

Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and his blessed Companions. In the verse from Sūrah al-Baqarah (2:233) cited a little earlier, the Holy Qur'an has said: 'Now, if they want to wean, by mutual consent, and consultation, there is no sin on them.' Since this matter here concerns the woman, therefore, consultation with the woman has been specially made binding on the man.

In a *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said: 'المستشار مؤتمن إذا استشير فليشره بما هو صانع لنفسه': 'The person whose counsel is sought is a trustee. When he counsels, then, he must counsel with what he would propose to his ownself (to do otherwise is a breach of trust)'. This *ḥadīth* has been reported with good authority from Sayyidnā 'Alī by al-Ṭabarānī in al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ (see al-Mazḥarī).

At this point, it is necessary to bear in mind that consultation is an act of Sunnah only in situations where some clear and categorical injunction from the Qur'an or *Ḥadīth* does not exist. Otherwise, in the presence of a clear and categorical injunction of the Shari'ah, no consultation with anybody is needed. This is not permissible either. For example, if somebody went about consulting in - 'should I make my *ṣalāh* or should I not?' 'Should I pay my *zakāh* or should I not?' or 'Should I perform my Ḥajj or should I not?' - then, this would be absurd. These are not things you consult about. They are absolutely mandatory under the Shari'ah of Islam. However, the option of making consultation about how to go for Ḥajj is open and one can seek advice on questions like - should he go this year, or next; should he go by sea, or by air; should he go by land, or by some other method.

The same holds true about *zakāh*. One can consult about where and on whom it has to be spent, for the Shari'ah has left these on the choice of the payer.

In a *ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have explained this himself. Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنه says that he asked the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم: 'If, after you, we are confronted by a situation the injunction for which has not been explicitly revealed in the Qur'an, and about which we have heard nothing from you as well, what are we supposed to do?' The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'For a matter like this, get together from among you pious men who are consistently devoted to the worship of their Lord and who have deep

and extensive understanding of the Faith (*fuqahā'*) and decide the matter following their mutual counsel. Do not decide on the basis of someone's solitary opinion.'

The first, out of the two things that we learn from this *ḥadīth* is that consultation is not restricted to worldly affairs. Instead, the fact is that mutual consultation in situations where clear *nuṣūṣ* (plural of *naṣṣ* meaning textual authority) from the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth in matters governed by the injunctions of Shari'ah do not exist is an act of Sunnah. We can say that mutual consultation will be an act of Sunnah if made in situations where textual authority from the Qur'ān and Sunnah is not available. The second rule we learn is that advice should be taken from people who are known for their understanding of the Faith and devotion to their obligations to Allah (Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī) Al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, to whom the deduction given above is credited, has reported another *ḥadīth* from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه which says: استرشدوا العاقل ولا تعصوه فتندموا (Seek counsel from the wise person and do not act against it, otherwise you will regret.).

By putting the above two *aḥādīth* together, we learn that two qualities are necessary for the members of the consultative council. Firstly, they should be wise, perceptive and advice-worthy, and secondly, they should be pious and devoted to *'ibādah*. In other words, they should be deserving of giving advice and should be God-fearing in their conduct. If the matter to be discussed involves problems relating to Islamic Law, it is incumbent that they be *faqīh* (juriconsult: expert in Islamic Law and Jurisprudence) as well.

Consultation of the Holy Prophet ﷺ with his Companions

The verse under discussion here orders the Holy Prophet ﷺ to consult his Companions رضى الله عنهم. This raises a certain difficulty here. Isn't it that he is the Messenger of Allah and the blessed recipient of revelation? Why, then, should he need to consult anyone? Since, everything can come to his knowledge through the medium of revelation from Allah Almighty, some scholars interpret this command to consult by saying that the Messenger of Allah was neither in need to be counselled, nor anything he did depended on such counsel. The command to consult given to him is simply to honour the blessed Companions and mollify their broken hearts. But, Imām Abū Bakr al-Jaṣṣāṣ does not

agree with this view. According to him this is not correct, for being involved in consultation - while knowing that one's counsel will not be acted upon, nor would it affect any proceedings of the agenda - will make the whole thing ineffectual. If so, no heart will be mollified and no honour will be sustained. Instead, the truth of the matter is that a course of action to be taken by the Messenger of Allah is identified through revelation directly by Allah Almighty. This holds good in all general matters. But, there are certain matters which, under the dictates of the wisdom and mercy of Allah Almighty, are left to the opinion and discretion of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. It is in such matters alone where consultation is needed, and these are the kind of matters in which he has been commanded to seek consultation. The history of the consultative sittings of the Messenger of Allah confirms this view.

When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم consulted with the Companions about the battle of Badr, they said that should he ask them to jump into a river, they would do just that; and if he commanded them to march to a far out place such as Bark al-Ghamad, they will be with him; and they would never act like the companions of Mūsā عليه السلام who said: 'Go, you and your Lord, and fight the disbelievers' - 5:24; on the contrary, we shall fondly submit: 'You lead the way, we shall fight the enemy with you, in front of you and in the rear and the right and the left.'

Similarly, he consulted them about the battle of Uḥud asking them if they should defend Madīnah by staying inside the city limits or should they go out of the city limits and confront the enemy in the open. The general opinion of the Companions was that they should do the latter and this was what he accepted to do. In the battle of Khandaq, the question of accepting peace under the terms of a particular treaty came up for discussion. Sayyidnā Sa'd ibn Mu'adh and Sa'd ibn 'Uḇādah رضى الله عنهم opposed the proposed treaty on the grounds that it was inappropriate. It was the opinion of these two Companions that he finally accepted. When he went into consultations on a matter pertaining to Hudaybiyyah, the opinion of Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه was the basis of his final decision. The Companions were also consulted following the incident of *Ifk* (false imputation against Sayy-

idah 'Ā'ishah (رضى الله عنها) but this and all other matters pointed out were those in which no particular position to be taken by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was determined through revelation.

To sum up, being a prophet, a messenger and a recipient of revelation is not a bar against consultation. Moreover, in the case of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم it cannot be said that his seeking of counsel from the Companions was ever designed to please them artificially, or that it was virtually ineffectual in the conduct of affairs. On the contrary, the truth is that there were many occasions when he accepted the opinion of those present during consultation even if it happened to be against his own. In fact, in some situations where a particular line of action had not been determined for the Holy Prophet ﷺ through revelation, and in its absence he had worked through consultation, there is great divine wisdom. The objective is that the practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم comes to be established for all future generations of Muslims. Thus, the seeking of consultation as a Sunnah shall become binding on the whole *ummah* of the Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Imagine when he himself has not been left free of the need of consultation who else can claim to be free of such need? For this reason, the method of mutual consultation always continued to be operative during the blessed times of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and his noble Companions رضى الله عنهم particularly in matters where there was no clear injunction in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. When the Holy Prophet ﷺ passed away from this mortal world, the noble Companions continued following his practice. Still later, mutual consultation was resorted to as the modality to deduce rulings of Islamic Law in matters where clear injunction was not found in the Qur'ān and Sunnah. This was actually the method taught by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in answer to a question put by Sayyidnā 'Alī رضى الله عنه .

4. The Status of Consultation in an Islamic State:

As stated earlier, the Holy Qur'ān has given clear instructions about *mashwarah* or consultation at two places. One appears right here in the verse under study; the other one comes up in verse 42:38 of Sūrah al-Shūrā where one of the many qualities of true Muslims has been mentioned as وَأَمْرُهُمْ شُورَى بَيْنَهُمْ which means that their affairs are settled by mutual consultation. At both these places the word, *amr*

(matter) has been mentioned along with *mashwarah* (consultation). Discussed in detail earlier, the word, *amr*, signifies any important saying or doing, while at the same time, it is applied to injunction, rule or authority or government. No matter which of the two meanings is taken, consultation in the affairs of the government emerges as invariably necessary, based on these verses. If one elects to take this to mean the affairs of the government, then, the necessity is all the more obvious. In case, the word is taken in its general sense, the affairs of a government being important and far-reaching in effect, would still be considered as affairs in which consultation will be inevitable. Therefore, it is one of the duties of the Muslim *Amīr*, the chief executive of the community, that he should seek the counsel of those responsible for the affairs of the government in matters that are important. The verses of the Qur'ān quoted above and the consistent practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and of the rightly-guided Caliphs is a clear proof of this requirement.

These two verses not only highlight the need for consultation very clearly, they also point out to some basic principles of Islam's system of government, and its constitution. The Islamic government is a government by consultation in which the *amīr* or chief executive is chosen by consultation and definitely not as a matter of family inheritance. It is a *barakah* of Islamic teachings that this principle is recognized all over the world, in one or the other form, so much so that hereditary monarchies too are moving towards this arrangement, willingly or unwillingly.

But, let us go back 1400 years in history when the super-powers were Cyrus and Ceaser. The common factor between them was that they both headed hereditary empires and the authority of government was vested in their own persons. Thus, one man ruled millions, not on the basis of ability or capacity, but on the strength of the cruel principle of hereditary possession of sovereignty. This form of government, an insult to all human beings, was the way all over the world except Greece where the early teachings of a democratic order of life had yet to translate into principles that would go on to establish a stable government. Instead of that, these ideas relegated into a branch of Aristotelian philosophy. As opposed to this, Islam demolished the

unnatural principle of government through heredity and gave the choice of appointing and dismissing the chief executive to the people - a power they could use through their representatives shouldering the responsibilities of the affairs of the state. The world, once stuck in the quagmire of traditional monarchy, came to know about this natural and just system through Islamic teachings and this happens to be the spirit of a system of government we now know as democracy.

But, modern democracies, since they appeared as a reaction to cruel monarchies, came out with an equal lack of moderation. They went on to give the masses the sense of being the absolute, the ultimate entity, an unbridled sovereign of the system of government and the law of state, to the extent that their minds and hearts became alienated from the very concept of God, the Creator of the earth and the heavens and of all human beings, not to say much about the concept of His real Sovereignty and Rule, which comes as a result of that cardinal belief. Now the situation has reached a stage where their 'democracy' has started taking the restrictions imposed by Allah Almighty on public choice - which in itself was conferred on human beings by Him - as something of a burden, contrary to justice and equity (of their brand).

The way Islamic Law liberated the whole world from Cyruses, Ceasars and other despotic monarchies, it has also shown the way of God to western democracies trying to hide from Him behind secular curtains. Islam's way is no more a secret. Its teachings clearly say that the rulers and the ruled, the governments and their peoples are all subject to the Law given by Allah Almighty. The masses, their representative assemblies, law-making, appointment and removal of office-holders must operate within the parameters set by Allah Almighty. It is their duty to see that full consideration is given to ability and merit, in the choice of the chief executive, holders of offices and responsible positions. In addition to that, their honesty and trustworthiness should be weighed and tested. When it comes to selecting the chief executive of their government, they must select the one who is the best of all in knowledge, fear of Allah, honesty, trustworthiness, ability and political experience. Even this chief executive, elected though he may be, is not totally free, unchecked and despotic. He has to seek counsel

from those who are capable of giving such counsel. The Holy Qur'ān bears witness to this and so does the constant practice of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and of the great rightly-guided Caliphs, may Allah be pleased with them all. Who else can claim to be more just than them?

Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه has said:

لَا خِلَافَةَ إِلَّا عَنِ مَشُورَةٍ

There is no *Khilāfah* (Caliphate) unless it be with consultation. (Kanzul-'ummāl vide Ibn Abī Shaybah)

Government by consultation is a basic Islamic requirement so much so that a chief executive or head of the state, if he ever unfetters himself from the need for consultation or takes counsel from those who are not fit to give counsel from the point of view of the Sharī'ah of Islam, has to be removed of necessity.

ذكر ابن عطية أن الشورى من قواعد الشريعة وعزائم الاحكام ومن لا يستشير اهل العلم والدين فعزله واجب، هذا مالا خلاف له (البحر المحيط لابي حيان)

It appears in *al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ* of Abī Hayyān: Ibn 'Atiyyah رحمه الله said that Consultation is one of the basic principles of Islamic Law and Faith. He who does not consult with those who know must be removed as a matter of obligation. This is what nobody differs about.

By making consultation mandatory, the blessings that would benefit the Islamic state and its citizens could be measured by what the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said about consultation. Ibn 'Adī and al-Baihaqī have reported from Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās رضى الله تعالى عنه that when this verse was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ said: 'Allah and His Messenger do not need this consultation, but Allah Almighty has certainly made it a source of mercy for my community' (Bayān al-Qur'ān).

The purport is, if Allah Almighty had so willed, He would have conveyed everything to His Messenger through revelation. It was within His power not to leave any need for consultation in anything. But, it was in the best interest of the Muslim community that Allah Almighty helped establish the practice of consultation through His

Messenger. This is why many matters were left without any mention and about which no particular revelation was sent down. About these, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was instructed to seek consultation.

5. Consultation: Decision-Making after a difference of opinion:

What happens when opinions differ on a certain matter? Would it be decided on the contemporary parliamentary principle? Would the chief executive be compelled to enforce the decision of the majority? Or, would he have the right to take a course of action on the basis of powerful arguments and obvious welfare of the state, coming from any side, no matter whether in a majority or a minority? From the Holy Qur'ān and Ḥadīth and from the constant practice of the noble Prophet ﷺ and his Companions, it cannot be proved that the *amīr* of Muslims, their head of the state is helplessly bound by the decision of the majority. On the contrary, some hints from the Qur'ān and clarifications from the Ḥadīth and the practice of the Companions make it very evident that the *Amīr* can, in the event of a difference of opinion, use his discretion and go by any of the several courses of action, irrespective of the fact that it comes from the majority or the minority. There is no doubt that the *Amīr* will do his best to look into other opinions as well to satisfy himself fully, but should the majority come to agree on one opinion, this could, at times, become a source of satisfaction to him.

A close look at this verse would show that the Holy Prophet ﷺ, after he has been commanded to seek counsel, is being told: **فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ** : '...and once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah'. Here, the word, 'azm in 'azamta' meaning a firm decision, one way or the other, has been ascribed to the Holy Prophet ﷺ. The text does not say, 'azamtum, a second person plural, which would have suggested the participation of the Companions in the final making and enforcing of the decision. This hint proves that, once the process of consultation has been completed, the decision and its enforcement is the valid prerogative of the chief executive. There were times when Sayyidnā 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb would give his decision based on the opinion of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās, if his opinion was weightier argument-wise, something done even when present there would be Companions more senior than Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās in age, learning

and seniority. There were many occasions when the Holy Prophet ﷺ has preferred the opinions of the revered *Shaykhayn* Abu-Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنها against the majority of other Companions to the limit that people thought this verse was revealed for consultation with these two only. Ḥākim reports from Sayyidnā ibn 'Abbās in his Mustadrak:

عن ابن عباس فى قوله تعالى (وشاورهم فى الامر) قال ابوبكر و عمر
(رضى الله عنهما) (ابن كثير)

Ibn 'Abbās says, that the pronoun in '*shāwirhum*' (consult them) refers to Abū Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنها. (Ibn Kathīr)

The narration of Kalbi is clearer than this:

عن ابن عباس قال نزلت فى ابى بكر و عمر و كانا حوارى رسول الله ﷺ
و وزيريه و ابوى المسلمين

Ibn 'Abbās says that this verse has been revealed for consulting with Abū Bakr and 'Umar. These two were special Companions of the Messenger of Allah and his Ministers and the patrons of Muslims. (Ibn Kathīr)

The Messenger of Allah, may Allah's blessings and peace be upon him, had once addressed Sayyidnā Abū Bakr and 'Umar رضى الله عنها in the following words:

لواجتمعتما فى مشورة ما خلفتكما ط

When you agree on an opinion, I do not decide against you.
(Ibn Kathīr with reference to the Musnad of Aḥmad)

A doubt and its answer:

It is not likely that someone objects to this procedure of decision-making saying that all this is against democracy, a model of one-man rule and that this system might hurt the rights of the masses.

The answer is that the Islamic system of government has already taken care of this problem, for it has not given the masses the absolute right to make anyone they wish the *amīr* of an Islamic state. On the contrary, the mandate given to them requires that they must select a person they think is the best of all in knowledge, conduct, functional ability, Godliness and honesty, and then elect him to be the *amīr*. Now a person who has been elected in view of such elegant qualities and attributes should certainly not be subjected to restrictions usually

placed on the dishonest, the sinful and the debauch. Doing this would be against reason and justice, an act of discouragement to the genuine servant of people and a hinderance in the promotion of community-oriented action.

6. Do what you can, then place your trust in Allah:

At this point, specially at the conclusion of the verse, it is very important to bear in mind that this instruction has been given after having prescribed consultation in all important affairs including those of government. The crucial guideline given here is: Even after having made all preparations, when you finally decide to go ahead and do what has to be done, then that is the time when you do not simply (place your) trust in your reason, opinion, plans or preparedness but, instead of that, you should place your trust in Allah alone, for all these considered plans are in the direct control of the supreme Planner of all affairs and matters. With this in view, the less is said about human beings and their plans is better. Man himself is witness to the futility of his plans in the thousands of events in his life-time.

The statement, 'And once you have taken a decision, place your trust in Allah' also clarifies that placing one's trust in Allah does not mean that the efforts to provide means and make plans should be abandoned. The fact is that placing one's trust in Allah while leaving off means near at hand is contrary to the blessed practice of prophets, and against the teachings of the Holy Qur'ān. However, if one sits idle dreaming about distant means and irrelevant concerns, or if one relies solely on means and plans as effective agents and ignores the Prime Causer of means and the Planner-par-Excellence of all affairs and plans, then this would certainly be against *tawakkul*, the placing of trust in Allah.

Verses 160 - 171

إِنْ يَنْصُرْكُمُ اللَّهُ فَلَا غَالِبَ لَكُمْ وَإِنْ يَحْذِلْكُمْ فَمَنْ ذَا الَّذِي
يَنْصُرْكُمْ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَعَلَى اللَّهِ فَلْيَتَوَكَّلِ الْمُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿١٦٠﴾ وَمَا
كَانَ لِنَبِيِّ أَنْ يَعْجَلَ وَمَنْ يَعْجَلْ يَأْتِ بِمَا عَمَلَ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ثُمَّ
تُوفَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا كَسَبَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ ﴿١٦١﴾ أَفَمَنْ

اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَ اللَّهِ كَمَنْ بَاءَ بِسَخِطِ مَنِ اللَّهِ وَمَا وَهُ جَهَنَّمُ
 وَيُسَّ الْمُصِيرُ ﴿١٦٢﴾ هُمْ دَرَجَتٌ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بَصِيرٌ بِمَا
 يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦٣﴾ لَقَدْ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ إِذْ بَعَثَ فِيهِمْ
 رَسُولًا مِّنْ أَنفُسِهِمْ يَتْلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتِهِ وَيُزَكِّيهِمْ وَيُعَلِّمُهُمُ
 الْكِتَابَ وَالْحِكْمَةَ وَإِنْ كَانُوا مِنْ قَبْلُ لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿١٦٤﴾
 أَوْ لَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُّصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا
 قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنفُسِكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ
 ﴿١٦٥﴾ وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ يَوْمَ التَّقَى الْجَمْعِينَ فَبِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ
 الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٦٦﴾ وَلِيَعْلَمَ الَّذِينَ نَافَقُوا وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا
 قَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَوْ ادْفَعُوا قَالُوا لَوْ نَعْلَمُ قِتَالًا
 لَّاتَّبَعْنَاكُمْ هُمْ لِلْكَفْرِ يَوْمِيذٍ أَقْرَبُ مِنْهُمْ لِلْإِيمَانِ يَقُولُونَ
 بِأَفْوَاهِهِمْ مَا لَيْسَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يَكْتُمُونَ
 ﴿١٦٧﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا لِإِخْوَانِهِمْ وَقَعَدُوا لَوْ أَطَاعُونَا مَا قَاتَلُوا
 قُلْ فَادْرَأُوا عَنْ أَنفُسِكُمُ الْمَوْتَ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٦٨﴾
 وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتًا بَلْ أَحْيَاءُ
 عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرْزَقُونَ ﴿١٦٩﴾ فَرِحِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ
 وَيَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِالَّذِينَ لَمْ يَلْحَقُوا بِهِمْ مِنْ خَلْفِهِمْ أَلَّا خَوْفٌ
 عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ ﴿١٧٠﴾ يَسْتَبْشِرُونَ بِنِعْمَةِ مِنَ اللَّهِ
 وَفَضْلٍ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُضِيعُ أَجْرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧١﴾

If Allah helps you, there is none to overcome you. And if He abandons you, then, who is there who could help you after that? And in Allah the believers should place their trust. [160]

And it is not (conceivable) for a prophet to misappro-

priate the spoils. And whoever misappropriates, shall bring forth, on Doomsday, what he misappropriated. Then, everybody shall be paid, in full, what he has earned. And they shall not be wronged. [161]

How then, could one who submits to the pleasure of Allah be equal to him who returns with displeasure from Allah? And his ultimate place is the Fire. And what an evil end it is. [162]

They are of various ranks with Allah. And Allah is watchful of what they do. [163]

And Allah has surely conferred favour on the believers when He raised in their midst a messenger from among themselves who recites to them His verses and makes them pure and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while earlier, they were in open error. [164]

And how is it that, when you suffered a hardship the twice of which you had inflicted upon them, you say, "Where did this come from?" Say, "This is from your ownelves. Allah is surely Powerful over everything." [165]

And whatever you suffered on the day when the two troops faced each other was with the will of Allah and in order to know the believers [166] and in order to know those who are hypocrites. And it was said to them, 'Come on, fight in the way of Allah, or defend.' They said, "Had we known it to be a fight we would have certainly followed you." That day, they were nearer to disbelief than they were to Belief. They utter from their mouths what is not in their hearts. And Allah is the most-knowing of what they conceal. [167]

Those who said about their brethren, while themselves sitting, "Had they obeyed us, they would have not been killed." Say, "Then repel death from yourselves if you are true." [168]

And never take those killed in the way of Allah as dead. Rather, they are alive, with their Lord, well-provided, [169] happy with what Allah has given them of His grace; and they feel pleased with the good news, about those who, after them, could not join them, that there shall be no fear for them nor shall they grieve. [170]

They feel pleased with blessing from Allah, and grace, and with the fact that Allah would not let the reward of the believers be lost. [171]

In the first verse (160) here, the recurring sense of grief that gripped the noble Companions after what happened at the battle of Uhud is being removed through elegant counsel.

