

tion. It seems their code recognized a vow as a cause of unlawfulness of something lawful, like in our own Shari'ah, a vow may make the permissible acts as obligatory. However, a vow or pledge which renders things unlawful is, in reality, an oath which is not permissible in our Shari'ah. In fact, in such a case, it is obligatory to break the oath and make amends by making *Kaffarah*. This is in accordance with what Allah Almighty has said in the verse *لِمَ تُحَرِّمُ مَا أَحَلَّ اللَّهُ لَكَ* (... why do you forbid what Allah has made lawful for you? - 66:1) (See *al-Tafsir al-Kabir*)

Verse 96

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبْرَكًا وَهُدًى
لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٦﴾

The first house set up for the people is surely the one in Makkah having blessings and guidance for all worlds. [96]

Commentary:

The above verse points out to the distinction and superiority of the House of Allah, the Ka'bah, as compared to the houses, and even mosques, of the whole world. There are several reasons for this status, which have been mentioned in this verse, namely:

1. Among the true houses of worship in this world, the Ka'bah enjoys the distinction of being the first.
2. It is full of blessings.
3. It is a source of guidance for the entire world.

The gist of the words used in the verse is that the first House designated for people by Allah is none other than the one which is in Makkah. It means that the Ka'bah of Makkah is the first House of Worship in this world. One possible interpretation of this phrase may be that the first house of all the houses of the world was made for Divine worship exclusively, in which case, there would have been no place of worship or place of residence prior to it. *Ādam عليه السلام* was a prophet of Allah. Given his stature and the eminent position as Allah's vicegerent, it is likely that he, soon after his appearance on the earth, elected to first build the House of Allah even before building his own

residence. It is for this reason that Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar, Mu-jāhid, Qatādah and others from among the Companions and their successors are of the opinion that the Ka'bah is the first house of the world. Then, it is also possible that houses where people lived may have already been made earlier but this may have been the first ever House made exclusively for worship. This very view has been reported from Sayyidnā 'Alī رضي الله عنه .

Al-Baihaqi, in his book, Dalā'il al-Nubūwwah, has reported on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Amr ibn al'Ās رضي الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'After the arrival of Sayyidnā Ādam and Sayyidah Ḥawwā' عليهما السلام into the mortal world, Allah Almighty commanded them through angel Jibra'il that they should build the House of Allah (the Ka'bah). After they had fulfilled the command, they were asked to go round it (in *ṭawāf*). They were told that they were the first among people and this house was the first House (of worship) appointed for people (Ibn Kathīr).

As it appears in some reports, this structure of the Ka'bah built by Sayyidnā Ādam was there upto the time of Sayyidnā Nūḥ. It collapsed during the Flood and its traces were obliterated. Following that, it was re-built by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام on the same foundations. When the structure collapsed again due to some accident, a group from the tribe of Jurhum raised it once again. When yet another collapse came, the Amalkites rebuilt it. When it collapsed close to the early period of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, the Quraysh built it all over again in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself participated and helped place the Black Stone with his blessed hands. But, the structure raised by the Quraysh was a little different from the original foundation laid down by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm in as much as they had left out a section of the House of Allah which is known as Ḥatīm. There were two doors in the original Abrahamic structure of the Ka'bah, one for entry and another on the back for exit. The Quraysh retained just the one door in the east (for entry and exit).

The third change they made was to raise the level of the entry door much higher than the ground level of the House of Allah so that everybody could not go in there easily; this was to restrict the entry only to those who were permitted by Quraysh. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم

said to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها : 'I wish I could demolish the present structure and raise it all over again exactly in accordance with the Abrahimic foundation. By doing this I shall be correcting the arbitrary deviation from the Abrahimic foundation made by the Quraysh, but this action is likely to create a misunderstanding among Muslims who are new and whose knowledge is not yet perfect, therefore, I shall leave it as it is for the time being.' The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم did not live for very long to implement his wishes in his lifetime.

But, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr رضى الله عنه, the nephew of Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها had heard this saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. When he came to rule Makkah al-Mukarramah following the *Khulafā al-Rāshidīn*, he had the structure of the House of Allah demolished and had it rebuilt in accordance with the saying of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and the original foundation of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. He ruled Makkah al-Mu'azzamah for a brief period only. The tyrant of the Muslim community, Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf invaded Makkah and Ḥaḍrat 'Abdullāh was martyred. After assuming control of the government, and abhorrent as he was to the idea that this feat of 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr remains a source of fame for the martyred ruler, he started a smear campaign that 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr was wrong in what he did and that the Ka'bah should be kept the way it was left to posterity by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Using this excuse, he once again demolished the structure of the House of Allah and had it built anew similar to the one made earlier by the Quraysh during the days of *Jāhiliyyah*. Some Muslim rulers who succeeded Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf intended, on the strength of the aforementioned ḥadīth, to rebuild the House of Allah all over again in accordance with the ḥadīth of the Holy Prophet ﷺ. But, the master-jurist of that period, Sayyidnā Imām Mālik ibn Anas gave a *fatwā* to the effect that re-demolishing and re-building the House of Allah at this stage will render the House of Allah a plaything in the hands of rulers who will follow. Every ruler who comes next will do exactly this to earn fame for himself. Therefore, it is appropriate that it be left the way it is. The entire *ummah* accepted it. This is the reason why the structure built by Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf is what remains even to this day. There have been damages, dilapidations and the process of repairs has continued ever since.

These narrations, first of all, tell us that the Ka'bah is the first house of the world, or at least, the first house of worship. While the Holy Qur'ān does mention that the House of Allah was built by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and Ismā'il following His will and command, there are simultaneous indicators suggesting that these revered prophets did not go through the initial layout for its construction. Instead, they built it in accordance with previous foundations, because the real foundation of the Ka'bah was already there. From what is said in the Holy Qur'ān, i.e. *وَإِذْ يَرْفَعُ إِبْرَاهِيمُ الْقَوَاعِدَ مِنَ الْبَيْتِ وَإِسْمَاعِيلُ* (and when Ibrāhīm was raising up the foundations of the House along with Ismā'il - 2:127) we get an indication that 'the *Qawā'id* or the foundations of the House of Allah were already there. It appears in Sūrah al-Hajj: *وَإِذْ يَوَدُّ أَنَّ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَكَانَ الْبَيْتِ* (and when we settled for Ibrāhīm the site of the House - 22:26)

This too is suggestive of the fact that the site of the House of Allah had continued as pre-determined since earlier times. The first verse lends support to the view that its foundations were already there.

When Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام was commanded to build the House of Allah, as in some reports, he was led by an angel on to the site of the Ka'bah and its previously existing foundations hidden under sand dunes.

In any case, the verse under reference does prove one of the merits of the Ka'bah, that is, it is the first ever house or place of worship. It has been reported in a ḥadīth from the *Ṣaḥīḥayn* that Sayyidnā Ab Dharr رضى الله عنه asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, 'Which is the first ever *masjid* in the world?' He said, 'al-Masjid al-Ḥarām.' He submitted again, 'Which *masjid* comes after that?' He said, 'Masjid Bayt al-Maqdis.' He asked once again, 'What time span separates their building?' He said, 'Forty years.'

In this *ḥadīth*, it is in relation to the new edifice of the House of Allah that the intervening period between its construction and the initial construction of Bayt al-Maqdis has been determined. As a matter of fact, there are reports which prove that the initial construction of Bayt al-Maqdis was undertaken by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام forty years after the construction of the Ka'bah. Then comes the construction of Bayt al-Maqdis by Sayyidnā Sulaymān عليه السلام. This too was not a new structure with new foundations, like the Ka'bah. Instead, Sayyid-

nā Sulaymān عليه السلام rebuilt it on the original Abrahimic foundations. Thus, there remains no contradiction between reports.

The Ka'bah has always been an object of reverence and respect. This fact is pointed out in the expression *رُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ* (set up for the people) in this verse under discussion hinted therein is that the respect and honour in which this House of worship is held will not be limited to a particular nation or group. Instead, the whole humanity will hold it in respect. Allah Almighty has placed a built-in aura of dignity and awe in its presence which draws in the hearts of people automatically.

Here, the word '*Bakkah*' means 'Makkah al-Mu'azzamah'. It does not matter whether you say that the letter '*mīm*' has been substituted for '*bā*' since, in common Arab usage, '*mīm*' is substituted for '*bā*', or simply say that '*Bakkah*' is an alternate name for 'Makkah'.

The Blessings of the Ka'bah

The second merit of Baytullah (the Ka'bah) stated here in this verse is that it is blessed. The word, '*mubārak*' has been derived from '*barakah*' which means 'to grow' and 'to sustain'. You can look at this growth factor from two angles. Something may grow in a way that it visibly increases in quantity, but the other possible way of growing is that it adds nothing noteworthy to its quantity, yet it turns out to be so useful in so many situations that it would have usually needed much more to do the same job. In that sense this too could be regarded as 'growth' or 'increase'.

The Ka'bah is full of blessings outwardly and inwardly. The outward blessings it has are quite obvious. In spite of Makkah and its environs being a desert, dry and barren, all sorts of fruits and vegetables and items of need are available in all seasons and at all times. Not only that these are enough for the people of Makkah, it is much more than that. These suffice for all visitors from everywhere in the world. And everyone knows the volume of visitors, specially during the Hajj season, when hundreds and thousands of people from the farthest corners of the world assemble there whose count outnumbers the residents of Makkah by at least four or five times. This huge multitude of people stays there, not for a few days, but for months together. Even, apart from the Hajj season, there is hardly a time of the year when thousands of people from outside do not come in and go out of here. It

may be noted that, during the Ḥajj season particularly when hundreds and thousands of people from outside assemble there, it has never happened that articles of use could have gone out of the market and become unavailable. Even, animals of sacrifice which are slaughtered there by each and every person, at least on the average of one per person, and there are some who sacrifice more, are always available there. It is not that special arrangements are made to import these from other countries. In the words of the Holy Qur'ān, i.e. *يَجِيئُ إِلَيْكَ مَتْرَاكُ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ* (Brought toward it are fruits of everything - 28:57), there is a clear indication of this phenomena.

This was a view of the outward blessings which, of course, are not the ultimate objective. The spiritual, the inward blessings are so numerous that it is impossible to count them. There are important *'ibādāt*, the acts of worship, which are special to the Ka'bah. The great reward and the spiritual blessings that come from them totally revolve around the Baytullah, such as the Ḥajj and 'Umra. Then, there are some other *'ibādāt* the merit of which increases several degrees when done in al-Masjid al-Ḥarām. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that a man offering *ṣalāh* at his home will get *thawāb* for one *ṣalāh*; and if he does that in the *masjid* of his locality, he will get the reward for twenty five *ṣalāhs*; and one who does that in a *Jāmi'* (big congregational mosque) will get the reward for five hundred *ṣalāhs*; and should he offer his *ṣalāh* in al-Masjid al-Aqṣā, he will get the reward for one thousand *ṣalāhs*; and in my *Masjid*, he gets the *thawāb* for fifty thousand *ṣalāhs*, while in al-Masjid al-Ḥarām, that of one hundred thousand *ṣalāhs*. (This narration has been reported by Ibn Mājah and Ṭahāwī and others).

As far as the merits of *Ḥajj* are concerned, Muslims generally know the Ḥadīth which declares that a Muslim who performs his Ḥajj obligations correctly is so cleansed of his past sins as if he was born on that day, all pure and pristine. Obviously, all these are spiritual blessings of the Baytullah. These very blessings have been identified by the word *مباركاً* towards the end of the verse: *مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ* (having blessings and guidance for all worlds).

Verse 97

فَبِهِ الْبَيْتُ مَقَامُ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمَنْ دَخَلَهُ كَانَ آمِنًا وَلِلَّهِ عَلَى
النَّاسِ حُجُّ الْبَيْتِ مَنِ اسْتَطَاعَ إِلَيْهِ سَبِيلًا وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ
اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٩٧﴾

In it there are clear signs: The station of Ibrāhīm! And whoever enters there is secure. And as a right of Allah, it is obligatory on the people to perform Ḥajj of the House -- whoever has the ability to manage (his) way to it. And if one disbelieves, then Allah is independent of all the worlds. [97]

Commentary

Three distinctions of Baytullah

Related in this verse are distinctions and merits of the House of Allah, that is, the Ka'bah. Firstly, it has many signs of Allah's power, one of them being the station of Ibrāhīm (Maqāmu Ibrāhīm). Secondly, one who enters there becomes a recipient of peace and remains protected; he cannot be killed by anybody. Thirdly, it is obligatory on all Muslims around the world that they make the Ḥajj of the House of Allah, subject to the condition that one has the means and the ability to reach as far as there.

