrase in the present verse which requires some explanation: "And Allah is not to let your faith go waste." If we take 'Imām (faith) in its usual sense, the phrase would be interpreted like this. When the Qiblah was changed, some stupid people thought that the Muslims had forsaken Islam, and that their 'Imām had now become null and void. The verse assures the Muslims that Allah would not allow their 'Imām to go waste, and asks them not to fall prey to such senseless conjectures.

On the other, on the basis of certain *Aḥādīth*, some early commentators have interpreted the word 'Imām in the verse to mean the *Ṣalāh*. According to this interpretation, Allah assures the Muslims that the commandment changing the Qiblah would in no way affect the validity of the prayers they have been offering so far in the direction of the *Baytul-Maqdis* - Allah would not allow these prayers to go waste, for they are valid, and have already been accepted.

Al-Bukhārī has reported from the Companion al-Barā' Ibn 'Āzib, and al-Tirmidhī from the Companion Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that when the *Baytullah* was appointed as the Qiblah, people became worried about the fate of those Muslims who had been praying in the direction

of the *Baytul-Maqdis*, but had died before having the opportunity to pray in the direction of the *Baytullah*.

Verse 144

قَدْ نَرَى تَقَلُّبَ وَجْهِكَ فِي السَّمَاءِ فَلَنُوَلِّيَنَّكَ قِبْلَةً تَرْضَاهَا
فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ وَحَيْثُ مَا كُنْتُمْ فَوَلُّوا
وُجُوهَكُمْ شَطْرَهُ وَإِنَّ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ
مَنْ رَبِّهِمْ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ عَمَّا يَعْمَلُونَ ۝

We have been seeing you turn your face to heaven. So, We will certainly assign to you a Qiblah that you would like. Now, turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque (*Al-Masjid al-Harām*). And, wherever you be, turn your faces in its direction. Even those who have been given the Book know well that here is the truth from their Lord. And Allah is not unaware of what they do. (Verse 144)

The orientation to Qiblah

This verse begins by speaking of how deeply the Holy Prophet ﷺ wished that the Ka'bah be appointed as the Qiblah of the Muslims. This inclination has been explained in different ways, but there is no real contradiction involved in these different views. For example, it has been said that before prophethood was conferred on him, he used to follow, out of the impulsion of his own nature, the way of Sayyidna Ibrāhīm (Abraham) عليه السلام, and that when he began to receive the Revelation, the Holy Qur'an itself designated his Shari'ah as being in total accord with the Abrahamic Way. Moreover, the Qiblah of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as well as that of Sayyidnā Ismā'il عليه السلام had been the Ka'bah. So, it was quite in the nature of things for him to wish that the Ka'bah be appointed as the Qiblah of the Muslims. An additional factor was that the Arab tribes, in spite of being associators, at least claimed to be the followers of the Abrahamic Way, and acknowledged the Ka'bah as their Qiblah in contradiction to the Jews. Once the Ka'bah had been made the Qiblah of the Muslims, the Arabs could be expected to find Islam more acceptable. As for the hope that the adoption of the *Baytul-Maqdis* as the Qiblah would bring the Jews closer to Islam, it had been dashed by the events of the last sixteen or

seventeen months, for the hostility of the Jews to Islam, fed by their vanity, had only been growing more intense.

Whatever be the motive, the Holy Prophet ﷺ was very keen to see the Ka'bah appointed as the Qiblah. Now, prophets are as close to Allah as man can ever be, and this exalted station teaches them to observe a very strict spiritual etiquette - they never submit a request before Allah until and unless they have received the permission to do so. This principle leads us to believe that the Holy Prophet ﷺ had already been allowed to pray for his wish to be fulfilled, and that he hoped his prayer would be granted. So, he used to turn his face again and again to the sky, anxiously waiting for an angel to appear and bring the injunction he had been wishing for.

In the present verse, Allah describes this state of the Holy Prophet ﷺ in an appreciative manner, and promises to assign him a Qiblah that he would like. Immediately after the promise, there follows the commandment: **فَوَلِّ وَجْهَكَ شَطْرَ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ** : "Now turn your face in the direction of the Sacred Mosque." Here we find a manifestation of the subtle workings of divine grace - the Holy Prophet ﷺ was, to begin with, granted the joy of hearing a promise made, and, immediately after, the greater joy of seeing the promise fulfilled. (Qurtubī, Jaṣṣāṣ and Mazhari)

Injunctions and related considerations

As we have explained earlier, Allah is not confined to any direction or dimension - **قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْمَشْرِقُ وَالْمَغْرِبُ** : "Say: the East and the West both belong to Allah." (2:115) But in order to institute a communal unity among the Muslims scattered all over the world, Divine Wisdom thought fit to assign them a particular and definite orientation which could serve as a visible symbol of that unity. Now, this orientation could have as easily been provided by the *Baytul-Maqdis*. But the Ka'bah was finally chosen as the Qiblah in accordance with the wish of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and the injunction was announced in the present verse. The situation required that the Holy Qur'ān should use the phrase: 'Turn your face toward the Ka'bah, or toward the *Baytullah*.' But we actually find the Holy Qur'ān saying: "Turn your face in the

direction of *Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām*." This particular mode of expression helps to clarify several important questions with regard to the Qiblah.

Although, the Qiblah, to be precise, is the *Baytullah*, which is known as the Ka'bah, yet it is obvious that one can turn exactly towards the *Baytullah* only so long as one can see it with one's own eyes, and that for those who live at some distance and cannot see it directly, it would be too rigorous an obligation to fulfil, if they were required to turn exactly towards the *Baytullah* - in the case of distant towns, an exact orientation would be difficult and uncertain even with the help of the instruments and calculations. But the Islamic Shari'ah always aims at making things easy for people. So, the Holy Qur'an has designated as the Qiblah, not the *Baytullah* or the Ka'bah, but *Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* which covers a much wider area, and in the direction of which it is easy to turn even for those who live in far off places.

Then, a greater facility has been provided by the use of the word *Shaṭr*. This Arabic word signifies "the half of a thing", or "the direction in which a thing lies." According to the consensus of the commentators, here the word has been used in the second sense. So, the word itself points to the rule that in the case of places which are far from Makkah it is not even necessary for the prayers to be valid that one should turn exactly towards *Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* - for, it is quite sufficient to turn only "in the direction" of the Sacred Mosque, as the Holy Qur'an itself has indicated. (Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ).

Let us give an example to make the rule as clear as possible. For countries which lie to the East of Makkah (e.g. Pakistan or India), the direction of *Al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* means the West. So, if one turns towards the West, one's prayers would be valid enough. Since the point at which the sun sets in the summer is different from that where it sets in the winter, the *Fuqahā'* (the Muslim jurists) have decided that for the purposes of *Ṣalāh* in such countries, the West (the direction of the Qiblah in this case) lies in between these two points. In mathematical terminology it means that an area covering 48 degrees between these two points is to be taken as being the direction