Verses 161-164 declare that the station of Allah's messenger is free of failings, that he exhibits the highest standard of trustworthiness, and that the very presence of his on the face of the earth is a great blessing and a favour shown to the people of the world.

Verses 165-167 explain the reason why Muslims faced hardships at Uhud, while refuting the view of the hypocrites alongwith it in verse 168.

Towards the end, in verses 169-171, it has been said that those who lay down their lives in the way of Allah achieve the ultimate success, real, permanent and full. Details follow.

Commentary:

The verse *مَا كَانَ لِنَبِيِّ أَنْ يَقْتُلَ* translated as, 'And it is not (conceivable) for a prophet to misappropriate the spoils - 161', has a particular background of its revelation. As a corollary, the problem of '*Ghulūl*', that is, misappropriation in the spoils, comes into focus.

Misappropriation in the spoils: A sin which cannot be ascribed to any prophet by any stretch of imagination:

The background, as narrated by al-Tirmidhī, is that a sheet was found missing from the spoils collected in the battle of Badr. Some people said that the sheet may have been, perhaps, taken by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. If those who said that were hypocrites, the source speaks for itself. May be, this came from a less-initiated Muslim thinking that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had the right to do that. Thereupon, this verse was revealed which said that *ghulūl* is a great sin to be punished severely on Doomsday and that the very thought of linking this sin to a prophet is an ugly audacity, for prophets are free of all sins (معصوم : *ma'ṣūm*).

The word, *ghulūl* is also used in the absolute sense for *khiyānah*, a breach of trust, (misappropriation, pilferage and stealing). This is also

applied particularly to misappropriation in the spoils as the crime of stealing from the spoils is far more serious as compared to common thefts and filchings since spoils belong to the whole Muslim army as a matter of right. So, whoever steals from it steals from hundreds and thousands of people. Even if there comes the thought of making amends at some later stage, it would be very difficult to give back to everyone what was due to be given, or seek their forgiveness for the injustice done. This is contrary to other types of thefts where the owner of the stolen property is known. In this case, there is the chance that one may repent, if Allah gives the ability to do so, and that which was stolen could be returned back to the owner, or one could, at the least, exonerate himself from the blame by seeking forgiveness from him. This is illustrated by what happened at one of the battles fought by Muslims. Someone who had secretly withheld a portion of wool from the spoils thought about it after the distribution of the spoils was over. He brought it before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم hoping to return it. But he, in spite of being 'mercy for the worlds' and far more generous to his community than fathers and mothers could ever dream to be for their children, he returned it back to him saying: How can I distribute it over the whole army now? Now it is you who would present yourself with it on the Day of Doom.

Therefore, the punishment for *ghulūl* or misappropriation is more severe as compared to common thefts. What else could be more severe for the misappropriator when he, before the eyes of the whole creation on the plains of resurrection and retribution, will find himself disgraced with what he had stolen all stacked on his neck? A narration from Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah appearing in Al-Bukhārī and Muslim reports that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: 'Watch out, lest I see one of you with a camel loaded round his neck (and the announcement being made that this person had stolen a camel from the spoils). If this person asks me to intercede on his behalf, I shall tell him frankly that I had conveyed what Allah had commanded, now I cannot do anything about it.'

May Allah protect us from this disgrace of the Day we rise again which, according to some narrations, will be so hard on those who face it that they would wish to be sent to the fires of *Jahannam* in lieu of this terrible disgrace.

Misappropriation in *Waqf* properties and government Treasuries comes under *Ghulū*: غلول

The same rule applies to mosques, religious schools and institutions, *khanqāhs* and properties of *awqāf* (endowments) since they represent the contribution of millions of Muslims. If an unfortunate misappropriator was to go about seeking to be forgiven for his evil act, how could he possibly go to each one of those millions. The same rule holds good for public or government treasury (*Bayt al-Māl*) because all citizens of a country have a right in it. One who steals from it steals from everyone. But, the problem is that these very holdings are such that a single owner does not sit over them. The caretakers become negligent. Avenues of pilferage abound. It is in such moneys and properties that a lot of thefts and misappropriations have become rampant all over the world with most people heedless to the evil end that awaits them. They do not realize that this is a terrible burden to haul onto the plains of Resurrection, not to speak of the punishment of Hell that is bound to come as a result of this crime. Then, last but not the least, comes the sad deprivation from the promised intercession of the Messenger of Allah. Let us all seek refuge from such a fate !

The Prophet of Islam: a great blessing for the Humanity

Verse 164 speaks of the great favour Allah has shown to the Muslims by sending the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم towards them. The basic functions assigned to him are also mentioned in the same verse. These are the same functions which were attributed to him in the prayer of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as referred to by the Holy Qur'ān in Sūrah al-Baqarah. The details of these functions have already been discussed in the first volume of this book under the said verse (2:129).

What is new in the present verse is the statement: 'And Allah has surely conferred favour on the believers'. Two points about this statement are worth mentioning here:

(1) The words 'on the believers' in this verse apparently mean that the advent of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was a favour conferred on the Muslims only while at another place the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been held as *رَحْمَةً لِّلْعَالَمِينَ*: 'the Mercy for all the worlds' which includes both Muslims and non-Muslims. In order to resolve this apparent contradiction one must understand that the particularization of this

quality with 'believers' in the present verse is very much like saying that the Holy Qur'ān is 'guidance for the God-fearing' (هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ) while the fact that the Holy Qur'ān is a guidance for the whole humanity is clearly proved by other verses of the Qur'ān. However, there are places where this universal status of the Qur'ān has been particularized to the God-fearing. There is a common reason operating at both places, that is, the beneficial coming of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is a great blessing and a great favour for the Muslim and the non-Muslim alike, just as the Qur'ān is a Book of Guidance for the entire humanity. but the true Muslims and the God-fearing are the only ones who derived the fullest benefit out of these. At some places, therefore, the blessing and the guidance, were particularized with them.

(2) In order to explain the primary statement in the verse which declares that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is the greatest possible blessing and favour for the believers or for the whole humanity, it can be said that the statement hardly needed any explanation. only if modern man was not all that blind to the spiritual side of life and, at the same time, was sacrificing every good thing for the sake of naked material gains. Had this not been so, every reasonable person would have found out the reality of this great blessing all by himself without anybody having to tell him about it. But, the problem is that modern man has turned out to be no more than the smartest animal among the animals of the world. Tell him about 'favour' and 'blessing' and he would immediately start seeing what fills his stomach and whets his desires. He has practically stopped thinking about the basic reality of his being which is *rūḥ*, his spirit. That something good should happen to it and that something can go wrong with it are concerns he pays no heed to, not in the least. Therefore, there is the need to explain that man is not simply a being of bones and flesh. That is certainly not his reality. The reality of man is his *rūḥ*, the spirit which is contained within him. So far as this *rūḥ* is there in his body, man is what man is. His claims to humanity stand proved. He may be weak or he may be dying, nobody can dare usurp his property or take his rights away from him. But, once this *rūḥ* leaves his body, he ceases to be man, no matter how strong and well-built he may be with all parts of his body in their ideal form and shape. His ceasing to be what he was means that he now has no personal right in his own property and possessions.

Prophets come into the world to nurture the human spirit correctly, to make human beings out of men so that actions which issue forth from their bodies turn out to be beneficial to humanity and that they do not go about the world hurting other human beings like beasts and snakes. Instead of that, they should also think about their end and start working for the everlasting life of the Hereafter. Our blessed Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم who leads the way among the great company of prophets عليهم السلام has a unique majesty when it comes to the mission of making men real human beings. This was exactly what he did during his Makkan life. The men he turned out formed a society of human beings which stands way ahead of even the angels. Never had the earth, nor the heavens, seen such men, each one of them, a living miracle of the Messenger of Allah, may the blessings of Allah be upon him. What happens after them? The answer is that he left behind his own footprints, and theirs, as well as teachings and the methods to institute and promote, which can be followed and acted upon. Those who do so sincerely and honestly can still reach the stations that were reached by the noble Companions. These teachings are there for the entire humanity to benefit from. Therefore, his having graced this world and his being born generous is a great favour shown to the universal kingdom of human beings, though true Muslims are the ones who have reaped the fullest benefit from these blessings.

The Wisdom behind the hardships of the Muslims at Uḥud

The subject of verse 165, *أَوَلَمْ أَصَابِكُمْ* translated as, 'And how is it that, when you suffered a hardship the twice of which you had inflicted upon them...' has appeared in several previous verses. Here, it comes for the sake of emphasis and further clarification because Muslims were very much disturbed as a result of this incident, so much so that some of them could not resist wondering why should they be suffering in that manner (أَنَّى هَذَا) while they were in the company of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, doing *Jihād*.

In this verse, Muslims are being reminded that the hardship they were facing that day was only half of what they had already inflicted earlier at the battle of Badr, for seventy Muslims were martyred at Uḥud while seventy disbelievers were killed at Badr and seventy

others from them were taken prisoners by Muslims. The purpose behind this reminder is that Muslims should think positively in their present state of depression in view of the fact that they had already won a battle, inflicting a loss on the enemy twice as much as they had themselves suffered at their hands. Now, a winner-like this need not surrender to sorrow and grief in the event defeat comes once, or less.

Secondly, and primarily too, the purpose of saying, *قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ أَنْفُسِكُمْ*, 'This is from your own selves' at the end of this verse, is to tell Muslims that the hardship they have faced is not because the enemy is stronger or his forces overwhelming, but all that has been caused by some of their own shortcomings, that is, they fell short in obeying the command of the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم*.

Immediately later, in verse 166, the words *fa bi idhnillāhi*: *فَبِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ* indicate that whatever happened there was with the leave and will of Allah Almighty operating behind which are many wise divine arrangements, some of them having been explained earlier. One such wise arrangement is that Allah will 'see' His true believers, and the hypocrites too, that is, the sincerity of Muslims and the hypocrisy of the hypocrites will become so clear that everybody could see it for himself. Here, the reference to Allah's knowing or seeing means seeing in the perspective of our own sense-experience in the mortal world. Otherwise, as far as Allah is concerned, He knows and sees everything, all the time. So, the wise arrangement became all the more clear when, at the time of the trial, the hypocrites bowed out of the harm's way while true Muslims stood undaunted in the middle of the battle front. Incidentally, there is another cause of comfort here in the martyrdom of Muslims in the battle, for Allah has conferred such rewards on them so that others should envy them. So, very appropriately, in: *وَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ قُتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ*, the special merits of martyrs have been taken up in the verse that follows (169).

The special merits and ranks of those who sacrifice their lives in the way of Allah

In addition to this statement of the Holy Qur'an, the merits of the martyrs have been taken up in great detail in sound *aḥādīth*. According to Imām Al-Qurtubī, the *shuhadā'* (martyrs) have different ranks and states of being which should be taken into consideration

while looking at descriptions in *Hadīth* narrations.