The signs of Allah's Power:

Since the time the foundations of Baytullah were laid out, Allah Almighty has, because of its enormous blessings provided protection to the people of Makkah against enemy attacks: When Abrahah invaded Makkah with his army of elephants, Allah Almighty, in His most perfect power, destroyed them through birds. Those who enter the sacred precincts of Makkah, men and women, even animals, stand protected.

When there is rainfall on a certain side of Baytullah, it has been observed that countries situated on that side are favoured with substantial rainfalls. Another unusual sign relates to the Jamarāt, the granite pillars on which every pilgrim throws seven pebbles each, everyday for three days. A couple of million or more pilgrims go there every year. Had these pebbles remained there, the Jamarāt would have been buried under a mountain of pebbles. The fact is that any huge de-

posits of pebbles are not visible there after the passage of three days of Ḥajj, except some scattered pebbles the cause of which is, as stated by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, that angels pick up these pebbles and the pebbles left there belong to people whose Ḥajj is not accepted for some reason. This is why it is forbidden to pick up pebbles lying near the Jamarāt and throw them on the pillars, as part of Ḥajj rites, since they are from the unaccepted ones.

In his comments on this phenomenon, Shaykh Jalāl al-Dīn al-Suyūṭī has said in al-Khaṣā'iṣ al-Kubrā that there are some miracles of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم which still live and stand, and shall continue right through to the Day of judgement and everyone shall see them. One of these, of course, is the unmatched presence of the Holy Qur'an itself which cannot be matched even if the whole world joined its forces. This inability persists all the same as it was during the blessed days of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and shall continue to persist like that right through to the Day of Judgement. Every Muslim, no matter of what period of time, shall be able to challenge the whole world: فَاتُوا بِسُورَةٍ مِثْلِهِ (Then, produce a Sūrah like it -10:38).

So is the miracle of Jamarāt as stated above. Similarly there is the statement of the Prophet عليه السلام in respect of Jamarāt. He has stated that pebbles thrown on these pillars are picked up by the angels in a manner invisible to mankind. The few pebbles left belong to those unfortunate people whose pilgrimage is not accepted by Allah. The Prophet's statement has stood the test of time for centuries in a row and it will continue upto the Great Day. This is one of the continuing miracles of the Prophet عليه السلام and a major sign of Allah in respect of the revered house of Ka'bah.

The Station of Ibrāhīm :

From among the signs associated with the Ka'bah there is the great sign - The 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm' which has been mentioned separately in its own right. The Station of Ibrāhīm is the name of the stone on which Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام stood while building the edifice of Baytullah (the Ka'bah). There are narrations reporting that the stone raised itself along with the rising level of construction and came down automatically when so required. The footprints of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام are still there on this stone. Obviously, that an inert and

unconscious stone is invested with sudden intelligent volition to respond to functional needs and elevate itself, or come down, or that it is given the ability to assume the plasticity of wax and let a perfect print of feet appear on its surface, are all signs of the most perfect power of Allah reflecting the superior merit of Baytullah.

This stone used to be on the ground close to the door of the-Baytullah. When came the Qur'ānic command: **وَاتَّخِذُوا مِن مَّقَامِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مُصَلًّى** (And make the station of Ibrāhīm a place of prayer - 2:125), this stone was removed from there, considering the convenience of those who made *tawāf*, and placed in front of the Baytullah, but at some distance outside the *ma-ṭāf* (the area where *tawāf* is made) close to *Bi'r Zamzam* (the well of *Zamzam*, the original site of which is now marked with a black marble circle on the floor of the Baytullah with the legend inlaid in Arabic). Later, it was secured in a small structure behind which the two post-*tawāf raka'āt* were offered. The present position is that the station of Ibrāhīm has been placed securely in a strong metal-crystal casing, but it is the particular stone inside it which is the 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm'. Offering the post-*tawāf ṣalāh* comprising two *raka'āt* behind or close to it is more merit-worthy. But the appellation, 'Maqāmu Ibrāhīm' taken in a literal sense, covers the entire al-Masjid al-Harām, the Sacred Mosque. Therefore, Muslim jurists have ruled that offering the two *raka'at* after *tawāf* anywhere within the Sacred Mosque would satisfy one's obligation.

'Whoever enters Baytullah is secure':

The second peculiarity of the Ka'bah mentioned in the verse is that 'whoever enters it is secure'. This statement has different aspects. Firstly, it is true in the legal sense, for Allah Almighty has ordained that one who enters there should not be molested or killed; even if a person kills someone or commits some other crime and goes into the sanctuary, he too should not be punished in there. Instead of that, he should be compelled to come out of the *Haram* and when he does come out of the *Haram*, the punishment due will then be given. This is how an entrant to *Haram* gets the protection of Divine law.

The second form of security provided to the entrants of *Haram* is factual. In the very design of Divine creation, Allah Almighty has caused awe and reverence for Baytullah to take roots in the hearts of

people. Even the Arab tribes of *Jāhiliyyah*, inspite of all their evil practices, were ready to sacrifice their lives to uphold the honour of Baytullāh. That they were all too wild and warring is well-known, yet they held the *Haram* in such esteem that a son whose father was killed would say nothing to the killer and quietly move away from him inspite of his burning rage for revenge.

The only time fighting was allowed within the *Haram* area was for a few hours through a revelation from Allah Almighty. The occasion was the conquest of Makkah and the permission was restricted to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in order that he could cleanse the Baytullāh and serve an important objective of faith. Soon after the conquest, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made an express announcement to this effect and stressed that the original unlawfulness of fighting in the *Haram* continues to be valid for ever.

As far as the case of Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf is concerned who, after the time of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, took armed action against Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Zubayr رضى الله عنه in Makkah, resorting to killings and terror. Since his action was a grave sin and a flagrant violation of law and Ka'bah's sanctity, in the sight of the entire community which hated him for what he did, therefore, it does not affect the divine declaration of Ka'bah's sanctity. It is also difficult to say that he violated the built-in sanctity of Baytullah as such intentionally, for Ḥajjāj himself did not believe in the lawfulness of this action of his; he knew that he was committing a serious crime but he became overwhelmed by political and administrative considerations.

However, the truth is that the Muslim community at large has always held the *Haram* and Baytullāh in the highest possible esteem and has always regarded fighting or quarrelling in the sacred precincts as one of the most ugly sins. This is a unique mark of Baytullah, universally and exclusively.

The obligation of Ḥajj: A Distinction of Baytullāh

Allah Almighty has made the Ḥajj of Baytullāh an obligation subject to the condition that one has the necessary means and ability to reach there. Having 'means' can be explained by saying that one should have resources surplus to his basic needs which could help him take care of the cost of travel, to Baytullāh and back home, and the

expenses incurred during stay in the Holy Land. It is also necessary that his 'means' should be good enough to cover the expenses of his family until his return, for this is an standing obligation on him. Then, one should not be physically handicapped, being unable to see, or use hands and feet, for a handicapped person would not have the ability to go that far and complete the many requirements of the Hajj.

As women are not legally permitted to travel without a *Mahram* (marriage with whom is prohibited), they would be considered 'able' to embark on their Hajj if they are travelling with a *Mahram* making his Hajj whether the *Mahram* is bearing his own expenses or the woman pays for his expenses as well. Similarly, the route taken to reach the Hajj site should also be secure since this too is part of the condition of 'ability'. If peaceful conditions do not exist on the Hajj route and there is an acute danger to life and property, then, it would mean an absence of the 'ability' to perform Hajj.

Literally, Hajj means 'to intend'. What it means in terms of prescribed religious observance is already stated in the Holy Qur'an itself, that is, the *tawāf* of the Ka'bah, the stay in 'Arafāt, and in Muzdalifah. Remaining details have been made clear by the Holy Prophet ﷺ through his words and deeds. So, after the announcement that the Hajj of Baytullāh is an obligation, it was said:

وَمَنْ كَفَرَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

And if one disbelieves, then Allah is independent of all the worlds.

Included here, undoubtedly, is the person who intentionally rejects the belief that Hajj is obligatory. It is obvious that such a person cannot be considered a Muslim. He is a disbeliever indeed, for the description: "And if one disbelieves" fits him clearly and comprehensively. Then, comes the case of one who does believe that Hajj is an obligation, yet he does not, inspite of having the means and the ability, perform it. He too, in a way, is no less a denier of the Divine command. In his case, the words: "and if one disbelieves" will apply in the form of admonition and warning since this person is acting like disbelievers who do not perform Hajj. In the process, such a person acts just like one of them.

This is why Muslim jurists, رَحِمَهُمُ اللهُ, have said that this is a severe warning to those who do not perform Hajj inspite of having the means and the ability to do so and thus, by this heedless act of theirs, they become the likes of disbelievers. Let us seek refuge with Allah from such a fate.

Verses 98 - 101

قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ شَهِيدٌ عَلَى
مَا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٨﴾ قُلْ يَا أَهْلَ الْكِتَابِ لِمَ تَصُدُّونَ عَن سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ
مَنْ آمَنَ تَبِعُونَهَا عِوَجًا وَأَنْتُمْ شُهَدَاءُ وَمَا اللَّهُ بِغَافِلٍ
عَمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٩٩﴾ يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِنْ تَطِيعُوا فَرِيقًا مِّنَ
الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ يَرُدُّوكُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ كُفْرِينَ ﴿١٠٠﴾
وَكَيْفَ تَكْفُرُونَ وَأَنْتُمْ تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْكُمْ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ وَفِيكُمْ
رَسُولُهُ وَمَنْ يَعْصِمْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ هُدِيَ إِلَىٰ صِرَاطٍ مُّسْتَقِيمٍ
﴿١٠١﴾

Say, "O people of the Book, why do you disbelieve the signs of Allah while Allah is witness to what you do?" [98]

Say, "O people of the Book, why do you prevent those who believe from the way of Allah seeking crookedness in it while you are witnesses (of the truth)? And Allah is not unaware of what you do." [99]

G those who believe, if you obey a group from those who have been given the Book, (before you) they will turn you infidels after your having believed. [100] And how do you disbelieve while it is to you that the verses of Allah are recited, and present amidst you is His Messenger? And whoever holds on to Allah, he is surely guided to the straight path. [101]

Commentary

Several verses earlier, the text was dealing with the people of the Book, their false beliefs and their doubts. Then, appeared the mention

of Baytullāh and Ḥajj. Now once again, the people of the Book are the addressees. These verses relate to a particular event. There was a Jew, Shammās ibn Qays, who harboured a chronic malice against Muslims. Once, when he saw two Anṣār tribes, Aws and Khazraj, gathered together amiably at one place, his malevolence got the better of him and he went about looking for ways to sow seeds of discord between them. Finally, he set up a man suggesting to him that these two tribes have fought a much long-drawn war in pre-Islām days and both parties had recited poetical compositions highlighting their tribal pride. So why not recite these self-congratulating poetical compositions while both sit together. The moment these poems were recited there, emotions rose high, there were charges and counter-charges to the limit that the place and time of a fresh war was all set. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ heard about this, he came to them and said: 'What is all this? Here I am present amidst you and you are doing this after having become Muslims and after having become united and friendly with each other. This is sheer ignorance. Do you want, in this state of yours, to revert to *kufr*'?

They took the warning to their heart. They knew this was a slip caused by Satan. They embraced each other, wept and repented. These verses were revealed in the background of this event.

This event appears in Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī as narrated by Ibn Ishāq while there are others who narrate it from Zaid ibn Aslam. This subject continues through several verses after this. Here, the verses begin with an admonition to the people of the Book who had engineered this intrigue, and this admonition has been done with great eloquence when, before admonishing them for what they did, they were taken to task for their disbelief as well, which meant that it would have made better sense if they themselves had taken to the right path, and become Muslims, rather than devoting themselves to distract others to the wrong track. Following this, Muslims have been addressed, and served with a word of caution, specially when they have by their side, the Book and the Messenger of Allah, two powerful, never-failing sources, which would help them stay firm in their belief.

The expression **وَمَنْ يَتَصَمَّ بِاللَّهِ** translated as 'And whoever holds on to Allah' means one who stays firm in, and totally committed to, his *'imān*

or faith, for *'i'tisām'*, the act of holding on to Allah firmly, denotes that one should affirm His Being and His Attributes, be staunchly faithful to what He has ordained, and in the process, be sure not to be lured into supporting the position of any adversary whoever that may be. One who acts in this manner 'is surely guided to the straight path'. It means that such a person is on the 'straight path', and being on the 'straight path' is the key to all that is good and beneficial which the Word of Allah promises to him.