The very first distinction of martyrs mentioned here is that they have not died; rather, they have begun to live eternally. At this point, it is worth noticing that their death and burial in a grave is something physically witnessed and realized by many, yet the Qur'ān has, in several verses, clearly instructed that they should not be addressed or taken as dead. What does this mean? If this was supposed to be an interim state of life, after death and before resurrection, referred to as the state of *Barzakh* in Islamic terminology, that would not take us very far, for that is something commonly experienced by believers and disbelievers both, when the spirit continues to live after physical death and goes through a question-answer situation following which the true and the righteous among Muslims are welcomed to comfort and the disbelievers and the sinners are consigned to the punishment of the grave. This is proved by the Qur'ān and Sunnah. Now, that the interim life of *Barzakh* is established as common to all, what is so special about *shuhadā'* (martyrs) ?

The answer is given by this very verse where it is said that the *shuhadā'*, i.e., those killed in the way of Allah, are blessed with provisions of Paradise from Him, and it is obvious that '*rizq*' (provision or sustenance) is needed by and given to the living. From here we know that sustenance starts reaching the *shahīd* (martyr) immediately after the *shahīd* leaves the frame of his life in the mortal world. In this manner, the *shahīd* enters into a special type of life right away from that point of time, something which has a status distinct from that of 'the dead' of our common experience (Qurṭubī).

There are no easy answers to questions such as - what is that distinct status and what is the nature of that life? The only answer is that its reality remains unknown to all except to the Creator of the universe; nobody has the power to know what is it - nor is there, for that matter, any need to know. Nevertheless, there are times when the effect of their special life does show up on their bodies buried in this world, that is, the earth they rest in does not eat them up but leaves them good and intact (Qurṭubī). There have been many incidents where this phenomena has been physically witnessed.

So, in summation, their first merit as pointed out in this verse is

their distinct perennial life; the second is their being well-provided from Allah and the third (فَرِحِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ) is that they shall always be happy with Allah's blessings and grace. The fourth (وَسَيَجْعَلُونَ بِالذِّكْرِ لَكُمْ) merit is the good news given to them about their relatives and circle of friends they left behind in the mortal world that they too shall deserve the same blessings and ranks with their Lord if they remain good in deeds and are active in *Jihād* (170-171).

Al-Suddī says that a *shahīd* is informed beforehand when one of his close friend or relative is about to die. The news that a certain person was coming to them makes them as happy as one would usually be when an old friend, long separated by time and distance, comes to meet him.

The background of the revelation of this verse as narrated by Abū Dawūd on sound authorities from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās is as follows. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said to the noble Companions: 'When your brothers-in-faith fell martyrs at the battle of Uḥud, Allah Almighty placed their spirits in the bodies of green birds and set them free. They get their sustenance from the streams and fruit-trees of the Paradise following which they return to special candelabrum held suspending for them underneath the 'throne' ('*arsh*) of the All-Merciful. When they noticed the luxury of their life there, they said, 'Can anyone tell them (their grieving friends and relatives in the world) about how we live here so that they stop grieving about us and go about striding in *Jihād* as we did.' Allah Almighty said, 'We shall let them know about this state of yours.' Thereupon, this verse was revealed (Qurṭubī).

Verses 172 - 175

الَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا أَصَابَهُمُ الْقَرْحُ
 لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّقُوا أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٢﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالَ
 لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ فَزَادَهُمْ
 إِيمَانًا وَقَالُوا حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ ﴿١٧٣﴾ فَانْقَلَبُوا
 بِنِعْمَةِ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ لَمْ يَمَسَّسْهُمْ سُوءٌ ۖ وَاتَّبَعُوا رِضْوَانَ

اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ ذُو فَضْلٍ عَظِيمٍ ﴿١٧٤﴾ إِنَّمَا ذَلِكُمُ الشَّيْطَانُ يُخَوِّفُ
أَوْلِيَاءَهُ ۗ فَلَا تَخَافُوهُمْ وَخَافُوا مِنِّي إِن كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿١٧٥﴾

Those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger, even after they had received the wound, for those of them who did good and feared Allah there is a great reward [172] -- those to whom people said, "The people have gathered against you; so, fear them." It increased them in Faith and they said, "Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in." [173]

So, they returned with bounty from Allah, and grace, with no evil having even touched them -- and submitted to the pleasure of Allah. And Allah is the Lord of great bounty. [174]

It is none but that Satan who frightens (you) of his friends. So, do not fear them. And fear Me if you are believers. [175]

Commentary :

The subject of the previous verse was the battle of Uḥud connected with which is the battle of Ḥamrā' al-Asad which forms the subject of the present verse. Ḥamrā' al-Asad is a place eight miles away from Madīnah.

The background of this event, mentioned briefly under introductory remarks about verse 151, is that the disbelievers of Makkah left the battlefield of Uḥud, reached a certain distance where they realized that they had made a mistake by retreating. Since they had almost won the battle, they should have gone for the final assault and finished off the Muslim forces. The thought so gripped them that they started getting ready to march back to Madīnah. But, Allah Almighty cast such awe and fear in their hearts that they found it more convenient to march back home to Makkah. They still left a message with a passing group of travellers to Madīnah asking them to give a warning to Muslims that they were coming back after them with all their awesome strength. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم found this out through a revelation and he reached Hamrā' al-Asad in hot pursuit (Ibn Jarīr, cited by Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī).

It appears in Tafsīr al-Qurṭubī that, on the second day of Uḥud, the

Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم made an announcement before his *mujāhidīn* that they have to pursue the disbelievers but the attacking company will be composed of those who were active participants in yesterday's battle. Two hundred *mujāhidīn* rose following this announcement.

A report in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī states that seventy people stood up following the announcement by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as to who was ready to go after the disbelievers. Among those were people who had been severely wounded in the battle a day earlier, some even had to be helped in walking. This blessed company marched to apprehend the disbelievers. When they reached Ḥamrā' al-Asad, they met Nu'aym ibn Mas'ūd who told them that Abū Sufyān has assembled together a much larger force once again and he is all set to invade Madīnah and eliminate its people. Injury-ridden and much weakened Companions heard this disturbing news yet it was in one voice that they said: 'We do not know him': *حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ*: (Allah is sufficient for us and He is the best caretaker.)

On the one hand there was this news broken to Muslims so they get terrorized, but nothing of this sort happened to them. On the other hand, there was the instance of Ma'bad al-Khuzā'ī, a man from the tribe of Banī Khuzā'ah. He was on his way to Makkah. Though not a Muslim, he was a well-wisher of Muslims - his tribe was an ally of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. So, when he saw Abū Sufyān repenting his retreat from Madīnah and all too resolved to go back and fight, he told Abū Sufyān: 'You are making a mistake by thinking that Muslim forces have become weak. I have just passed by a huge army of theirs camped at Ḥamrā' al-Asad. Armed with an array of men and materials, they are about to set out in hot pursuit against you.' This report from him put the awe of Muslim forces in his heart.

This event has been related in three verses (172-174) given above. It has been said in the first verse (172) that despite injuries and hardships from the Battle of Uḥud, when Allah and His Messenger called them up for another *Jihād*, they were ready for that too. Worth noticing at this point is the fact that the Muslims being praised here had two distinguishing features. The first one appears in *مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا أَصَابَهُمُ* (even after they had received the wound) which means that those

who responded to the call of Allah and His Messenger were people wounded at the Battle of Badr. Seventy of their brave companions had met their martyrdom on the battlefield while they themselves were riddled with injuries all over their bodies, yet when they were called to serve again, they immediately agreed to join the *Jihād*.

The second distinctive feature has been mentioned in the words: *لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا مِنْهُمْ وَاتَّقُوا* (for them who did good and feared Allah) which established that these people were not simply some great achievers on the battlefield striving incessantly and staking their lives for a noble cause, but they also imbibed in their person the highest virtues of *Ihsān* (righteous conduct) and *Taqwā* (fear of Allah). Thus, this very blessed combination of virtues is the cause of their great reward.

Removing a doubt

Let there be no doubt about the word: *مِنْهُمْ* (literally 'of them') used here. It should not be taken to mean that all these people were not armed with the virtues of *Ihsān* and *Taqwā* - only some of them were. The simple reason is that the preposition *مِنْ* : *min* (of, some of) used here is not divisive or partitive. It is, rather, doubtlessly narrative which is confirmed by the very opening words of this very verse: *الَّذِينَ استَجَابُوا* (Those who responded to the call). From this, it is clear that such response and submission simply cannot materialize without having the qualities of *Ihsān* and *Taqwā* ingrained in one's personality. That is why most commentators have declared that the preposition *مِنْ* : *min* (of, some of) has been used here in the narrative sense. In short, the essential meaning of the verse is that all these people had rewards waiting for them.

Striving to achieve something good even at the cost of one's life is not enough unless there is total sincerity behind it

Anyway, this particular mode of address leads us to an essential rule of conduct which is: No matter how good is an effort made and no matter how many sacrifices of wealth and life one makes to achieve that end, it can be reward-worthy in the sight of Allah only when it is simultaneously backed by *Ihsān* and *Taqwā*. Therefore, the essence of the observation is that the deed undertaken must be for the good pleasure of Allah alone. Otherwise simple feats of bravery, some of which come even at the cost of one's dear life, are just about no lesser

among disbelievers as well.

In its ultimate reality, the command of the Messenger of Allah is the command of Allah.

In this event, it will be recalled that the command to pursue the disbelievers was given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. This does not find mention in any verse of the Holy Qur'an. But, in this particular verse, when the obedience of those people is praised, the command was attributed to both Allah and His Messenger as evident from the words of the text: الَّذِينَ اسْتَجَابُوا لِلَّهِ وَالرَّسُولِ (172): 'Those who responded to the call of Allah and the Messenger. This proves very clearly that the command which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم gives is also the command of Allah even though it has not been mentioned in the Book of Allah.

As for those irreligious deviants who reject *Hadīth* and belittle the status of the Messenger of Allah by restricting it to that of a courier (God forbid), a simple statement, that Allah Almighty has openly declared the command of the Messenger as His own, should be enough to understand the truth - if understanding is what they seek. This statement, moreover, also makes it clear that the Messenger can, also by himself and at his discretion, set up rules in accordance with expedient considerations, and all such rules have the same status as that enjoyed by the commandments of Allah.

The Definition of *Ihsān*

Mentioned several times during the comments given above, the word *Ihsān* generally means the performance of good deeds with the best of effort and discretion. However, the basic definition of *Ihsān* was given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم himself as reported in the well-known *hadīth* of Jibrā'īl'. The actual words are:

أَنْ تَعْبُدَ اللَّهَ كَأَنَّكَ تَرَاهُ فَإِنْ لَمْ تَكُنْ تَرَاهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَرَاكَ

That is, worship Allah as if you are seeing Him; and if it is not possible for you to (imagine that you) see Him, then, (imagine that) He sees you anyway.