Verses 102 - 103

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ حَقَّ تَقَاتِهِ وَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ
 مُسْلِمُونَ ﴿١٠٢﴾ وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا
 وَاذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ
 فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ
 فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا كَذَلِكَ يُبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ
 تَهْتَدُونَ ﴿١٠٣﴾

O those who believe, fear Allah, a fear which is His due, and let not yourself die save as Muslims. [102]

And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you, and be not divided. And remember the blessing of Allah upon you: When you were enemies to each other, and He brought your hearts together, then you, with His grace, became brothers. And you were at the brink of a pit of Fire, then, He saved you from it. This is how Allah makes His signs clear to you, so that you may take the right path.

[103]

Commentary

In the previous verses, Muslims were warned that the people of the Book, and others, want them to go astray from the right path so Muslims must remain vigilant of their moves and take steps to counter their anti-Muslim activities.

In the two verses appearing here, two important principles have

been given which go to make the collective strength of Muslims impregnable. These are:

1. *Taqwā*
2. Unity

The first principle appears in the first of the two verses. The second principle follows in the second verse. The first principle stated in the said verse is that one must 'fear Allah', that is, one should organize and manage his life with a full sense of responsibility before Allah, avoiding all that is forbidden or undesirable, doing so in a manner 'which is His due'.

What *Taqwā* is?

In Arabic, the word, '*Taqwā*' is used to denote avoidance and abstinence. It is translated as 'fear' in the sense that things one is asked to abstain from are nothing but things that cause fear, or alert one to the danger of Divine retribution.

Taqwā has its own degrees, the lowest is to avoid *Kufr* and *Shirk*, that is, disbelieving in Allah and His Message and attributing partners to His Divinity. In this sense, every Muslim can be counted as *Muttaqī* (one who has the quality of *Taqwā*), even if he is involved in sins. At several places in the Holy Qur'an, the words, '*Muttaqīn*' (plural of *Muttaqī*) and '*Taqwā*' have been used in that sense as well. What is really desirable falls under the second degree of *Taqwā*, that is, to avoid that which is disliked by Allah and His Messenger. The merits and blessings of *Taqwā* enumerated in the Qur'an and Ḥadīth have been promised on this degree of avoidance and abstinence.

As far as the third degree of *Taqwā* is concerned, this is a high station destined for prophets, عليهم السلام, their devoted deputies and men of Allah, for it is not within the grasp of everybody. To stand guard over one's heart against the onslaught of what does not relate to Allah, and to keep it filled with the remembrance of Allah and the desire to seek His pleasure, are great assignments.

The meaning of *Taqwā* 'as due'

While giving a directive to attain '*Taqwā*' the Holy Qur'an has qualified the word of *Taqwā* with *تقوى* (a fear which is His due) which means that one should seek to attain a degree of *Taqwā* which it inherently

deserves.

This has been explained by the blessed Companions, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd, Rabī', Qatādah and Ḥasan al-Baṣrī رضى الله عنهم in the following words:

حَقَّ تَقْوَتِهِ هُوَ أَنْ يُطَاعَ فَلَا يُعْصَى وَيُذَكَّرُ فَلَا يُنْسَى وَيُشْكُرُ فَلَا يُكْفَرُ (البحر
المحيط)

'A fear which is His due' means that one obeys, then does not disobey; remembers then does not forget; and is grateful, then does not become ungrateful.' (Al-Baḥr Al-Muḥīṭ)

The above explanation has also been reported with its chain of authorities ascending to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself.

Major commentators have explained the sense of the above report differently. For instance, some say that the due fear of Allah means that, in obedience to Allah, one should dismiss all derogatory criticism, no matter where it comes from, always standing firm on what is just, even if, by being just, he has to hurt his own self, or his children, or his parents. Some say, that one can never hope to achieve *Taqwā* as due unless he protects his tongue.

There is another verse in the Holy Qur'ān where it is said:

اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ مَا اسْتَطَعْتُمْ

Fear Allah as much as you can. (64:16)

According to the blessed Companions, Ibn 'Abbās and Ṭāwūs, this is really nothing but an explanation of حَقَّ تَقْوَتِهِ (a fear which is His due). It means that should one be doing his best, using all his attention and energy to guard against evil, the obligation of *Taqwā* shall stand fulfilled. If one, who has already done everything he could, happens to fall a victim to something impermissible, that would not be considered being against *Taqwā* as due'.

The statement which follows immediately: فَلَا تَمُوتُنَّ إِلَّا وَأَنْتُمْ مُسْلِمُونَ (and let not yourself die save as Muslims) tells us that *Taqwā* is, in reality, the whole of Islām since the total obedience to Allah and His Messenger, and the total avoidance of disobedience both to Allah and His Messenger is what *Taqwā* is all about; and this is what Islām is.

The command in the verse, 'and let not yourself die save as Muslims' raises a possible doubt as man does not control death, it may come anytime, anywhere. This doubt is removed when we consider the *hadith*:

كَمَا تَحْيَوْنَ تَمُوتُونَ وَكَمَا تَمُوتُونَ تَحْسَرُونَ

'As you live, so shall you die; and as you die, so shall you be raised.'

Therefore, anyone who is determined to live his entire life by the tenets of Islām, and to the best of his determination and ability, acts accordingly, his death will definitely come, God willing, on a state of Islām. Now, about some *hadith* narrations where it is said that there will be people who may have spent a life-time of good deeds, yet the entire roster of such deeds shall go waste because of something awful they did later. Such fate can befall those people only who did not act with sincerity and steadfastness from the very beginning. And Allah knows best.

UNITY: The second principle of collective Muslim strength:

In the second verse, 103: *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا* (And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you), the golden principle of unity has been presented with great eloquence and wisdom, for the principle, being the only effective binding factor, has been identified before the command to unite was given, following which, came the prohibition of disunity and chaos.

Elaborating this a little, it can be said that unity is something good and desirable, a premise generally approved by all human beings, no matter what place, time, religion or life style they adhere to. A person who considers fights and disputes as something useful, and good in themselves, would be hard to find anywhere. This is why all groups and parties around the world invariably ask people to unite, but experience shows that all is not well in world affairs. No doubt, everybody agrees that unity is useful, and necessary, yet humanity is divided apart in sects, groups and parties. Then, there is a whole chain of sects within sects and parties within parties, reaching the limits of absurdity where even the unity of two people, in the real sense, has become a myth. A few people get together, agree on something under the

driving force of temporary objectives; then, no sooner do interests get served, or remain unrealized, unity evaporates in thin air, and instead, there remains the fall-out of mutual bickering and hostility.

With a little deliberation, it will become clear that every group, every sect, almost every person would like to unite people on some self-made programme, while the position is that other people have their own self-made programmes. So, rather than agree with them, they invite others to line up under their programme. Therefore, all calls for unity end up in break-ups and chaos among parties and persons. Thus, stuck in this quagmire of differences, humanity at large is the loser.

Therefore, the Holy Qur'ān has not stopped at giving sermons on unity and order, instead, it has also come forward with a just principle which would help achieve and sustain the desired state of affairs in the world, something in which no group should find a ground for differences. The truth of the matter is that imposing a system or programme conceived by one or some members of the human race on other human beings, and hoping that all of them will accept it unanimously, is simply against commonsense, and justice, and is nothing but cheeky self-deception. However, the system and the programme given by the Creator-Sustainer of all the worlds, the *Rabb al-'Ālamīn*, is something all human beings should naturally agree upon. No rational human being can deny it on principle. Now, the only possible inroad to difference here can show up in the actual identification of the system given by the Sovereign of Sovereigns, the *Rabb*, the Lord. Which is it? The Jews say it is the system of the Torah, the Christians say it is the system of the Evangile; both say it was sent by God and it is necessary to act upon it. The approach goes as far as even the polytheists, who have groups among them attributing their respective religious rites to none but god.

But, if man could rise a little above his group prejudice and the blind following of forefathers, using his own God-given reason, he would stand face to face with the reality without any frills; the reality that the Last of the Prophets, صلى الله عليه وسلم, has come with the last message of Allah Almighty in the form of the Holy Qur'ān and that, at this point of time, there is no other system or living pattern acceptable

in the sight of Allah Almighty. Leaving this wider focus aside, we can turn to the first and present addressees of the Qur'ān, the Muslims who believe that in the world as we have found it, the Holy Qur'ān is the only way of life revealed by Allah Almighty without any shadow of doubt in it, and since Allah Almighty has Himself taken the responsibility of protecting it, there is just no possibility of interpolation or change in it right through to the Day of Judgement. With this position in view, I leave the part of the subject dealing with non-Muslim groups for some other occasion and say to Muslims alone who, being believers in the Qur'ān, have no other alternative line of action except this. If different parties among Muslims were to unite on the system of the Holy Qur'ān, thousands of their differences based on group, race and country would be resolved instantly, which block the road to human progress. Whatever difference may remain among Muslims, would possibly be in the understanding and the interpretation of the Qur'ān. If such difference stays within limits, it is neither blame-worthy nor harmful to collective human living. In fact, the existence of such difference of opinion among the learned is natural. Therefore, exercising restraint and observing limits should not be so difficult to manage. Contrary to this, if our parties, were to go on fighting in complete disregard to the Qur'ān then, they would not be left with any possibility of correction. It is this chronic dissension and disorder which the Holy Qur'ān has sternly forbidden, and it is because of this abandonment of a great Qur'ānic principle that our community at large is wasting its potential by succumbing to chaos and factionalism. The Holy Qur'ān, in the present verse, shows us the way as to how we can eliminate this tendency to become divided when it says:

وَأَعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا

And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you.

Here, *حبل الله* (the cord of Allah) means the Holy Qur'ān. The blessed Companion, 'Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd is the narrator of the *hadīth* in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said:

كتاب الله هو حبل الله الممدود من السماء الى الارض

The Book of Allah is the cord of Allah, extended from the heavens to the earth.

In another narration of the *ḥadīth* by the noble Companion, Zayd ibn Arqam, the words are: حبل الله هو القرآن : The cord of Allah is the Qur'an (Ibn Kathīr).

In Arabic usage, the word, '*ḥabl*' also means 'covenant' and, in an absolute sense, it covers everything that can be used as a connecting link. The metaphor of 'cord' has been used for the Qur'an or the Faith to suggest that this is the connecting link which, on one side, establishes the lines of communion between those who believe and their Lord, while, on the other side, it brings all those who believe close together, forming one group.

In short, this one statement of the Qur'an is full of wise rules of conduct. To begin with, it can be said that man must firmly act in accordance with the way of life revealed by Allah Almighty, that is, the Holy Qur'an. Then comes the unity of action, that is, all Muslims should join hands to act in accordance with it. The result will be that Muslims will become united and organized as if they were a group holding on to the same cord firmly, turning the whole group into a powerful single body. The Holy Qur'an has explained this mystique of Muslim unity more clearly in another verse where it was said:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَيَجْعَلُ لَهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ وُدًّا

Surely, those who believe and do good deeds, among them the All-Merciful Allah shall create (mutual) affection. (19:96)

Also present here is a subtle analogy focused on Muslims holding fast to the Book of Allah. Their effort resembles the effort of those who would grip a strong rope while climbing and thus remain protected against a fall. So, the hint is: If Muslims keep holding on to the Book of Allah with their total strength, all in unison, no satan will ever succeed in dividing them. As a result, like their individual life, the collective strength of the Muslim community as well shall become stable and impregnable. Keeping a firm grip on the Qur'an is something which helps in uniting scattered forces through which a dead nation gets new life. God forbid, if Muslims break away from it, it is certain that their national and collective life will be ruined, and when this happens, their individual life is not likely to fare any better.

Islam is the only source of the Muslim Unity

Unity and agreement need a centre of attraction or a common idea. This idea of a centre has been different with different peoples of the world. Somewhere it was race and tribal affinity. For instance, among the tribal complex of Arabia, Quraysh was one nation and Banū Tamīm another. There were other places where colour was the criterion, with black people taken as one nation, and the white people as another. There were still other places where the geographical or lingual factor was the centre of unity making Indian one nation and the Arab, another. Then there were areas where people rallied around ancestral customs drawing a line between those who follow these customs and those who do not, for instance, the Ārya Samājists in India.

The Holy Qur'an, bypassing all these, made the Book of Allah basis of unity, that is, the system revealed by Allah Almighty. In a single stroke, it declared that Muslims are a nation attached to 'Habli'llāh', the cord of Allah, and those who disbelieve are another nation, not attached to this strong 'cord' or 'rope'. The statement: **خَلَقَكُمْ فَمِنْكُمْ كَافِرٌ وَمِنْكُمْ مُؤْمِنٌ** (It is He who created you. So, some of you are infidels and some of you are believers) means just this. So, the unifying factors of geography, race, tribe or language do not deserve to be the centre of affinity for man generally has no control over them. One cannot have them by personal effort or choice. Black cannot become white, a Qurayshī cannot become a Tamīmī, an Indian cannot become an Arab. Such unities can exist in a very limited frame; they can never claim to have assembled the whole humanity under their umbrella hoping to have the entire world gathered on a united platform. This is why the Holy Qur'an has made the Divinely revealed way of life as the centre of unity, something one can elect to have for himself. Everyone from the East or the West, black or white, speaking Arabic or English or any other language, coming from any family, any tribe, any human group, can freely make this centre of unity his own as the most rational and correct choice available. Then, humankind can come close together around this centre and become brothers and sisters to one another.