The Definition of *Taqwā*

The word, *Taqwā*, has been interpreted variously but the most comprehensive definition is what was given by the blessed Companion 'Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه when Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه asked him as

to what *Taqwā* really was. Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b said: 'O Commander of the Faithful, you may have certainly passed by pathways full of thorns, have you not?' Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه said, 'Several times, of course.' Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b رضى الله عنه asked, 'What did you do at that time?' Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه said, 'I folded the hang of my dress and walked carefully.' Sayyidnā Ubayy ibn Ka'b said, 'Enough. You said it. This is what *Taqwā* means. This mortal world of ours is a bed of thorns, full of the thorns of sins, therefore, one should live in this world in a way that one does not get entangled in the thorns of sin. The name of this attitude to life is *Taqwā*, the highest capital gain one can dream of.' The blessed Companion, Sayyidnā Abū al-Dardā' رضى الله عنه used to recite the following verse quite often:

يَقُولُ الْمَرْءُ فَإِنِّي وَمَالِي ، وَتَقْوَى اللَّهِ أَفْضَلُ مَا اسْتَفَادَا

"People say, 'my gain' and 'my money' while, really, the fear of Allah (*Taqwā*) is the best of what is gained."

In the second verse (173), more praises have been showered on the noble Companions, may Allah be pleased with them all, who so courageously stepped forward to join this *Jihād*. The words of the verse are:

الَّذِينَ قَالَ لَهُمُ النَّاسُ إِنَّ النَّاسَ قَدْ جَمَعُوا لَكُمْ فَاخْشَوْهُمْ، فَزَادَهُمْ إِيمَانًا

--- those to whom people said, "The people have gathered against you; so, fear them." It increased them in Faith ...

That is, blessed are such people who heard the news that the enemy has assembled a big fighting force against them and also the advice that they should fear them and avoid fighting - still, this news further increased the fervour of their faith. The reason is simple: When these blessed people had agreed to obey Allah and His Messenger, they had realized right from day one that the path they have chosen to travel on is full of dangers. There will be difficulties and impediments at every step. Their passage will not be easy. They will be stopped. Even armed efforts will be made to suppress their revolutionary movement. Thus, when these noble people came across such hardships, the power of their Faith increased to levels higher than before and, as a result, they worked harder, more selflessly, more than ever.

As obvious, the Faith of these noble souls was perfect from the very first day they had embraced Islam, therefore, the reference to the increase in Faith in these two verses (172-173) means the increase in the qualitative contents and end-results of Faith. Even this state of the Companions who readily responded to the call of Allah and His Messenger has been specially mentioned at this point by saying that they kept reciting: *حَدَّثَنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (173) all along their march to the *Jihād* mission. The sentence means: Allah is all-sufficient for us and the best one to trust in.

Let us consider an important rule of conduct at this point. It is a fact and we know it too well that no one in this world can claim to have placed his trust in Allah, a degree more pronounced than the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and his noble Companions. But, the form and manner of such trust was different. He would never think of sitting back forsaking all physical means available and end up saying: Allah is all-sufficient for us - He will bless us with victory while we sit out and do nothing! No. This did not work like that. Instead, he gathered the noble Companions together, infused a new fighting spirit in the hearts of those injured, prepared them for the *Jihād*, both materially and spiritually before marching out. It means that he collected and used all physical means which were available to him and it was only after that he said: 'Allah is all-sufficient for us.' This, then, is the most authentic form of *Tawakkul* (Trust in Allah) taught by the Holy Qur'an, personally practiced by the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and this was what he made others around him do. All physical means which we have in the life of this world are blessings from Allah. Rejecting or abandoning them amounts to being ungrateful to Him. Placing trust in Allah after having forsaken available physical means is no Sunnah (established practice) of the Messenger of Allah *صلى الله عليه وسلم*. However, if there be someone comprehensively overwhelmed by his state of being, he could be deemed as excusable while being unable to observe this precept of the Shari'ah. Otherwise, the most sound practice is no more than what has been curtly expressed in a Persian poetic line:

برتوکل زانوعے اشتریه بند

Before placing trust, do tie your camel.

The Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* has himself stated the meaning of

this very verse: *حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (173) 'Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in,' while deciding a case reported in *Ḥadīth* :

As reported by Sayyidnā 'Awf ibn Mālik رضى الله عنه , a case involving two men came up for hearing before the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم . He gave his verdict. The man who lost the case heard the verdict in perfect peace and started walking out with the words: *حَسْبِيَ اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (Allah is all-sufficient for me, and the best one to trust in) on his lips. The Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم asked: 'Bring this man to me.' He said to him:

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَلُومُ عَلَى الْعَجْزِ وَلَكِنَّ عَلَيْكَ بِالْكَفَيْسِ فَإِذَا غَلَبَكَ أَمْرٌ فَقُلْ حَسْبِيَ
اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ

Allah censures inaction but it is your duty to use means, following which, when you find yourself powerless against odds, then say: 'Allah is all-sufficient for me, and the best one to trust in.'

The third verse (174) recounts the blessings which descended upon these noble Companions for their brave response to the call of *Jihād* and for saying: *حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ* (Allah is all-sufficient for us, and the best one to trust in). It was said:

فَانْقَلَبُوا بِنِعْمَةٍ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَفَضْلٍ لَمْ يَمَسُّهُمْ سُوءٌ وَاتَّبَعُوا رِضْوَانَ اللَّهِ

So, they returned with bounty from Allah, and grace, with no evil having even touched them -- and submitted to the pleasure of Allah.

Allah Almighty bestowed on them three blessings:

1. Such awe and terror was placed in the hearts of disbelievers that they ran away because of which the Companions remained protected against the rigours of fighting on the battlefield. Allah Almighty has used the very word *Ni'mah* for what we refer to as blessing.

2. The second blessing conferred on them was the opportunity to engage in trading in the market of Ḥamrā' al-Asad. The benefits yielded by such financial transactions were called '*Faql*' or the bounty from Allah.

3. The third and the highest of the three blessings was the attainment of the pleasure of Allah which these blessed souls received in

this *Jihād* in a special manner.

حَسْبُنَا اللَّهُ وَنِعْمَ الْوَكِيلُ : *Hasbunallāhu wa ni'mal-wakīl*: A wonderful prayer for all of us

The blessings of this prayer cited by the Holy Qur'an were not limited to the Companions of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in any restrictive sense. The fact is that anyone who recites this prayer devotedly with a genuine sense of faith will share in such blessings.

Muslim scholars and spiritual masters have said that one who recites this verse a thousand times with true faith, and prays, will find that Allah Almighty has not rejected his prayer. Reciting this verse under the stress of frustrations and difficulties is a proven panacea.

The fourth verse (175) tells Muslims that the real agent behind the report that the disbelievers are coming back is Satan himself who would love to see Muslims overawed. In other words, Satan is threatening Muslims with the strength of his friends - his cohorts, the disbelievers. Thus, one of the two objects of the verb يُخَوِّفُ : *yukhawwifū* [frightens (you)] has been left out in the text. The one mentioned is in 'auliyā'ahū' (of his friends) while the one understood but not mentioned is 'you' as it would be in يُخَوِّفُكُمْ : *yukhawwifukum* (frightens you).

In the end, the verse exhorts Muslims not to fear such threats. What is necessary is that Muslims must continue fearing Allah, the natural outcome of which will be that a true Muslim will always think twice before embarking on anything that means disobedience to Allah. The truth of the matter is that, with Allah's help and support on ones' side, no harm can come from any side.

The Fear of Allah: What does it mean?

The imperative in the present verse obligates Muslims that they must always keep fearing Allah. In another verse, يَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ قَوْلِهِمْ (They fear their Lord above them-16:50) those who do so have been praised. Some revered elders have explained it by saying that fearing Allah does not mean that one should be scared stiff or sit back in tears. Far from it, a God-fearing person is one who leaves everything which may become a source of Allah's displeasure or punishment.

Abū 'Alī al-Daqqāq, may Allāh's mercy be upon him, says that Abū

Bakr ibn al-Fuwarak was sick so he paid him a visit. When Abū Bakr saw him, he was in tears. Abū 'Alī consoled him by saying that there was nothing to worry about, Allah Almighty will give him health soon enough. Abū Bakr corrected Abū 'Alī's impression and said that he was certainly not weeping because of any fear of death. What he really worried about was his fate after death lest he may be awarded some punishment then. (Qurtubī)

Verses 176 - 178

وَلَا يَحْزُنكَ الَّذِينَ يُسَارِعُونَ فِي الْكُفْرِ إِنَّهُمْ لَنْ يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَلَّا يَجْعَلَ لَهُمْ حِطًّا فِي الْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٦﴾ إِنَّ الَّذِينَ اشْتَرُوا الْكُفْرَ بِالْإِيمَانِ لَنْ يَضُرُّوا اللَّهَ شَيْئًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٧٧﴾ وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُغْنِي لَهُمْ حَيْرٌ لَأَنْفُسِهِمْ ، إِنَّمَا نُغْنِي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُهِينٌ ﴿١٧٨﴾

Those who hasten towards disbelief should not make you grieve. They cannot harm Allah at all. Allah intends not to spare for them any share in the Hereafter. And for them there is a mighty punishment. [176] Certainly, those who bought disbelief in exchange of Belief cannot harm Allah at all. And for them there is a painful punishment. [177] And those who disbelieve should not think that the time We give them is good for them. In fact, We give them time only that they may increase in sin. And for them there is a humiliating punishment. [178]

Previous verses mentioned the treachery and ill-will of the hypocrites. The present verses comfort the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, asking him not to grieve over the mischiefs made by the disbelievers for they cannot harm him in any way.

The last verse (178) carries a refutation of the false notion about disbelievers: How can they, while obviously prospering in the present world, be regarded as victims of Allah's wrath and rejection?

Commentary

Material affluence of disbelievers is, after all, an extension of Divine punishment

Let there be no doubt about the worldly well-being of disbelievers for one may be tempted to believe that since Allah Almighty has given respite, long life, security and comfort to disbelievers so that they go on increasing in their crimes, they should, then, be taken as innocent. Far from it, because the verse means that Muslims should not feel upset about this temporary respite and affluence given to disbelievers as all this worldly wealth and power in their hands - despite their disbelief and disobedience - is nothing but a form of the very punishment destined for them. Today, they do not realize it. But, once they leave the mortal world, they would. They would discover to their dismay that all those articles of comfort they acquired and spent in sin were, in reality, the very embers of Hell. This is corroborated by several other verses of the Qur'ān. For instance, in *إِنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُعَذِّبَهُمْ بِهَا* (Allah intends to punish them with it - 9:55) which means that the wealth and power of disbelievers and their vulgarly luxurious consumerism should not be a matter of pride for them for this is nothing but an instalment of that very punishment from Allah which will cause their punishment in the Hereafter to increase.

Verse 179

مَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيَذَرَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ عَلَىٰ مَا أَنْتُمْ عَلَيْهِ حَتَّىٰ يَمِيزَ
الْخَبِيثَ مِنَ الطَّيِّبِ ۚ وَمَا كَانَ اللَّهُ لِيُطْلِعَكُمْ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ
وَلَكِنَّ اللَّهَ يَجْتَسِي مِن رُّسُلِهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ فَآمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ
وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ وَإِن تَوَمَّنُوا ۖ فَتَقَفُوا فَلَكُمْ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ ﴿١٧٩﴾

Allah is not to leave the believers in what you are in unless He separates the impure from the pure. And Allah is not to inform you of the unseen. But Allah selects from His messengers whom He wills. So, believe in Allah and His messengers. And if you believe, and fear Allah, then, for you there is a great reward. [179]

The previous verse (178) answered the question about disbelievers as to why they, being the detested ones in the sight of Allah, are in possession of all sort of wealth, property and other means of luxurious

living?

The present verse (179), in sharp contrast, removes the doubt about true believers as to why they, being the favoured servants of Allah, are tested with all sorts of hardships? Being favoured required that they should have been the ones living in comfort surrounded by its paraphernalia !

Commentary

The wisdom of making a believer distinct from a hypocrite through practical demonstration rather than through a revelation.

It has been said in this verse that Allah Almighty has His way of making a sincere believer distinct from a hypocrite through which He generates such situations of hardship as would expose the hypocrisy of the hypocrites practically. This distinction, though, could also be made by identifying hypocrites by name through a revelation. But, the later course was not taken because it would have not been wise. The whole range of wisdom behind what Allah does is known to Him alone. However, one wise consideration in the present context could be: If Muslims were told about a person being a hypocrite through revelation, they would have had no difficulty in dealing with them carefully, but this would have not provided them with a clearly demonstrated proof necessarily acceptable to the hypocrites - for, they would have still insisted: 'You are wrong. We are true Muslims.'

Contrary to this, the distinction was made practically. The introduction of hardship put the hypocrites to test in which they failed and ran away. Their hypocrisy was demonstrated and exposed practically and openly. Now they did not have the cheek to claim that they were true, sincere and believing Muslims.

The manner in which the hypocrites were exposed yielded yet another benefit for Muslims when their formal relationship was also severed with the hypocrites. Otherwise, maintaining a state of discord in the heart with a veneer of formal social dealing would have been equally harmful ethically.

The Unseen when communicated to anyone is no Knowledge of the Unseen as such

This verse tells us that Allah Almighty does not inform everyone

about Unseen matters through the medium of revelation (*Wahy*). However, He does inform His chosen prophets in this manner. From this, let no one hasten to doubt that prophets too have become sharers in the Knowledge of the Unseen or the knowers of the Unseen! The reason is that the Knowledge of the Unseen which is particularly attributed to the being of Allah Almighty cannot be taken as being shared by any created being. Doing so is *Shirk* (the crime of ascribing partners to Allah). The particular Knowledge is fortified by two conditions:

1. This should be intrinsic to the being, not given by anyone else.

2. This has to be all-comprehensive, encompassing all universes, the past and the future - a Knowledge that covers even the minutest particle without any possibility of anything remaining hidden from it. As for things of the Unseen the information of which is given to His prophets by Allah Almighty through the medium of revelation (*Wahy*), they are not, really, the Knowledge of the Unseen as such. They are, rather, news of the Unseen given to prophets, something about which the Holy Qur'ān itself has used the expression *أَنْبَاءُ الْغَيْبِ* (news or reports of the Unseen) at several places :

مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ

... a part of the news of the Unseen We reveal to you. (11:49)

Verses 180 - 186

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَبْخُلُونَ بِمَا أَنهَمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا لَّهُمْ ۗ بَلْ هُوَ شَرٌّ لَّهُمْ ۗ سَيُطَوَّقُونَ مَا بَخَلُوا بِهِ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ ۗ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاتُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٨٠﴾
 لَقَدْ سَمِعَ اللَّهُ قَوْلَ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ فَقِيرٌ وَنَحْنُ أَغْنِيَاءُ ۗ سَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَالُوا وَقَتْلَهُمُ الْأَنْبِيَاءَ بِغَيْرِ حَقٍّ ۗ وَنَقُولُ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ ﴿١٨١﴾ ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ آيْدِيكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ ﴿١٨٢﴾ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَاهَدَ ابْنَنَا آلًا

نُؤْمِنَ لِرَسُولٍ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِينَا بِقُرْبَانٍ تَأْكُلُهُ النَّارُ قُلْ قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ
 رَسُولٌ مِّن قَبْلِي بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَإِلَّذِي قُلْتُمْ فَلِمَ قَتَلْتُمُوهُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ
 صَادِقِينَ ﴿١٨٣﴾ فَإِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقَدْ كَذَّبَ رَسُولٌ مِّن قَبْلِكَ جَاءُوا
 بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ وَالْكِتَابِ الْمُنِيرِ ﴿١٨٤﴾ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ
 وَإِنَّمَا تُوَفَّقُونَ أُجُورَكُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ فَمَنْ زُحْزِحَ عَنِ النَّارِ
 وَأُدْخِلَ الْجَنَّةَ فَقَدْ فَازَ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ
 ﴿١٨٥﴾ لَتَبْلُوَنَّ فِيهِ أَمْوَالِكُمْ وَأَنفُسِكُمْ وَلَتَسْمَعَنَّ مِنَ الَّذِينَ
 أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِن قَبْلِكُمْ وَمِن الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا أَذَىٰ كَثِيرًا وَإِنْ
 تَصَبَّرُوا وَتَتَّقُوا فَإِنَّ ذَلِكَ مِنْ عَزْمِ الْأُمُورِ ﴿١٨٦﴾

And those who are miserly with what Allah has given them out of His grace should not take it as good for them. Instead, it is bad for them. They shall be forced, on the Doomsday, to put on round their necks the shackles of what they were miserly with. And to Allah belongs the inheritance of the heavens and the earth. And of what you do, Allah is All-Aware. [180]

Allah has surely heard the saying of those who said, "Allah is poor and we are rich." We shall write down what they said, and their killing of the prophets unjustly; and We shall say, "Taste the punishment of the flaming fire. [181] This is due to what your hands sent ahead and that Allah is not cruel to the slaves." [182]

(There are) those who said, "Surely, Allah directed us that we should not believe in a messenger unless he comes to us with an offering to be eaten up by the fire." Say, "A number of messengers have come to you, before me, with clear signs and with what you have said. So, why did you kill them, if you are true? [183]

Then if they belie you, so messengers have been belied before you. They came with clear signs and the Scriptures and light giving Book. [184]

Every soul has to taste death. And it is on the Doomsday that you shall be paid your rewards in full. So, whoever has been kept away from the Fire and admitted to Paradise, he has really succeeded. And the wordly life is nothing but an asset, full of illusion. [185]

Of course, you shall be tested in your wealth and yourselves. And, of course, you shall hear much of what hurts, from those who have been given the Book before you and from those who associate (others with Allah). And if you observe patience and fear Allah, then these are among matters of determination. [186]

Anomalies in the conduct of Jews were mentioned at the beginning of Sūrah 'Āl-'Imrān (21-25). The text now reverts back to the same subject. The verses cited above carry related topics. In between, there are words of comfort for the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم as well as those giving good counsel to Muslims.

Commentary

The first (180) of the seven verses (180-186) appearing here repudiates miserliness and carries a warning for those who practice it.

The Definition of Miserliness and the punishment it brings

In the terminology of the Shari'ah of Islam, miserliness (*Bukhl*) refers to the act of not spending that which it is obligatory to spend in the way of Allah. Therefore, miserliness is forbidden (*ḥarām*). Besides, it carries a stern warning of Hell for its practitioners. As for occasions where spending is not obligatory (*wājib*) but only recommended (*mustahabb*), then not spending there is not included under the miserliness which is forbidden. However, this too is called miserliness in its general sense. As said earlier, this kind of miserliness is not forbidden (*ḥarām*) but against the preferred choice (*khilāf aulā*) it certainly is.

Appearing in *Hadīth*, there is another word - *Shuḥḥ* - also used in the sense of *Bukhl* or miserliness. By definition, it means not spending what it was obligatory to spend - one may go even farther than that by remaining consumed with greed to increase one's wealth. This then, shall be a crime much more severe than ordinary miserliness. Therefore, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

لَا يَجْتَمِعُ شُحٌّ وَإِيمَانٌ فِي قَلْبِ رَجُلٍ مُسْلِمٍ أَبَدًا

That is, miserliness (*shuḥḥ*) and faith ('*Īmān*) can never coexist in the heart of a Muslim. (Qurtubī)

The punishment for miserliness (*Bukhl*) mentioned in this verse: 'They shall be forced, on the Doomsday, to put on round their necks the shackles of what they were miserly with' has been explained by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in the following words reported by Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه :

'Anyone Allah blessed with some wealth and who did not pay the *zakāh* due on it properly will find his or her wealth turn into a deadly snake shackled round the neck chomping at the person's mouth from one to the other end of the lips and saying: 'I am your wealth. I am your capital gain.' Thereafter, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم recited this verse (180). (Al-Nasā'ī, from Tafsīr al-Qurtubī)

The second verse (18) warns Jews against their grave act of effrontery and mentions its punishment. According to the background of the event, when the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم presented the Qur'ānic injunctions relating to *Zakāh* and *Ṣadaqāt* (charities), the arrogant Jews started saying that Allah had surely become poor and needy while they were rich, or else why would He go about asking us to give? We seek refuge with Allah from such effrontery. Obviously, they would have hardly believed in the absurd statement they made but, in all likelihood, they would have said so to prove that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم was, God forbid, false in his statement. Their argument was: If these verses of the Qur'ān are true, then, it necessarily follows that Allah be poor and needy! This absurd argument of theirs being false in itself was not worth responding to because the injunction of Allah Almighty was not for His benefit; it was, rather, for the benefit of the owners of wealth themselves in this world and the hereafter. But, it was termed as giving loan to Allah elsewhere because repayment of a loan is necessary and certain in the sight of every good person. Similar is the case of charity given by someone, the repayment of which Allah Almighty takes upon Himself as if it was the payment of loan taken from someone. Anyone who believes in Allah Almighty as the Creator and Master of everything would never stoop to entertain the kind of doubt from these words of the verse which is there in the saying of the insolent Jews. For this reason, the

Qur'ān has certainly refrained from answering this doubt. Instead, it has simply restricted itself to announcing that they shall be apprehended and punished for this effrontery of theirs, for having falsified the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and for having made fun of him. It was said that their insolent words will be put on record in 'writing' so that the final evidence goes against them on the Day of Judgment and they are punished for what they did. Otherwise, Allah Almighty needs no writing.

Along with this act of effrontery committed by the Jews, yet another crime of theirs has been mentioned, that is, they not only falsified the prophets and mocked at them, they even went to the limit of killing them! That such people could falsify and flout any prophet or messenger of Allah hardly remains surprising.

Staying emotionally satisfied with disbelief in and disobedience to Allah is also an equally grave sin

Worth noticing at this point is the fact that those being addressed by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Qur'ān are the Jews of Madīnah while the incident of the killing of prophets belongs to a time much earlier than theirs, that is, to the time of Sayyidnā Yaḥyā and Sayyidnā Zakariyyā, may peace be on them. Now, the question is: How is it that the crime of the killing of the prophets referred to in this verse was attributed to these addressees? The reason is: The Jews of Madīnah were quite satisfied with this act committed by their Jewish predecessors, therefore, they too were counted as those who fall under the injunction governing killers of prophets.