What is needed is a little impartial thinking, a slight rising above

custom, prejudice and habit, as a result of which, the seeker shall be striking the best bargain of his life. Hopefully, he will discover for himself the way of life revealed by Allah Almighty, understand it, and follow it holding fast on to this strong medium of communion with Allah. As a result of this, the whole humanity will become beneficially concentric, having the centre of God-given guidance in common. Consequently, every individual member of this great brotherhood will be able to tune his deeds, material and spiritual, to the jointly accepted way of life from Allah.

Here is the principle, wise and correct, of which Muslims can be proud, and confident when inviting others to join in. Unfortunately, conspiracies hatched by the Europeans, for centuries to crush the Muslim unity have succeeded in dividing the ranks of those who claim to be Muslims.

Now they have themselves accepted the differences of race, language and nationalities as the dividing forces, and the link of Muslim unity stands severed by the concept of Arabs and Non-Arabs, Indians and non-Indians etc. The Holy Qur'an proclaims a universal reality, loudly and openly, time and again, that these distinctions are ill-founded and divisive and any unity based on them shall remain irrational and false. Acentericity is not the solution for Muslims who have no choice but to 'hold on to the cord of Allah', all of them, as a way of life. This has given them a place of honour earlier, and if there is yet another success destined for them, this is how it would come again.

Before we move on to the second part of the verse, let us remember the two distinct instructions given to Muslims in this verse, that is, they should first live by the system prescribed for them by Allah Almighty, then, they should hold fast to 'the cord of Allah' all together. This is how the Muslim *ummah* gained ascendance in the past and there is no reason why, it will not rise again.

This far the discussion revolved around the positive aspect of unity among Muslims. The text now takes up the negative aspect when it says: وَلَا تَفْرَقُوا (And be not divided). This is another example of the peculiarly wise style of the Holy Qur'an when it would highlight the positive aspect first, then identify the negative, and forbid the later. In

another verse, it was said:

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

Surely, this is the straight path, so, follow it. And do not follow (other) ways which will cause you to become separated from His way. (6:153)

Since disunity is the first and the last reason behind the destruction of a nation, therefore, the Holy Qur'an has repeatedly forbidden it in various ways. It has been said in another verse:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَرَّقُوا دِينَهُمْ وَكَانُوا شِيَعًا لَسْتَ مِنْهُمْ فِي شَيْءٍ

Those who have made divisions in their religion and become sects, you have nothing to do with them. (6:159)

Also narrated in the Holy Qur'an are events concerning communities led by their prophet's عليهم السلام, communities which fell into temporal and eternal disgrace because of their mutual disputes and disunity which turned them away from the honest pursuit of their central purpose of life.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that there are three things Allah Almighty has liked for you while there are three others He has disliked. The ones He has liked are as follows:

1. That your worship should be for Allah alone and that you should not attribute partners to His divinity.
2. That you should hold on to the Book of Allah firmly and avoid disunity.
3. That you should have goodwill for those in authority from among you.

The three things which cause Allah's displeasure are:

1. Unnecessary argumentation.
2. Needless asking.
3. Wastage of resources.

(Ibn Kathīr from Abī Hurairah)

Differences and their Limits

A question that remains unanswered is: Is every difference to be

despised or is there a sort of difference which can be called unblameworthy? The answer is: Every difference is not blameworthy or despicable. A blameworthy difference is one in which individuals and groups stay away from the Qur'ān and think in terms of their whims and wishes. But, should it be that everyone stays united in and around the Qur'ān and at the same time, continues to accept the explanation and detail coming from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and then, on the basis of God-given natural ability and intellectual quality, expresses differences in opinion about subsidiaries of religion, in which case, this difference will be natural and Islām does not forbid it. The difference among the blessed Companions and their Successors, and among leading juristic authorities was of this nature. It was nothing but this difference that was called a 'mercy' for the community. However, if these very subsidiary debates were to be invested with the status of the mainstream of religion, and differences arising out of them were to become a cause of controversy, confrontation, insult and vilification, then, this too will be considered blameworthy.

The Blessing of Brotherhood

The text, after making the two aspects of unity clear, points out to the conditions prevailing among pre-Islām Arabs. Because of tribal rivalries, incessant warfare and long-drawn blood feuds, the entire nation was on the brink of total ruin. What saved them from the fire of hatred was nothing but this blessings of Islām. So, it was said:

وَأذْكُرُوا نِعْمَةَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ إِذْ كُنْتُمْ أَعْدَاءً فَأَلَّفَ بَيْنَ قُلُوبِكُمْ فَأَصْبَحْتُمْ
بِنِعْمَتِهِ إِخْوَانًا وَكُنْتُمْ عَلَى شَفَا حُفْرَةٍ مِنَ النَّارِ فَأَنْقَذَكُمْ مِنْهَا

And remember the blessing of Allah upon you: When you were enemies to each other, and He brought your hearts together, then you, with His grace, became brothers. And you were at the brink of a pit of the Fire, then, He saved you from it. (103)

In other words, by erasing out deep-seated enmities going back to centuries, Allah Almighty made them brothers to each other through the benediction of Islām and the noble Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. This made their life worth living, materially and spiritually, establishing between them such exemplary friendship that even their enemies found it awesome. Where in the whole wide world would they have

found this brotherly unity, this enormous blessing of Allah, even if they were to spend the combined treasures of the world?

If we recollect what was said in the opening remarks under these verses, we can see very clearly that the present verse helps eliminate the mischief engineered by the wicked when they tried to disunite the tribes of Aws and Khazraj by reminding them of their past feuds. The lesson is: Once in Islām, division is unthinkable.

Unity among Muslims depends on obedience to Allah:

The above statement of the Holy Qur'an unravels yet another mystery. We now know that, in reality, Allah Almighty is the Master of hearts. Activating mutual love and consideration in the hearts of a people is purely a Divine blessing. Obvious alongwith it is the fact that one can become deserving of the blessings of Allah only through obedience to Him. With disobedience and sin, one cannot hope to have this reward.

It also follows from here that for Muslims, if they desire to have a stable organization among them, and unity, the only alternative open is that they should make obedience to Allah their life style. This point has been hinted at towards the end of the verse where it was said:

كَذَلِكَ يَبَيِّنُ اللَّهُ لَكُمْ آيَاتِهِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

This is how Allah makes His signs clear to you, so that you may take the right path. (103)

Verses 104 - 105

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ ﴿١٠٤﴾ وَلَا تَكُونُوا
كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ وَأُولَئِكَ
لَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٠٥﴾

And there has to be a group of people from among you who call towards the good, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. And it is these who are successful. [104] And do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes after the clear signs had come to them. And for them there is grave punishment. [105]

Commentary

In the previous verses (102 - 103), Muslims were given two principles which guarantee their collective well-being. If everyone practiced *Taqwā*, and made Islām his linkage with Allah, the result will be that individual life will be corrected and the collective strength of Muslims will come in its wake.

In the present verses وَلَتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ (104 - 105), yet another dimension of the proposed system has been added. It has been said here that Muslims are not to rest at the correction of what they think and do individually; but they should, alongwith that, be affectionately concerned with the good of other brothers and sisters in faith. By doing so, the whole community shall have the benefit of keeping its stance correct at all times, and at the same time, this will guarantee closer mutual cooperation and unity.

Collective well-being of Muslims depends on two things:

These are:

1. Self-correction through *Taqwā* and a firm hold on the 'cord of Allah' through the Qur'ān and the Faith.
2. The correction of others through call (*da'wah*) and positive propagation.

The second article of guidance appears in the opening verse which says: 'and there has to be a group of people from among you ...' So, the gist of the previous and the present verses is that one must correct his or her deeds and morals in the light of what Allah Almighty has sent as the Law, and with it, one must be concerned that other Muslim brothers and sisters do the same. The subject appears in Sūrah al-'Aṣr:

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Except those who believe and do good deeds and invite each other to truth and invite each other to patience. (103:2,3)

In order that Muslims have a firm bond of unity, they must relate to Allah, and in order that this bond stays firm through the ages, it is necessary that Muslims consider it their obligation to enjoin what is good in accordance with the dictates of the Qur'ān and the Sunnah on their brothers and sisters in faith, and to stop them from what is not

good. The purpose is that 'the cord of Allah' should not slip out of one's hands. This was succinctly illustrated by my well-known teacher, Shaykh al-Islām, Maulānā Shabbīr Aḥmad 'Uthmānī رحمه الله عليه who said:

"There is no way this 'cord of Allah' can break. That one loses his hand-hold on it is, of course, possible."

It is to offset this danger that the Holy Qur'ān asks Muslims to go on educating other brothers and sisters in faith exhorting them to good deeds and holding them back from the bad ones. This will become a collective effort to stay with Allah and His commands and collective will be their gains in this mortal world and in the Hereafter. There are other proofs in the Holy Qur'ān which show that the responsibility of mutual self-correction has been placed on the shoulders of each Muslim.

Cited above, you have seen the statement made in Sūrah al-'Aṣr. Elsewhere, in this very Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān, it is said:

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

You are the best Ummah raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. (3:110)

As is clear, here too, the obligation - 'to bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair' - has been assigned to the whole community. That they discharge this responsibility is the reason that they are placed higher over other communities. Similarly, there are a large number of sayings of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in this connection. As narrated in Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

والذى نفسى بيده لتأمرن بالمعروف ولتنهون عن المنكر اوليوشكن الله ان يبعث عليكم عقابا من عنده ثم لتدعنه فلا يستجيب لكم

By Him in whose hands is my life, you must bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair lest Allah inflicts upon you a severe punishment; you shall then pray to Him (for mercy) but your prayer shall not be answered.

In another *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

من رأى منكم منكرا فليغيره بيده، فان لم يستطع فبلسانه، وان لم يستطع

فبقلبه، وذلك اضعف الايمان

Whoever from among you sees that an evil is being committed then, he should change it with his hands. And if he is unable to do that, then, with his spoken word. And if he is unable to do even that, then, with his heart (i.e., abhor it taking it to be evil) and this is the weakest degree of faith.

All these citations leave no doubt about the fact that the duty of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair falls on every individual of the community. The liability will, however, be proportionate to everyone's ability, which is true in the case of all other Islāmic injunctions. You may have noticed in the *ḥadīth* just quoted above that the obligation varies with ability.

Now, each function requires a different ability. First of all, the ability to bid the Fair depends on a correct knowledge of the Fair and the Unfair as such. One who cannot distinguish between the two or does not have a full knowledge of his undertaking would not be the right person to go out to others to bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. Obviously, this would create disorder instead of discipline. It is quite possible that such a person may, because of his lack of knowledge, forbid something Fair or bid something Unfair. So, one who does not know the Fair and the Unfair is obligated to find it out, get to learn the *Ma'rūf* and *Munkar* as determined by the *Shari'ah* of Islām and then he can go ahead and make these known to others as part of his community service. Let this be clear that until such time that one has acquired the pre-requisites of this mission, it is not permissible for him to stand up for this service. These days there are places where many ignorant enthusiasts would stand and deliver a sermon without knowing the Qur'ān or the Ḥadīth, or worse still, sections of common people would use hearsay to pick up arguments with others as to how something should or should not be done. This method is not proper to correct the Muslim society. Indeed it will result in more disputes and bring destruction to it.

Similarly, it is also included in 'to bid the Fair' that there be no formidable danger or unbearable harm likely to affect the person involved. Therefore, it was said in the *ḥadīth* quoted above that one should stop sin with his hands, that is, by this strength. If he is unable

to do so, let him do it with his tongue. If he is unable to do so with his tongue, he should at the least consider it bad in his heart. It is obvious that 'not being able to stop it with his tongue' does not just mean that this person's tongue cannot move. It simply means that he strongly apprehends that, should he open his mouth and speak the truth, his life will be taken or he will be subjected to some other serious injury or loss. In such a case, this person will not be taken as 'able' and he will not be called a sinner for the abandonment of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair. It would be an entirely different matter, if he elects to stake his life and property in the way of Allah, bear all losses and still goes ahead and bids the Fair and forbids the Unfair, which is something many blessed Companions and their Successors have been reported to have done. This is determination at its highest, and a feat of great merit which raised their status in this world and in the Hereafter. But, what they did was not obligatory on them.