Imām al-Qurṭubī has said in his *Tafsīr* that 'remaining satisfied with disbelief (*kufr*) is also included under disbelief and disobedience' which is a major juristic ruling in Islam. A saying of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم explains it further. He said:

'When a sin is committed on God's earth, following which, the person who is present on the spot opposes that sin and considers it to be bad, then, such a person shall be deemed as not present there, that is, he is no accomplice in their sin. And, a person who, though not present physically yet is quite satisfied with this act of sinners, then, this person shall be considered, despite his absence (from the scene of sin), an accomplice in their sin.'

In the later part of the present verse (181) and in the third verse (182), the text recounts the punishment to be meted out to such loud-mouthed people by saying that they shall be consigned to the Hell to experience the taste of burning in fire which is but the outcome of their own deeds and certainly no injustice from Allah. The fourth verse (183) takes up the case of a false accusation made by these very Jews who came up with an excuse in order to reject the prophethood of the Messenger of Allah. Their contention was that, during the period of past prophets, there used to be a method under which charities and offerings were placed in the centre of an open ground or on top of a hill where heavenly fire came and burnt these to ashes. This used to symbolize that offerings were accepted. But, to the Holy Prophet ﷺ and to his community, Allah Almighty had given the unique distinction that charities were not left to be consumed by heavenly fire. They were given to the poor and needy among Muslims. Since the later method was contrary to the former, the disbelievers found an excuse to say: If you were a prophet, you too would have been given the miracle whereby the heavenly fire would have consumed the offerings and charities. They, not resting at that, became audacious enough to fabricate lies against Allah Almighty claiming that 'He has taken pledge from them to the effect that they are not to believe in a person who is unable to cause the miracle of the coming of a heavenly fire which burns the charitable offerings.'

Since this claim of the Jews that Allah had taken a pledge from them was false, there was really no need to counter it. So, to disarm them through their very proven saying, Allah Almighty said: If you are true in saying that Allah has taken such a pledge from you, then, the past prophets who had obliged you by showing the miracle of your choice whereby the heavenly fire consumed the offerings certainly deserved that you should have at least believed in them! But, what actually happened is that you did not spare them either. You still falsified them. In fact, you went to the extreme of transgression by killing them.

Let no one have any doubt here despite the fact that while this claim of the Jews was absolutely false, may be, if this miracle did come to pass at the hand of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم chances were that

they would probably have come to believe. Such a doubt is unfounded because Allah Almighty knew that these people were saying such things simply out of hostility and obstinacy. Thus, even if the miracle they demanded came to pass, they would have still not believed.

In the fifth verse (184), the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been comforted by saying that he should not grieve at being falsified by his adversaries for this is something faced by all prophets in the past.

Thoughts of the Hereafter heal all sorrows and remove all doubts

The sixth verse (185) puts a sharp focus on the ultimate reality of things in a situation when sometime somewhere disbelievers come to enjoy ascendancy one way or the other and they have all the luxury they can think of in this world. Contrary to this, Muslims have to face some hardships, some difficulties and a certain paucity of worldly means. There is nothing surprising about it and certainly no occasion to be grieved, for no follower of a faith or philosophy can ignore the reality of life that sorrow and happiness in this world are both short-lived. No living creature can escape death. As for the comfort and discomfort experienced in this world, they vanish, more than often, right there with relevant changes in circumstances - or, just in case, no change takes place during the life of this world, it is certain that everything will end with the knock of death. Therefore, worrying about this short-lived cycle of comfort and discomfort should not become the chronic concern of a wise person. One should, rather, have concern for what would happen after death.

So, the verse (185) tells us that every living being shall taste death and once in the Hereafter, there shall come the reward and punishment of deeds which will be severe and long drawn as well. This is what a wise person should worry about and prepare for. Given this rule of conduct, one who stays away from Hell and finds entry into the Paradise is really the successful one. May be this happens at the very beginning as would be the case with the most righteous servants of Allah. Or, it may come to pass after having faced some punishment as would be the case with sinning Muslims. But, Muslims - all of them - will finally have their deliverance from Hell and the blessings of Paradise will become theirs for ever. This will be contrary to what happens

to disbelievers - Hell will be their eternal resting place. If they wax proud over their short-lived worldly gains, they are terribly deceived. That is why it was said at the end of the verse: 'And the worldly life is nothing but an asset, full of illusion.' Strange is the anatomy of this deception, for reckless material enjoyments here become the source of great hardships in the Hereafter and conversely, most of the hardships faced here become the treasure of the Hereafter.

People of Falsehood hurting people of Truth is a natural phenomena: Patience (*Ṣabr*) and piety (*Taqwā*) cure everything

The seventh verse (186) was revealed in the background of a particular event which has been briefly referred to a little earlier in verse 181. According to relevant details, when verse 245 of Sūrah al-Baqarah: مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يُقرضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا (who is the one who would give Allah a good loan) was revealed, it eloquently equated the givings of charities to the giving of loan to Allah thereby indicating that all givings in charity in the life of this world will be recompensed with a certainty like that of someone returning a loan taken. An ignorant or hostile Jew reacted by commenting in the following words: إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيمٌ وَتَعْنُ أَغْيَابًا (Allah is poor and we are rich). Sayyidnā Abū Bakr رضى الله عنه was angry at his effrontery and slapped him. The Jew complained to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Thereupon, the verse: لَنُكَلِّبَنَّكُمْ وَأَنْفُسَكُمْ آيَةً (Of course, you shall be tested in your wealth and yourselves) was revealed. This verse instructs Muslims that they should not show weakness when called to stake their wealth and life in the defence of their Faith or when they are hurt by the vituperations of the disbelievers, the polytheists and the people of the Book. All this is nothing but a trial for them. The best course for them is to observe restraint, be patient and keep to their real objective in life which is the achievement of the perfect state of *Taqwā*, (a state in which one fears Allah and remains answerable to Him all the time). In such a state Muslims should not worry about replying to the effrontery by antagonists.

Verses 187 - 189

وَإِذَا أَخَذَ اللَّهُ مِيثَاقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ لَتُبَيِّنُنَّهُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَكْتُمُونَهُ فَنَبَذُوهُ وَرَاءَ ظُهُورِهِمْ وَاشْتَرَوْا بِهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا

فَيْسَسَ مَا يَشْتَرُونَ ﴿١٨٧﴾ لَا تَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ يَفْرَحُونَ بِمَا آتَوْا
 وَبِحِبُّونَ أَنْ يُحْمَدُوا بِمَا لَمْ يَفْعَلُوا ۖ فَلَا تَحْسَبَنَّهُمْ بِمَفَازَةٍ مِنَ
 الْعَذَابِ ۖ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ﴿١٨٨﴾ وَلِلَّهِ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ
 وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿١٨٩﴾

And when Allah took pledge from those who were given the Book: "You shall make it known to people, and you shall not conceal it." So, they threw it away behind their backs and bought a small price out of it. So, evil is what they buy. [187]

And do not think of those who are delighted with what they did and love to be praised for what they never did - so, do not think of them as being in a position to escape the punishment. And a painful punishment is there for them. [188] And to Allah belongs the Kingdom of the heavens and the earth. And Allah is powerful over everything. [189]

In continuation of the description of evils practiced by the Jews mentioned in previous verses, the first of the present two verses (187) takes up yet another evil practice of theirs. This is their habit of going back on solemn pledges and covenants - for Allah Almighty had taken pledge from the people of the Book that they would communicate the commandments of Allah appearing in the Torah freely, openly and universally and that they would not conceal any injunction out of their selfish ends. The people of the Book broke this covenant. They concealed injunctions. Not only that, they were audacious enough to show their pleasure about having acted in this manner and taking this deed of theirs as commendable.

Commentary

Concealing the Knowledge of Faith is forbidden and waiting or manipulating to be praised without practicing it is deplorable

The three verses cited above describe two crimes committed by scholars from the people of the Book along with their subsequent punishment.

As pointed out earlier, they were commanded to tell their people about injunctions revealed in the Book of Allah freely and openly

without any effort to curtail or hold back what was in there. Although, they were explicitly instructed not to hide any commandment, yet they elected to ignore the pledge they had made, out of their worldly considerations and personal greed. They did hide a good many commandments from their people.

Secondly, they had the problem of personally staying aloof from acting righteously while, at the same time, they had no qualms of conscience in wishing to be praised without acting the way they were expected to.

As for the incidence of hiding the commandments of the Torah, it has been reported in Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī on the authority of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Abbās. He narrates that the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked the Jews about something mentioned in the Torah. They concealed the truth and told him something contrary to what was said in the Torah - and they left his company all pleased with their exercise in evil congratulating themselves on their deceit. Thereupon, this verse which carries a warning for them was revealed.

As for the other statement - 'they love to be praised for what they never did' - it refers to the hypocrites among the Jews who would make excuses at the time of *Jihād*, sit home and celebrate how well they were able to dodge the hardships of *Jihād*. When the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم returned from *Jihād*, they would go to him, take false oaths, offer excuses and, on top of that, they would demand that this act of theirs be praised. (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī)

The Holy Qur'an condemns them for both these attitudes. From here, we know that concealing the knowledge of Faith and the injunctions of Allah and His Messenger is forbidden (*Ḥarām*). But, this forbiddance applies to the kind of concealment which was practiced by the Jews for they used to conceal Divine injunctions to promote their own worldly interest and, in this process, they made people pay for it. However, if an injunction is not broadcast publicly due to some expedient religious consideration, such an action would not fall under the purview of this ruling. This problem has been taken up by Imām al-Bukhārī under a separate subject heading supported by relevant *Ḥadīth* narrations. According to him, there are occasions when there is the danger that masses would fall prey to misunderstanding and

disorder by publicising a certain injunction openly. If an injunction is allowed to remain unpublicised on the basis of such a danger, it does not matter.

The rule about doing a good deed is simple. If anyone does a good deed, then looks forward to be praised for it - or, worse still, takes elaborate steps to make this happen - then, despite having done what one did, this act will be deemed blameworthy under the Islamic legal-moral norms. And should one elect not to do that good deed at all, that would, then, be taken as far more blameworthy. As for the natural desire to do something good and thereby earn a fair name, it is not included under the purview of this ruling - unless, of course, if one does not make unusual projections to earn that fair name (Bayān al-Qur'ān).