The nature of this obligation requires that one bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair in what is necessary; this would be obligatory. If done in what is commendable; the act too would remain commendable. For instance, the five *ṣalāts* are obligatory, therefore, giving good counsel to the non-performer of *ṣalāh* will become necessary on everyone. The *nawāfil* (optional prayers) are classed as commendable or desirable, therefore, giving good counsel on these will be commendable. Here, etiquette would require that while advising someone to do a commendable act, soft language and attitude must be adopted in all cases. Similarly, while inviting to an obligatory act, one should start with softness. However, he may resort to firmness in attitude if one rejects the soft call outright. It is common sight these days that people tend to object in case of what is commendable or indifferent rather strongly, but remain silent when people abandon what is obligatory.

In addition to this, this obligation will become operative for everybody when one actually sees something forbidden being done before his eyes. For instance, there is a person who is seeing that a Muslim is drinking wine, or stealing or raping, he will then be obligated with the duty to stop it to the best of his ability. If all this is not happening before his eyes, he is not liable to discharge this duty. Rather, this is the duty of the Islāmic government to inquire into the crime, investi-

gate and punish the criminal.

The words of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم , (Whoever from among you sees that an evil is being committed) point out to this principle.

Then comes another level of this function - that there be a dedicated group among Muslims devoted exclusively to the mission of calling people to the Faith and giving them right guidance towards it. Its single mandate and activity should be that it keeps calling people to the Qur'an and the Sunnah through word and deed. When it sees people less inclined towards what is good, or sees them indulging in evils, it should not fall short of pointing out what is good and preventing people from taking to the evil, of course, according to its ability. It should be realized that this great mission can be carried out fully and effectively only when the performers have a complete knowledge of questions involved, as well as, when they are conversant with methods that go to make the call effective in the light of Sunnah. It is for this reason that a particular group of Muslims has been charged with this responsibility as they are likely to take care of all ramifications of this effort.

So, in the present verse:

وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ وَيَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

it has been said: And there has to be a group of people from among you who call towards the good and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair.

The first part of the verse, *وَلْتَكُنْ مِنْكُمْ أُمَّةٌ* translated as (And there has to be a group of people from among you) gives a hint that the presence of this group is necessary. In case, a government does not shoulder this responsibility, it will become obligatory on Muslims that they should establish and operate such a group, because the vital role of the *Ummah* depends on the existence of such a group. What are the major features of this group? The Qur'anic answer is: *يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ* (who call towards the good). It means that this call of theirs shall be their primary objective. What does 'khayr' or 'good' mean? The Holy Prophet ﷺ has himself explained it by saying: *الخير هو اتباع القرآن وسنتي* that is, 'khayr' means following the Qur'an and my Sunnah. (Ibn Kathīr)

Seen in a restricted sense, 'to bid the Fair and to forbid the Unfair' could have been taken to mean that doing so shall be needed only on special occasions when the evil or 'the Unfair' (*munkarāt*) are seen being committed. But, the expression *يَدْعُونَ إِلَى الْخَيْرِ* (who call towards the good) in the beginning makes it clear that the function of this group will be to call towards the good, even when evil practices are not seen, or time may not have come to perform something obligatory.

For example, it is known that in the period between sunrise and *Zawāl* (noon) no *ṣalāh* is prescribed by the Shari'ah. But this group shall continue even in this period, to exhort people to perform *ṣalāh* when it is due. Or, take fasting which may not be due at a particular time, the month of Ramaḍān being far away, but that group will not shelve its duty and become complacent. Instead, it will keep reminding people about the month of Ramaḍān in advance, stressing on them that fasting will be obligatory at that time. In short, calling people to good will be the intrinsic duty of this group for all times to come.

Then, this 'call towards good' has two sub-levels:

1. Calling non-Muslims towards '*khayr*', that is, Islām. This involves all Muslims. It means that every Muslim, in general, and this group, in particular, is responsible for giving the call of Islām, both by words and acts, to all peoples of the world. Therefore in a verse which enjoins *jihād* on Muslims, the true Muslims have been defined and praised in the following words:

الَّذِينَ إِنْ مَكَّنَّاهُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ أَقَامُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتَوُا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَمَرُوا بِالْمَعْرُوفِ
وَنَهَوْا عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ

that is, 'true Muslims are those who when We endow them with authority in a land the first thing they do is to establish a system of obedience to Allah on His earth, of which *ṣalāh* is an outward expression, and raise their financial system on principles governed by *zakāh*, and they make the bidding of the Fair and the forbidding of the Unfair their very purpose of life.' (22:41)

Only if, the Muslim community of today were to take to extending their call towards good to other peoples as their objective, all ills that have crept into our social frame through the blind following of non-

Muslim nations shall cease to exist. When a community resolves to unite for this great objective and becomes sure that it has to forge ahead among the nations of the world and that the responsibility of teaching and training them falls on its shoulders, will find that all its disunities have disappeared and there remains nothing but that wonderful goal in sight. The secret of the successes achieved by the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his noble Companions, رضى الله عنهم اجمعين, lies hidden behind this effort. It appears in a *ḥadīth* that the Holy Prophet ﷺ recited this verse **رَأَيْتُمْ مَنِ مِّنْكُمْ** (And there has to be a group of people from among you) and then said: This special group is the group of the noble Companions (Ibn Jarīr). This is because each individual from among these blessed souls considered himself personally charged with the responsibility of calling people to good.

2. The second sub-level of this noble function is to call Muslims themselves towards the good. This means that *tablīgh* or the act of conveying the message of Allah should be done by all Muslims generally, and by the special group particularly, among Muslims, fulfilling the duty of *da'wah* imposed by the Qur'an.

Again this call takes two forms as given below:

a). The first form will be that of a general and open call to good through which all Muslims will be educated into necessary injunctions and morals which have to be followed in Islām.

b). The second call would be particular and selective through which the objective will be to produce experts in the Muslim community, experts in the sciences of the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Another verse of the Holy Qur'an leads in this direction:

فَلَوْلَا نَفَرَ مِن كُلِّ فِرْقَةٍ مِّنْهُمْ طَائِفَةٌ لِّيَتَفَقَّهُوا فِي الدِّينِ وَلِيُنذِرُوا قَوْمَهُمْ إِذَا رَجَعُوا إِلَيْهِمْ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَحْذَرُونَ

So, why should it not be that a group from every section of them goes forth, so that they may acquire perfect understanding of the Faith, and so that they may warn their people when they return to them, that they may be cautious. (9:122)

Further on, this responsibility-bearing group has been identified as carrying the additional distinction of **يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ**, that is, 'they bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair'.

The word, '*ma'rūf*' literally means 'recognized' but as a Qur'ānic term it includes all good enjoined by Islām, and promoted by all prophets during their respective ages. Since what is good is known and recognized, it has been referred to as '*ma'rūf*'.

Similarly, the word, '*munkar*' literally means 'non-recognized' or 'alien', but as a Qur'ānic term it includes all evils and disorders about which it is well-known and recognized that the Holy Prophet ﷺ declared them to be impermissible.

Keeping this in view, another point is worth-consideration. The Holy Qur'ān could have used the word '*wājib*' (what is obligating) instead of '*ma'rūf*', and the word '*ma'āsī*' (sins) instead of '*munkar*', but it did not do so. The selection of the words '*ma'rūf*' and '*munkar*' may be indicative of the principle that the subject of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair must be an act which is recognized by the entire Muslim *Ummah* as 'fair' or 'unfair' without any difference of interpretation. As for the rules deduced through *ijtihād*, which have always been open for the different interpretations offered by the capable Muslim jurists, they should not be made an issue during the process of *الامر بالمعروف والنهي عن المنكر*: 'bidding the fair and forbidding the unfair'¹ It is a pity that such a wise Qur'ānic principle is being generally neglected in the Muslim community, and the Muslims are made to fight each other on the secondary issues which can admit different interpretations. People tend to consider such efforts as some feat of piety while the evils which are held by the entire *ummah* unanimously as sins and are being committed in the community receive much less attention and often go unchecked.

Towards the conclusion of the verse, the commendable end of the group described therein has been enshrined in the following words:

وَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْمُفْلِحُونَ

And it is these who are successful.

It simply means that, in reality, success is achieved by such people alone.

1. It means that if a recognized school of Islamic jurisprudence, such as Hanafi school adopting a particular interpretation of Islamic law, has held an act as 'fair', the holders of an opposite view like Shāfi'ites should not blame or reproach the former for their action, and vice versa. (editor)

Primarily, this description applies to the great group of the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم . They were the ones who rose with the great objective of calling towards the good and of curbing what is bad and in a very brief period of time conquered the entire world of their time. There were power centres of Byzantine and Persia which could not stop them and they went ahead teaching lessons in morality and purity and ushering around the light of righteousness and Godliness wherever they went.

Having established that Muslims have a distinct mission to convey and preach the God-oriented message of good, the text moves on to warn Muslims with the words:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

And do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes after clear signs had come to them. (105)

It means that Muslims should not be like Jews and Christians who, even after clear injunctions of Allah Almighty had reached them, became divided in the implementation of the basic code of faith simply because they preferred to follow the dictates of their desires. Thus, thrown in violent mutual disputations, vocal and physical, they brought Divine punishment upon themselves. This verse is, in fact, a complement of *وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا* (verse 103) where Muslims were asked to seek unity and strength by attaching themselves to Allah's commands, individually and collectively, which helps make an entire community act like one body, one person, one entity. Then comes the perpetual mission of *da'wah*, the act of calling people to good, the process of bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair. These nurture and strengthen that unity. After that, by saying *وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا* (and be not divided) in verse 103 and *وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا* (And do not be like those who became divided) in the present verse, Muslims have been asked to learn a lesson from past communities which were destroyed by mutual dissensions with the good counsel that they should do their best to stay safe against this disease.

The type of divisiveness censured in this verse is a division that shows up because of arrogant and egotistic self-assertiveness, be it in the fundamentals of religion or in its subsidiaries. The statement

after clear signs had come to them' is an obvious indicator towards this explanation. The truth is that all fundamentals of religion are clear. Even some subsidiaries are so clear that they allow no margin of disagreement, unless of course, there be a selfish motive behind it.

However, there are subsidiary issues not so definite and clear. They may have no clear support from the texts of the Holy Qur'ān and Sunnah, (rather they are deduced by the scholars on the basis of analogy) or the text on which they are based is open to different interpretations. The resulting difference of opinion in the understanding of these subsidiaries is not included in the sense of this verse. The well-known authentic *ḥadīth* narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim from the blessed Companion, 'Amr ibn al'Āṣ, is more than enough to permit it. In this *ḥadīth* the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said that one who does *Ijtihād* (conducting a competent inquiry within the framework provided by the Shari'ah to resolve a religious issue) and comes up with a ruling which is correct, he gets a twofold reward; and if he makes a mistake in his *Ijtihād*, he gets one reward.

This tells us that an *Ijtihād* made by a competent scholar even if it turns out to be erroneous, is still worthy enough for a reward provided utmost effort has been made. How can this be regarded as blame-worthy? So, the difference of opinion resulting from *Ijtihād* undertaken by the blessed Companions and the great Imāms has absolutely no connection with the present verse. According to Sayyidnā Qāsim ibn Muḥammad and 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz رحمه الله عليه, the difference of opinion among the noble Companions is a source of mercy and ease for people (as in Ruḥ al-Ma'ānī from al-Baihaqī and al-Mudkhal).

Ruling on difference of opinion

Let us have a clear understanding of a serious matter of principle which arises out of this discussion. When we talk about differences in *Ijtihād*, we mean an *Ijtihād* which is permissible under the *Sharī'ah* of Islām. (There is no such thing as an *Ijtihād* outside the ramifications of the *Sharī'ah*). In a *Sharī'ah*-based *Ijtihād*, one or the other *Imām* may elect a view to stand by according to his line of thought, but the fact shall remain that, in the sight of Allah, only one of these views is true while other views are not so true. But again, the decision as to which is true and which is not rests with Allah Almighty, who will

bestow, on the Day of Resurrection, a twofold reward on the *Imām* and '*Ālim*' who arrives at the correct ruling through his *Ijtihād*. Also rewarded on this Day, will be the one whose *Ijtihād* was not correct. In short, nobody except Allah has the right to sit on judgement in the difference of interpretation and say that this is true and that is false. However, to the best of one's understanding and insight whichever side one thinks is closest to the Qur'an and the Sunnah he may say that, as far as he thinks, his choice is correct, although the possibility of its being incorrect cannot be ruled out and that which is the opinion on the other side, different from his chosen option is regarded as incorrect, with the possibility of that it may be correct in the sight of Allah. This is something all leading Imāms of *Fiqh*, the masters of Muslim jurisprudence, agree upon.

So, the rule becomes clear that no side taken in a difference of interpretations is '*munkar*' or '*unfair*' and open to objection. Thus it will not be subjected to reproach under the authority of *يَا مُرُونَ بِالْعُرُوبِ وَنَهَوْنَ عَنِ الشُّعْرِ* (Bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair). More so, when it is not unfair, raising an objection against what does not fall under the 'Unfair' would itself be regarded as unfair. This must be avoided. This is a rule most educated people do not fully comprehend these days or simply neglect it. They do not desist from abusing and verbally attacking others who think otherwise with all sorts of derogatory remarks and fretting. Inevitably, this leads to internecine confrontation and rampant disunity among Muslims, a phenomenon visible all over the Muslim world.

It has been already said that a difference of interpretation, if it corresponds to the principles of *Ijtihād*, does not go against the injunction *وَلَا تَفْرُقُوا* (and be not divided) and, therefore, it is not blameworthy. But, the way this difference is being handled these days, when quarrelsome debates around the tertiary subjects are being nursed as if they were the very basis of Muslim faith. Unfortunately this is what results in mutual confrontation and abuse. It can be said without any shade of doubt that this behaviour is certainly an open violation of the same Qur'anic injunction *وَلَا تَفْرُقُوا* (and be not divided). It is, most certainly, objectionable and totally contrary to the way of our learned elders, the blessed Companions and their Successors. There is no

precedent for this type of behaviour among the early scholars (the Companions and their disciples) who were the best of our community. That anyone was ever blamed on the basis of difference of opinion in matters of interpretation in this manner is something unheard of. For instance, Imām Shāfi'ī and other Imāms, may Allah have mercy on them all, rule that in a *ṣalāh* offered in a congregation behind an imām, all those offering their prayer behind him must recite the Sūrah al-Fātiḥah as an obligation. Given this ruling anyone who does not fulfil this obligation will not have offered his *ṣalāh* at all. Parallel to this is the view of Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, may Allah have His mercy on him, according to whom it is not permissible for one who prays behind an imām to recite his own Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, therefore, the Ḥanafiyah do not recite it while offering prayers in a congregation behind an imām. But, nowhere during the entire history of Muslim community there is any report saying that the followers of the Shāfi'ī school considered Ḥanafiyah as the deserters of the obligation of *ṣalāh* or that their prayers are not complete. They have never been blamed or criticised in the manner one would criticise and attack the evil acts forbidden by the Shari'ah.

Imām ibn 'Abd al-Barr has, mentioned the attitude of the early scholars and the revered elders in the following words:

عن يحيى بن سعيد قال ما برح اهل الفتوى يفتون فيحل هذا ويحرم هذا
فلا يرى المحرم ان المحل هلك لتحليله ولا يرى المحل ان المحرم هلك
لتحريمه (جامع بيان العلم، ص ٨٠)

Those who are entitled to give *fatwā*, have always been issuing *fatwās*. One of them would rule (concerning injunctions not covered under the texts) that something is lawful while the other will rule it to be unlawful. But, the latter takes the former doomed to perdition, nor does the former think that the later is doomed to perdition. (Jami' Bayān al-'Ilm, p. 80)

An important note of caution

All this discussion about *Ijtihād* relates to the one carried out under the standard rules governing it. The very first condition is that *Ijtihād* can be resorted to in questions and issues about which there is no categorical decision available in the Qur'an and the Sunnah. Or, it

may be that such decision is not clear and susceptible to more than one interpretation. Or, it is possible that a combination of some verses of the Qur'ān and some narrations of the *ḥadīth* may be apparently contradictory. In situations such as this, only those who possess the necessary pre-requisites to carry out *Ijtihād* will be entitled to do so. *Ijtihād* is no easy matter. It requires the most perfect expertise (in the real and full sense of the term) of all disciplines related to the Qur'ān and the Ḥadīth, a comprehensive and perfect knowledge of the Arabic language, and a comprehensive knowledge of the sayings of the blessed Companions and their Successors. Therefore, anyone who dabbles in questions which have been settled by authoritative texts and comes up with opinions contrary to those of leading authorities, then this difference of opinion will not fall under the category of *Ijtihād* as envisaged by the Sharī'ah.

This will also be true about the person who does not fulfil the conditions of *Ijtihād*. What he says does not affect the question at all. This tendency has unfortunately become fairly visible in Muslim societies. Those who consider themselves educated (in modern sciences) have started to express their personal opinions relating to matters that have been settled in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. This is ignorance at its ugliest. These are issues where even Imāms and *mujtahids* would not dare speak. How can the exercise of so called *Ijtihād* be acceptable from a person who does not even possess the knowledge of Islamic sciences let alone the highest level of learning required for *Ijtihād*.

Verses 106 - 109

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌُ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌُ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ
 وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ
 تَكْفُرُونَ ﴿١٠٦﴾ وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ ابْيَضَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ فَفِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ
 هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١٠٧﴾ تِلْكَ آيَاتُ اللَّهِ نَتْلُوهَا عَلَيْكَ بِالْحَقِّ
 وَمَا اللَّهُ يُرِيدُ ظُلْمًا لِّلْعَالَمِينَ ﴿١٠٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ
 وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ ۗ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ﴿١٠٩﴾

On a day when faces shall turn bright and faces shall

turn dark, as for those whose faces turn dark, (they shall be questioned): "Did you disbelieve after you had accepted the Faith? Now taste the punishment because you have been disbelieving." [106]

And as for those whose faces turn bright, they rest in Allah's mercy. They are there for ever. [107]

These are the verses of Allah We recite to you with all veracity. And Allah wants no injustice for (anyone in) the worlds. [108]

And to Allah belongs what is in the heavens and what is in the earth. And to Allah all matters are returned. [109]

Commentary

The meaning of 'bright' and 'dark' faces:

This expression appears in the Holy Qur'an at several places, for instance:

وَيَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ تَرَى الَّذِينَ كَذَبُوا عَلَى اللَّهِ وُجُوهُهُم مُّسْوَدَّةٌ

On the day of Doom, you shall see those who lied against Allah (with) their faces blackened. (39:60)

وُجُوهُهُم يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفَرَةٌ صَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ وَوُجُوهُهُم يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ

Some faces on that day shall shine, laughing, joyous. Some faces on that day shall be dusty, overspread with darkness. (80:38)

وُجُوهُهُم يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ

Faces on that day shall be radiant, looking towards their Lord. (75:22)

In these verses, several words such as, '*bayād*', '*sawād*', '*ghabarah*', '*qatarah*', and '*naḍirah*', have been used to carry the same sense. In the English translation, where applicable, they appear in italics. According to the majority of commentators, 'brightness' signifies the brightness of the light of Faith, that is, the faces of believers shall be resplendent with the light of Faith, fresh and smiling due to happiness (as a result of rewards bestowed upon them by Allah). 'Darkness' signifies the darkness of disbelief, that is, the faces of the

disbelievers will be covered with the gloomy anguish of disbelief and the added soot of sin and transgression would turn them still darker.

Who are these people?

Commentators have explained the identity of the people with 'bright and 'dark' faces variously. Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه says that the faces of the followers of Sunnah shall be 'bright' and those of the followers of *Bid'ah* (innovation in the revealed Faith, not intended by Allah and His Messenger, nor by his learned dark Companions). Ḥadrat 'Aṭā' رحمه الله عليه says that the faces of the *Muhājirīn* and *Anṣār* shall be 'bright' and the faces of the Banī Qurayzah and Banī Naḍīr shall be 'dark' (Qurtubī).

Imām Tirmidhī narrates a *ḥadīth* from Sayyidnā Abū Umāmah رضى الله عنه which identifies these as relating to the Khawārij, the oldest sect of rebels), that is, the 'dark' faces shall belong to the Khawārij, and the 'bright' faces to those whom they shall kill. The *ḥadīth* is given below:

قال ابو امامة كلاب النار شرقتلى تحت اديم السماء، وخير قتلى من قتلوه
ثم قرأ: "يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ"

When Sayyidnā Abū Umāmah was asked if he had heard the *ḥadīth* from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, he replied, while counting on his fingers, that he would not have narrated this *ḥadīth* had he not heard it from the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم seven times (Tirmidhī).

Sayyidnā 'Ikrimah رحمه الله عليه says that 'dark' faces shall belong to those from among the people of the Book who did confirm the coming of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم before he was ordained. But when he had been given prophethood they did not accept and support him. On the contrary, they started falsifying him (Qurtubī).

There are other explanations as well, other than those cited above, but they all lead to the same conclusion, and are not contradictory. Imām al-Qurtubī has said in his *Tafsīr* that the expression يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ in the verse means that the faces of sincere Muslims shall be 'bright' but the faces of all those who may have altered their religion, or may have become apostates and disbelievers, or may be concealing their hypocrisy in their hearts, shall be 'dark'.

Some special notes:

In the verse Allah Almighty has mentioned the *bayād* first, and the *sawād* or darkness after it. But, in the verse which follows: **فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ** (As for those whose faces turn dark), *sawād* or darkness has been made to appear before *bayād* or brightness, although the sequence of the original statement required that the mention of brightness appear first at this place as well. This reversal of the order seems to indicate that Allah Almighty has pointed out to His main purpose of creation. That purpose is to bless His creation with His mercy; punishment is not the objective. So, those with bright faces come first as they deserve the mercy and merit from their Lord. People with dark, anguished faces were mentioned later as the ones who deserve punishment. Towards the close of the verse, the statement **فِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ** (They rest in Allah's mercy) is meant to stress upon the great mercy of the Creator. One cannot miss observing that those deserving of mercy were identified immediately at the beginning of the verse and again, at the end of the verse, and very affectionately indeed. The mention of those whose faces shall turn dark remains in between. All this points out to His limitless, endless mercy, clearly suggesting that human beings were certainly not created to serve as an exhibit or manifestation of Divine punishment; instead, they were created to flourish under the sunshine of Allah's mercy.

2. About the statement, 'they shall rest in Allah's mercy', the blessed Companion Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضى الله عنه says that '*rahmah*' or 'mercy' in the verse means '*Jannah*' or 'paradise'. Here too, the wisdom behind giving the name 'mercy' to 'paradise' is, quite obviously, that man, no matter how worshipful and pious he may be, shall not enter Paradise unless it be through the sole mercy of Allah Almighty. The reason is that being devoted in acts of worship is no feat of human excellence as such. On the contrary, the very ability to do so is, in itself, a gift of Allah. So, '*ibādah*' or worship does not, in itself, create an inherent right to enter Paradise. It is Allah's mercy alone through which one can enjoy the bliss of Paradise. (al-Tafsīr al-Kabīr)

3. The sentence **فِي رَحْمَةِ اللَّهِ** (they rest in Allah's mercy) is immediately qualified by **هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ** (they are there for ever). This means that the mercy in which the believers shall rest will not be temporary; it

would be forever and eternal. This blessing will never be taken away or reduced in their case. In contrast to this are those whose faces shall turn dark; for them, it has not be expressly mentioned if they shall be in that state for ever.

Sinning man earns his own punishment:

The verse نَذَرُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ (106) (now taste the punishment because you have been sinning) indicates that the punishment on that Day is not from Allah but that it is as consequence of what man has earned while living his mortal life, for the truth is that the blessings of paradise and the hardships of hell are simply a changed form of our very deeds. So, later on in verse 108, it was said: وَمَا اللَّهُ بِرَبِّدٍ ظَلَمًا لِلْعَالَمِينَ (and Allah wants no injustice for {anyone in the worlds} which means that Allah has no intention of being unjust to His creation. Whatever reward or punishment there is, is nothing but justice and very much the perfect expression of the divine wisdom and mercy.

Verse 110

كُنْتُمْ خَيْرَ أُمَّةٍ أُخْرِجَتْ لِلنَّاسِ تَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَتَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَلَوْ آمَنَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ لَكَانَ خَيْرًا لَهُمْ مِنْهُمْ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَأَكْثَرُهُمُ الْفَاسِقُونَ ﴿١١٠﴾

You are the best *Ummah* raised for mankind. You bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair and believe in Allah. And if the people of the Book had believed, it would have been better for them. Of them, there are the believers, while most of them are the sinners. [110]

Sequence

In previous verses, Muslims were asked to take special care in order to remain steadfast in their faith, bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair. In the present verse, it has been further emphasised that these are the very reasons why Allah Almighty has conferred upon the *Ummah* of Muḥammad, may the peace and blessings of Allah be upon him, the status of '*Khayr al-Umam*', the best of communities, dignified and elevated, when it does what it has been charged to do.

Why the best of communities?

The Holy Qur'an has, in different verses, given several reason for

declaring the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم as the best *Ummah*, the most important of which has appeared in Surah al-Baqarah, that is:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا

And in the same way We made you a moderate *Ummah* (community). (2:143)

A detailed explanation of this verse can be seen in Volume I of this commentary. This portion deals with the major reason why the *Ummah* of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has been called the best of human communities. There it has been pointed out that moderation is its great characteristic and that it is visible in all department of its collective life.

In this particular verse, another reason has been given. The reason is that this community has been raised for the sole purpose of dispensing good to all beings created by Allah. It has been actually charged with the function of remaining concerned with their spiritual and moral reformation. Seen in the perspective of past communities, it was this community which contributed most in the mission of 'bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair', even though this was already enjoined upon past communities as mentioned in authentic *aḥādīth*. However, to begin with, several past communities did not have *Jihād* as a religious obligation, in which case, the mission of 'bidding the Fair' could only be carried out by heart and tongue only. Available with the followers of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم is a third option of 'bidding the Fair', that of the power of the hand, which also includes all sorts of *Jihād*. Then, the enforcement of Islāmic laws through the agency of the government is also a part of it. In the case of other communities, distinguishing features of religion were gradually obliterated by general inertia. The obligation of *amr bi l'ma'rūf*, the ordained mission of bidding the Fair, also stood totally forsaken. As far as this *Ummah* of his is concerned, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ made this prophecy:

In this *Ummah*, there shall be right through the day of Doom, a group of people which will remain firm and stick to (the task of) bidding the Fair and forbidding the Unfair.

The second distinguishing feature of this community is that they 'believe in Allah': كُفُّوا بِأَللَّهِ. At this point one may ask why should this be a distinguishing feature of the Muslim community as belief in Allah has been the common factor between all past prophets and their communities. The answer is clear. No doubt, belief as such is common to all, but the degrees of perfection in belief differ. The degree of preference given to the community of Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم has a class of its own as compared to past communities.

Towards the end of the verse, it has been said about the people of the Book that there are some Muslims among them. This refers to those who had confirmed the prophethood of our Holy Prophet ﷺ such as, Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Salām and others.

Verse 111

لَنْ يَضُرُّوكُمْ إِلَّا أَذًى وَإِنْ يُقَاتِلُوكُمْ يُؤَلُّوكُمُ الْأَدْبَارَ ثُمَّ لَا يُنصَرُونَ ﴿١١١﴾

They shall never (be able to) cause you any harm except a little hurt. And if they fight you, they will turn their backs on you, then they shall not be helped. [111]

Commentary

In previous verses (98-101), it was shown how hostile to Muslims the people of the Book were and how they planned to bring religious harm to them. Mentioned in the present verse are their plans to harm Muslims materially. The last sentence carries the prophecy that they shall not succeed.

This prophecy of the Holy Qur'an was proved true when, during the entire period of prophethood, the people of the Book were unable to overcome the noble Companions who are the primary addressees here. This applies particularly to the Jewish tribes who had tried to sow seeds of discord among the Companions. The outcome was that these people were disgraced; some paid *jizya*, some were killed while others were exiled.

The next verse (112) makes the description complete.

Verse 112

ضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الذَّلَّةُ أَيُّنَ مَا تُقِفُوا إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلِ مِّنَ
النَّاسِ وَبَاءٌ وَوَيْعَظِبُ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَضُرِبَتْ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَسْكَنَةُ
ذَلِكَ بِأَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا يَكْفُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَيَقْتُلُونَ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ
حَقِّ ذَلِكِ بِمَا عَصَوْا وَكَانُوا يَعْتَدُونَ ﴿١١٢﴾

Disgrace has been stamped over them wherever they are found, unless (saved) through a source from Allah and through a source from men, and they have returned with wrath from Allah, and misery has been stamped over them. All this because they used to deny the signs of Allah and to slay the prophets unjustly. All this because they disobeyed and used to cross the limits. [112]

Commentary

The meaning of disgrace and wrath cast on the Jews:

A detailed discussion on this subject has already appeared under comments on verse 61 of Sūrah al-Baqarah where the text has not mentioned any exception. This can be seen in Volume I of this commentary. It also covers the exception given in the present verse -
إِلَّا بِحَبْلٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ وَحَبْلِ مِّنَ النَّاسِ .

Briefly, the verse means that the Jews shall remain stamped with disgrace and misery except under two situations:

1. Though a Covenant of Allah. For example, a minor child or woman shall not be killed. (This exception is meant by the words 'through a source from Allah').

2. Through a treaty obligation, that is, بِحَبْلِ مِّنَ النَّاسِ (through a source from men). Such patronage may cause their disgrace and misery not to become manifest. The specific words used in the Holy Qur'an i.e., a source from men, cover all men, believers and disbelievers. The possibility that they live with freedom after making a peace treaty with Muslims is included here. Also possible is the situation that they may come under the protection of other non-Muslim powers through a peace treaty (or informal collaboration strategy), a situation that prevails in the form of the present-day state of Israel. To discerning

people all over the world, it is no secret that the state of Israel is really a joint encampment of the West. Behind all the facade of power they appear to have is the power of others. If the U.S., U.K., Europe, and USSR too, were daring enough to withdraw their patronage of Israel, it would not survive for a day. Allah knows best.

Verses 113 - 117

لَيْسُوا سَوَاءً ۗ مِّنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ أُمَّةٌ قَائِمَةٌ يَتْلُونَ آيَاتِ اللَّهِ
 أَنَاءَ اللَّيْلِ وَهُمْ يَسْجُدُونَ ﴿١١٣﴾ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ وَالْيَوْمِ الْآخِرِ وَ
 يَأْمُرُونَ بِالْمَعْرُوفِ وَيَنْهَوْنَ عَنِ الْمُنْكَرِ وَأُسَارِعُونَ فِي
 الْخَيْرَاتِ وَأُولَئِكَ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ ﴿١١٤﴾ وَمَا يَفْعَلُوا مِنْ خَيْرٍ
 فَلَنْ يُكْفَرُوهُ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِالْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿١١٥﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَنْ
 تُغْنِيَ عَنْهُمْ أَمْوَالُهُمْ وَلَا أَوْلَادُهُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ شَيْئًا وَأُولَئِكَ
 أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ ۗ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ ﴿١١٦﴾ مَثَلُ مَا يُنْفِقُونَ فِي
 هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا كَمَثَلِ رِيحٍ فِيهَا صِرٌّ أَصَابَتْ حَرْثَ قَوْمٍ
 ظَلَمُوا أَنفُسَهُمْ فَأَهْلَكَتُهُ ۗ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَٰكِن أَنفُسَهُمْ
 يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿١١٧﴾

Not all of them are alike: Among the people of the Book there are those who are steadfast; they recite the verses of Allah in the night hours and they prostrate; [113] they believe in Allah and the Hereafter, and bid the Fair and forbid the Unfair, and race towards the good deeds. They are among the righteous. [114] And whatever good they do, they shall never be deprived of it. And Allah is All-Aware of the God-fearing. [115]

Surely, those who disbelieve, neither their wealth nor their children shall help them against Allah; and they are the people of the Fire. They shall be there for ever. [116]

The example of what they spend in this worldly life is just like a wind which, having chill within, hit the tillage of those who wronged themselves, and

destroyed it. And Allah has not wronged them, instead, they wrong themselves. [117]

In verse 110, it was said that among the people of the Book there are those who believe, yet most of them are disbelievers. Details appear in the present verse which gives a complementary profile of those who believed from among the people of the Book, and by becoming Muslims, they adopted the distinguishing hallmarks of the Faith that go to make believers the best of communities.

Soon after praising those who had embraced Islām from among the people of the Book, the text censures those of them who did not embrace Islām and insisted on retaining their stance of disbelief, not realizing that their wealth and their children will be unable to save them from the punishment of Allah and Hell shall be their eternal abode.

Verse 117 declares through a similitude that disbelievers simply waste what they spend in this worldly life, for belief in Islām is a precondition in order that such spendings be acceptable with Allah, of whatever sort they may be. The similitude stresses the fact that disbelievers inflict this injustice upon themselves when their spendings go to waste in this world and remain rewardless in the Hereafter. If they were not to wrong themselves, if they were to embrace Islām, they would have been like other Muslims who, on suffering a worldly loss, are compensated by Allah through reward and forgiveness of sins, as reported in a *ḥadīth*.

Verse 118 - 120

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةَ مَن دُونِكُمْ لَا يَأْتُونَكُم
 خَبْرًا لَّا وَدُّوا مَا عَنِتُّمْ قَدْ بَدَتِ الْبَغْضَاءُ مِنْ أَفْوَاهِهِمْ وَمَا
 تُخْفِي صُدُورُهُمْ أَكْبَرُ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ إِن كُنْتُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ
 ﴿١١٨﴾ هَآئِنْتُمْ أَوْلَاءُ تُحِبُّونَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِبُّونَكُمْ وَتُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْكِتَابِ
 كُلِّهِ وَإِذَا لَقُوكُمْ قَالُوا آمَنَّا وَإِذَا خَلَوْا عَضُّوا عَلَيْكُمُ
 الْأَنَامِلَ مِنَ الْغَيْظِ قُلْ مُؤْمِنُوا بِغَيْظِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ

الضُّوْرُ ﴿١١٩﴾ اِنْ تَسْسِكُمْ حَسَنَةً تَنْوَهُمْ وَاِنْ تُصِيبْكُمْ
 سَيِّئَةً يَفْرَحُوا بِهَا وَاِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَا يَضُرُّكُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ
 شَيْئًا اِنَّ اللّٰهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ ﴿١٢٠﴾

O those who believe, do not take anyone as insider but from your own selves. They would spare no effort to do you mischief. They want you to be in trouble. Malice has come out of their mouths while what is concealed in their hearts is far worse. We have made the signs clear to you, provided that you understand. [118]

Look, you are the ones who love them and they do not love you. And you believe in the Book, in all of it. And when they meet you, they say, "We believe", and when they are alone they bite their finger-tips out of rage against you. Say, "Die in your rage." Surely, Allah is All-Aware of what lies in the hearts. [119]

If something good happens to you, it annoys them and if something evil befalls you, they are delighted with it. And if you keep patience and fear Allah, their cunning shall not harm you at all. And Allah is All-Encompassing of what they do. [120]

Commentary

These verses were revealed in a particular background. There were Jewish settlements around Madīnah. They had old friendly ties with the tribes of Aws and Khazraj. Individuals from these tribes were also on friendly terms with other individuals from the Jewish settlements. In their tribal capacity too, Aws and Khazraj were to the Jews their neighbours and allies. When these two tribes embraced Islām, they continued to maintain their old ties with them. Individuals from these tribes saw no problems in meeting their old Jewish friends with the same love and sincerity. But, Jews were so hostile to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the religion brought by him that they were unwilling to be sincere and loving to anyone who had said yes to the prophetic call and had embraced Islām. So, they outwardly went along with the same old relationships with the Anṣārs of Madīnah, but inwardly they had turned into their enemies. The apparent friendship they had allowed to remain became their cover which they utilized in their

sinister efforts to foment trouble among Muslims so that their unity could be disintegrated. They even went to the limit of banking on this feigned friendship with Muslims to find out their organizational secrets and pass them on to the enemies.

It is this hypocritical behaviour of theirs which Allah Almighty has asked Muslims to guard against. We have been given an important rule of conduct when it was said:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَتَّخِذُوا بَطَانَةً مِّن دُونِكُمْ

O those who believe, do not take anyone as insider but from your own selves.

The word, *biṭānah* used here means a friend, confidant, one with whom secrets are shared. The lining or inside part of a dress which stays close to the body is also known as *biṭānah*. Derived from *baṭn* (inside), it is used in everything opposed to *ẓahr* (outside). That which is outside is *ẓahr* and that which is inside is *baṭn*. In garments, the outer part is *ẓihārāh* and the inner part touching the body such as a lining is called *biṭānah*. [There is an expression in English - 'hand in glove' - which comes close to this sense, even if partly. It means 'to be on very intimate terms'.] Similarly, the expression, *biṭānatu-th'thawb* (بطانة الثوب) lends the metaphor of friend, confidant, one who comes to know internal secrets and that is how the word, *biṭānah* is used to carry that sense. The well-known, and quite reliable lexicon of Arabic, *Lisān al-'Arab* explains *biṭānah* as follows:

بطانة الرجل صاحب سرّة وداخلة امره الذى يشاوره فى احواله

It means that a person's *biṭānah* is one who knows his secrets, has access to his affairs in which he seeks his advice. Rāghib al-Isfahānī in his *Mufradāt* and al-Qurtubī in his *Tafsīr* have given the same meaning. (The word, '*biṭānah*', translated here as 'insider' is an effort to cover some of these important shades of meaning.)

So, it has been enjoined upon Muslims through this verse that they should not take persons other than those from their own community as confidants and advisers, in a way that leads one into spilling the sensitive secrets of one's own government, community or state. No doubt, under the shade of its universal mercy, Islām has given unusual instructions to Muslims in order that they treat non-Muslims with

compassion, goodwill, beneficence, kindness and tolerance, and not leaving it at that, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has put these in actual practice in all affairs concerning non-Muslims. But, at the same time, and in perfect wisdom, binding instructions were given so as to make sure that the organized body of Muslims and its particular hall-marks stay protected. A Muslim cannot be permitted to go beyond a certain limit when developing or promoting relations (unilateral, bilateral or multi-lateral) with those who disbelieve in or practice hostility against the Law of Islām. This is so because such an action throws the doors of harm and danger open both for the individuals and the community. This arrangement is clear, reasonable, appropriate, and very necessary to give secure frontiers to the individuals as well as to the Muslim state.

About non-Muslims resident in Islāmic states or those tied with Muslims through a treaty, the teachings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his most emphatic instructions for their protection are all part of the Islāmic law. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said:

من آذى ذميا فانا خصمه و من كنت خصمه خصمته يوم القيمة

Whoever harms a *Dhimmī* (protected non-Muslim), I shall be his opponent on the Day of Judgement and I always defeat the one whom I oppose. (Reported by Ibn Mas'ūd)

In another *ḥadīth*, he said :

منعنى ربي ان اظلم معاهدا ولا غيره

My Lord has prohibited me to wrong the one protected by a treaty, or anyone other than him. (narrated by Sayyidnā 'Alī)

In yet another *ḥadīth*, he said:

الامن ظلم معاهدا او انتقصه او كلفه فوق طاقته او اخذ منه شيئا بغير طيب
نفس منه فانا حجيجه يوم القيمة

Beware, whoever wrongs a non-Muslim protected by treaty, or usurps his right, or obligates him to do what is beyond his power, or takes from him something without his genuine consent, then, I shall be the advocate for him (the said non-Muslim) on the day of Judgement.

Side by side with these concessions and considerations for non-

Muslims, instructions were given to Muslims that they should protect their distinct group cohesion by not trusting enemies of Islām and Muslims with their secrets. Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrates that Sayyidnā 'Umar ibn Al-Khaṭṭāb رضى الله عنه was asked to appoint a young non-Muslim as the chief manager and scribe in his office since he was very good at that. Thereupon, he said:

قد اتخذت اذا بطانة من دون المؤمنين

If I were to take him in, in that case, I will be taking an insider from among non-Muslims (which is against the Qur'anic authority).

Imām al-Qurṭubī, famous scholar and commentator of the fifth century says, with marked pensive longing, that contravention of this teaching of the Qur'an has produced evil results for Muslims:

وقد انقلبت الاحوال فى هذه الازمان باتخاذ اهل الكتب كتبه وامناء
وتسودوا بذلك عند جهلة الاغنياء من الولاة والامراء

Things have so changed these days that Jews and Christians were trusted with secrets and considered trustworthy through which they were able to prevail over the ignorant rich, the rulers and the chiefs.

Even today, in a state established under a particular ideology, a person who does not subscribe to this ideology cannot be admitted into the inner echelons of power as a confidant. In Russia and China, a person who does not believe in communism is not given any responsible office or, farther still, trusted with state secrets. A close study of the decline of Muslim states would reveal several reasons behind it. One of the oft-repeated ones will be that Muslims had entrusted their sensitive affairs in the hands of non-Muslim confidants. This policy was an active factor in the decline of the Ottoman Caliphate as well.

The reason why this command has been given is explained soon after. Starting from *لَا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ حَيَّالًا* (they would spare no effort to do you mischief) and ending at *ان كنتم تعطون* (provided that you understand), the text warns Muslims that they should not take anyone other than their own Muslim brothers as insiders on their affairs, for no other group, be they Jews, Christians, hypocrites or other disbelievers, could be their genuine well-wishers. Contrary to that, they are always on the

look out for opportunities to hoodwink and hurt them materially and spiritually. They are always plotting to harm them in this worldly life as well as to take them away from the enjoined pursuits of their Faith. All this is what the Muslims can see for themselves, but the venom that lies hidden in their hearts is far too fatal. However there are times when they are enraged with their deceptive cool front thrown off and the fangs of their deep hostility become clearly visible. Why would an intelligent person take such people as his confidant? Allah Almighty has pointed out who they are and what has to be done about them. Now it is upto him who understands what is involved here.

The sentence رَدُّوْا مَا عَنِتُّمْ (they want you to be in trouble) is a perfect mirror of the mentality of disbelievers. Here, the in-depth teaching is that no non-Muslim can ever be the real friend and well-wisher of Muslims.

After that, in verse 119: مَا أَشْتُمُ أَوْلَادَهُمْ حَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ (they want you to be in trouble), Muslims have been told that 'it is certainly strange that you go about loving them as friends, yet they are no friends of yours. Indeed, they are your worst enemies. Still more unusual is the situation because you believe in all Scriptures without any reservations as to the people they address, the time when they were sent down and the prophet they were revealed to. Contrary to this, they do not accept your Book and your Prophet. Their belief in their own Books is not correct either. Given this state of affairs it would have been expected that they should have been affectionate towards you and you should have been the ones to give them a cold shoulder. But, what is happening here is just the reverse of what it should have been.'

The mentality of disbelievers has been further clarified by saying: إِنْ يَسْتَكْبِرُوا عَنْكُمْ فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ (if something good happens to you, it annoys them and if something evil befalls you, they are delighted with it.)

How can Muslims remain protected against the aftermath of sinister moves of the hypocrites and the deadly hostility of opponents? For this, a simple and effective prescription was suggested in:

وَإِنْ تَصَبَّرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا لَأَبْطَرُنَّكُمْ كَيْدَهُمْ سِنِينَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ مُحِيطٌ

And if you keep patience and fear Allah, their cunning shall

not harm you at all. Surely, Allah is All-Encompassing of what they do.

Ṣabr and Taqwā: Panacea for Muslims

The Holy Qur'ān has prescribed *ṣabr* (patience, endurance) and *Taqwā* (fear of Allah) as an effective measure against all hardships. This elemental teaching has been conveyed to Muslims not only here but also at many other places in the Qur'ān. For instance, in the section that follows immediately, it has been said:

بَلَىٰ إِنْ تَصْبِرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا وَيَأْتُوكُم مِّن فَوْرِهِمْ هَٰذَا يُمْدِدْكُمْ رَبُّكُمْ بِخَمْسَةِ آلَافٍ مِّنَ الْمَلَائِكَةِ مُسَوِّمِينَ

Why not? If you stay patient and fear Allah and they come upon you in this heat of theirs, your Lord will reinforce you with five thousand of the angels having distinct marks. (3:125)

Here, the promise of divine help has been made conditional upon *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*.

In Sūrah Yūsuf, it has been said:

إِنَّهُ مَن يَتَّقِ وَيَصْبِرْ

Whoever fears Allah and keeps patience ... (12:90)

Here too, prosperity and success have been tied with *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*. Towards the end of this very Sūrah, *Ṣabr* is being proposed in the following words:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ

O those who believe, be patient, be more patient than others, and guard your frontiers, and fear Allah so that you may be successful. (3:200)

Once again, prosperity and success have been made dependent on *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*.

The two words, *Ṣabr* and *Taqwā*, though looking like a short title, are nevertheless very comprehensive. They contain within themselves a successful rule for all aspects of individual and collective life as well as public, government and military affairs.

The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said, as narrated by Sayyidnā

Abū Dharr رضى الله عنه :

عن ابى ذر قال قال رسول الله صلى الله عليه وسلم انى لاعلم اية لواخذ
الناس بها لكفتهم "ومن يتق الله يجعل له مخرجا" الاية (رواه احمد)

I know a verse which, if people were to take to it, would suffice them. And that is: 'And whoever fears Allah, for him He shall make a way out (of the difficulties) - 65:2.'

Verses 121 - 123

وَإِذْ غَدَوْتَ مِنْ أَهْلِكَ تُبَوِّئُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ مَقَاعِدَ لِلْقِتَالِ وَاللَّهُ
سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ ﴿١٢١﴾ إِذْ هَمَّتْ طَّائِفَتَيْنِ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ تَفْشَلَا وَاللَّهُ
وَلِيَهُمَا ۗ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٢٢﴾ وَلَقَدْ نَصَرَكُمُ
اللَّهُ بِبَدْرٍ وَأَنْتُمْ أَذِلَّةٌ فَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿١٢٣﴾

And when you left your house in the morning in order to place the believers in positions for fighting. And Allah is all-Hearing, all-Knowing. [121] When two of your groups were about to lose heart, while Allah was their guardian. And it is in Allah alone that the believers must place their trust. [122] And Allah certainly supported you at Badr when you were weak. So, fear Allah that you may be grateful. [123]

Sequence

In the previous verses, it was said that no power could harm Muslims if they observed patience and fear of Allah (*ṣabr* and *taqwā*). Now, the temporary set-back faced by Muslims during the battle of Uḥud was due to their failure to observe these rules of conduct fully. The present verses remind Muslims of what happened during the battle of Uḥud, and also, of their victory at the battle of Badr.

Commentary:

Before we proceed to explain these verses, it is appropriate that we have before us a sequence of events that came to pass at Uḥud.

The background of the Battle of Uḥud:

It was the month of Ramaḍān, Hijrah year 2, when the Quraysh

army and Muslim *mujāhidīn* fought a battle at Badr in which 70 well-known *kuffār* (disbelievers) of Makkah were killed and an equal number was taken prisoners. This defeat, disastrous and disgraceful as it was, and really the first instalment of Divine punishment, incensed the Quraysh; their search for revenge knew no bounds. The relatives of Quraysh chiefs who were killed at Badr, appealing to the traditional Arab pride, resolved that they would not rest until they have avenged their defeat at Badr at the hands of the Muslims. They proposed to Makkans that the sale proceeds from things brought in by their trade caravan from Syria should be spent on nothing but this war so that they can avenge the slaying of their comrades by Muḥammad صلى الله عليه وسلم and his companions. To this, everybody agreed and it was in the Hijrah year 3 that the Quraysh, along with several other tribes as well, marched out to mount an attack on Madīnah. The invading force included even women so that they could appeal to the sense of honour their men had and implore them not to retreat, if they ever did.

When this armed force of three thousand strong, all laced with weapons and other logistics, pitched up its tents near the mountain of Uḥud, about three or four miles outside Madīnah, the Holy Prophet ﷺ went into consultation with Muslims. In his blessed opinion, warding off the enemy by staying in Madīnah was easy and more likely to succeed. This was the first time that the leader of the hypocrites, 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy, who outwardly went along with Muslims, was asked to give his opinion, which turned out to be the same as that of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. But, some zealous Muslims, who were unable to take part in the Badr encounter and were intensely eager to lay down their lives in the cause of Islām, insisted that they should go out and fight the enemy in the open so that the enemy does not take them to be cowards. To this, the majority turned.

In the meantime, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم went to his house and when he came out, he had his armour on. At that point of time, some people thought that they had forced him, against his opinion, to lead the fight outside Madīnah in the open. Realizing what they did

was wrong, they submitted to him that he could act according to his opinion and stay in Madīnah. The answer was: 'It does not behove a prophet, once he has put on his armour and taken up his arms, to put them off without fighting.' This one sentence is sufficient to clarify the difference between a prophet and a non-prophet. A prophet cannot show weakness in that capacity. Then, here lies a lesson for the community as well.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم left Madīnah on his way to confront the enemy, he had about a thousand men with him, but the hypocrite 'Abdullāh ibn Ubayy broke off enroute with about three hundred men, saying: 'When my advice was rejected and action was taken on the advice of others, why should we fight and why should we endanger our lives?' Obviously, most of his comrades were hypocrites, yet there were some Muslims too who swallowed the bait and tugged along with them.

Finally, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reached the battlefield with a total of seven hundred *mujāhidīn*. He personally took charge of the action area setting up all arrangements in a formal military manner. The formations of his men were so placed that the mount of Uḥud remained on their rear. Sayyidnā Muṣ'ab ibn 'Umayr was made the standard-bearer and Sayyidnā Zubayr ibn 'Awwām, the commander of the mounted troops. Sayyidnā Ḥamzah was given the command of the unarmoured. On the rear, there was some likelihood that the enemy may cut his way in from that side. So, he positioned a company of fifty archers (arrow-shooters) on a hillock in the rear and ordered them to stand on guard against any attack from that side. They were specifically instructed not to bother about the fighting down the hill, irrespective of whether they win or lose, and were told that they just do not have to move from their appointed place.

The command of the company of archers was given to Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn Jubayr. As for the Quraysh, they had gone through the battle of Badr and they too went into battle formations in an orderly manner.