Verses 190 - 194

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاخْتِلَافِ اللَّيْلِ وَالنَّهَارِ لآيَاتٍ
لِّأُولِي الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿١٩٠﴾ الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا
وَعَلَى جُنُوبِهِمْ وَيَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ رَبَّنَا مَا
خَلَقْتَ هَذَا بَاطِلًا سُبْحَانَكَ فَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ ﴿١٩١﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّكَ
مَنْ تَدْخِلِ النَّارَ فَقَدْ أَخْرَجْتَهُ، وَمَا لِلظَّالِمِينَ مِنْ أَنْصَارٍ
﴿١٩٢﴾ رَبَّنَا إِنَّا سَمِعْنَا مُنَادِيًا يُنَادِي لِلْإِيمَانِ أَنْ آمِنُوا
بِرَبِّكُمْ فَآمَنَّا رَبَّنَا فَاغْفِرْ لَنَا ذُنُوبَنَا وَكَفِّرْ عَنَّا سَيِّئَاتِنَا وَتَوَقَّنَا
مَعَ الْأَبْرَارِ ﴿١٩٣﴾ رَبَّنَا وَإِنَّا مَا وَعَدْتَنَا عَلَى رُسُلِكَ وَ
لَا تُخْزِنَا يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ، إِنَّكَ لَا تُخْلِفُ الْمِيعَادَ ﴿١٩٤﴾

Surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and in the alternation of night and day, there are signs for the people of wisdom, [190] who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides, and ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth (saying:) "Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain. We proclaim Your purity. So, save us from the punishment of Fire. [191] Our Lord, whomsoever You

admit into the Fire, You have disgraced him indeed. And for the unjust there are no supporters. Our Lord, We heard a herald calling towards Faith: 'Believe in your Lord.' And We believed. [192] Our Lord, forgive us, then, our sins, and write off our evil deeds, and take us unto You with the righteous. [193] And our Lord, give us what You have promised us through Your messengers, and do not put us to disgrace on the Day of Doom. Surely you do not get back on Your promise." [194]

Verse 189 appearing immediately earlier particularly and strongly stressed upon *Tauḥīd*, the Oneness of Allah. So, the verse (190) which follows here, presents the proof of *Tauḥīd* and, along with it, mentions the merit of those who act strictly in accordance with the dictates of *Tauḥīd* and, by implication, it also motivates others to do the same.

In addition, the earlier mention of pain caused by the disbelievers bears congruity to the verses appearing presently. This can be understood in the background in which the disbelievers, out of hostility, requested the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم that he should turn Mount Ṣafā into solid gold. Thereupon, this verse was revealed indicating that there were so many proofs confirming the Truth all around them - why would they not deliberate in them?

As for the reality of their request to the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it was not motivated to find out the Truth. Instead, it was out of hostility - so, they would have still not believed, even if their request was granted.

Commentary

The background of Revelation

Commenting on the background of revelation concerning these verses, Ibn Hibbān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and Ibn 'Asākir in his *History* have reported that the Companion 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ رضى الله عنه went to Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah رضى الله عنها and said to her: 'Of the things about the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, tell me what you saw as most unique out of the many states of his life.' Thereupon, Sayyidah 'Ā'ishah said: 'Which state are you talking about? In reality, everything about him was unique. Yet, I would tell you about one very unique event. It so happened that the noble Prophet, may Allah bless and protect him, came to me one night and entered into the comforter with me. Then,

he said: 'Allow me to worship my Lord.' He rose from the bed, made *Wuḍū* and stood up for *Ṣalāh*. And in this standing position of *Qiyām*, he wept, so much so that his tears trickled down his blessed chest. Then, he bent down for *Rukū* and there too he wept. Then he did his *Sajdah* and kept weeping in the *Sajdah* very much like before. Then, he raised his head and continued weeping until came the morning. Sayyidnā Bilāl came in and informed him about the time of the *Fajr Ṣalāh*. Sayyidnā Bilāl says: I submitted: 'my master, why do you weep like that? Is'nt it that Allah Almighty has forgiven you all your past and future sins?' He said: 'So then, should I not continue to be a grateful servant of Allah? And in offering this gratitude of mine, why should I not shed tears, specially tonight when Allah Almighty has revealed this blessed verse to me :

إِنَّ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ...

Surely, in the creation of the heavens and the earth... (190)

After that, he said: "Ruined is the person who recited these verses but failed to deliberate therein."

So, in order to deliberate into this verse, let us begin by answering some questions first.

What does 'the creation of the heavens and the earth' mean?

Since *Khalq* is a verbal noun which signifies creation or origination, it means that there are, in the creation of the heavens and the earth, great signs of Allah Almighty. Therefore, all those Divinely created beings and things in the heavens and the earth also get to be included therein. Then, among these created beings there are kingdoms after kingdoms - each having different types and states - yet each and every such created being is comprehensively pointing out to its Creator. Then, going a little deeper, one would discover that 'the heavens' is inclusive of all heights and 'the earth' covers all lows. Thus, high or low, all dimensions owe their existence to Allah Almighty.

The different forms of 'the alternation of the night and day'

Let us now determine the meaning of 'the alternation of the night and day'. The word '*Ikhtilāf*' translated here as 'alternation' is derived from the Arabic usage: اختلف فلان فلاناً (Such and such person arrived after

such and such person). So, the Arabic expression translated as 'the alternation of the night and day' means that the night goes and the day comes and when the day goes, night comes.

The word *Ikhtilāf* translated here as 'alternation' could also be taken to mean increase or decrease. For example, during winter, the night is long and the day is short; while during the summer, the order is reversed. Similarly, the difference between the night and day is also caused by the difference in the geographical location of countries. For example, countries closer to the North Pole have longer days as compared to areas farther away from it. So, it should not be difficult to infer from each such phenomena the essential proof of the most perfect power of Allah Almighty.

What is the meaning of the word, *Āyāt* ?

Āyāt (آيات) is the plural of *Āyah* (آية) and is used to express more than one single meaning. Miracles are known as *Āyāt*. It is also applied to the verses of the Holy Qur'ān. It is also used in a third sense, that of proof and sign. Here, in the present context, this very third sense is what is intended - meaning that, in these manifestations, there are great signs of Allah, and the proofs of His power.

Wise are those who believe in Allah and always remember Him

To determine the meaning of the expression اولو الالباب, we look into the word '*albāb*' which is the plural of *lubb*. Lexically, it means the essence. Since the essence of everything is its sum-total and the key to its nature and uses, therefore, human wisdom has been called *lubb*, for wisdom is the essence of human nature. Thus, '*albāb*' means 'the people of wisdom'.

Now the problem before us is how to identify the people of wisdom because the whole world claims to be wise. Not even a moron would be ready to admit being devoid of wisdom, reason or sense. Therefore, the Holy Qur'ān has told us about some signs which are, in fact, the most sound criterion of wisdom. The first such sign is Faith in Allah. Think of the knowledge which comes from the senses such as hearing, seeing, smelling and tasting and communication, something also found in non-rational animals. Now, it is the job of wisdom or reason to arrive, through signs, circumstantial evidence and proofs, at a particular conclusion which is beyond sense-perception and through which it may

become possible to grasp the final link of the chain of causes.

Keeping this rule in view, just think about this universe around us. It should not be too difficult to realize that this wonderfully organised system - comprising the heavens and the earth and containing the whole of creation in between them which is further streamlined by the most deft management of everything, big or small, existing therein - certainly points out to a special Being that has to be the highest and the foremost in terms of Knowledge, Wisdom, Power and Authority. A Being who originated and fashioned all these components with the wisest of consideration and under Whose intention and will this whole system keeps operating. That Being, as obvious, can only be that of the most-exalted Allah. How well some spiritual master has put it in a few words:

برگیا ہے کہ از زمین روید ، وحده لا شریک له گوید

Every blade of grass sprouting from the earth
Says: He is One; there are no partners in Him.

That human intentions and plans keep failing everywhere all the time is a matter of common experience. These cannot be called the prime movers and operators of this universal system. Therefore, the outcome of the deliberation into the creation of the heavens and the earth and into what has been created in them is, as wisdom dictates, living to know, obey and remember Allah. Anyone unmindful of it does not deserve to be classed as wise. Therefore, the Holy Qur'an has given the following sign of the wise:

الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ

That is, the wise are those who remember Allah - standing and sitting and (lying) on their sides (191).

In other words it means that they are engaged in the remembrance of Allah under all conditions and at all times.

From here we find out that the thing which our modern world takes as the criterion of reason and good sense is simply a deception. Catering to greed, some people take accumulation of money as their ideal of intelligence. There are others who love to equate human intelligence with scientific inventions and electronic applications and for them, these are the power. But, real good sense lies in the message

brought by the prophets and Messengers of Allah Almighty, for they, proceeding through knowledge and wisdom and advancing from the low to the high in the chain of causation, skipped the intermediary stages. Granted that human beings moved from raw materials to machines and science gave them access to power through utilization of energy generated in many ways. But, higher intelligence demands that human beings take that real giant step farther ahead so that they can discover that the main agent of human accomplishment is certainly not the water or clay or iron or copper or some other material, not even the machines that generate power. This function was accomplished by none else but the One who created the fire, the water and the air through which human beings were enabled to control technology and energy:

کار زلفِ تست مشک افشانی اما عاشقان
مصلحت راتہمتے بر آہوئے چین بستہ اند

Spreading the scent of musk is the function of Your tresses
But, those who love You have, out of expediency,
ascribed the credit to the Chinese deer!

Let us understand this through the commonplace example of an ignorant dweller of some distant jungle who reaches a railway station and notices that such a huge railway train stops at the flash of a red flag while it starts moving at the flutter of a green one. Then, should he say that these red and green flags must have super power as they can stop and move such a powerful engine of the big train. Obviously, all sensible people would dismiss the ignoramus telling him that no power is vested in these flags. Instead, power rests with the person who is sitting in the engine room and stops or moves the train by watching these signals. But, someone smarter might reject the assumption that the engine driver had any intrinsic power to move or stop the train. His strength had nothing to do with it. He will go a step farther and attribute this power to the mechanical parts of the engine. But, a scientist would bypass cold mechanics of the engine and ascribe the real power to the steam which has been generated in the engine through heat and water. But, that is as far as the so-called scientific thinking goes. At this point, comes the thinking of the prophets, may peace be upon them, who would be telling these tyrants of their intel-

lect: If the ignoramus who took the flags or the driver or the engine parts as the respository of power was in error, so are those who take sources of energy powerful by themselves - intellectually, they too are in error! The prophets would ask them to take yet another step forward so that they could lay their hands on the lost end of this tangled ball of string. May be, by doing so, they could have access to the final link of the great chain of caused things and there they could find the answer that the ultimate master of all power is none else but the One who created all forces which were harnessed to achieve human models of power.

It is not difficult to deduce from what has been said here that those who get to know Allah and remember Him at all times and under all conditions are the only people who deserve to be called 'the wise'. It is for this reason that the Holy Qur'ān has defined the 'People of Wisdom' as *الَّذِينَ يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ قِيَامًا وَقُعُودًا وَعَلَىٰ جُنُوبِهِمْ* : '... those who remember Allah standing and sitting, and (lying) on their sides.'

It is on this basis that Muslim jurists have answered the case of a deceased person who, before his death, made a will that his property be given to the wise. As to who will be given this property, they have ruled that those who will deserve this are abstaining scholars who do not seek unnecessary material resources and are averse to the blind pursuit of the worldly, for they are the wise ones in the real sense. (al-Durr al-Mukhtār, Kitābul-Waṣīyyah)

Also worth attention at this point is the fact that the Sharī'ah of Islam has not enjoined abundance in any other mode of worship except *Dhikr*. But, about *Dhikr*, the command is: *وَاذْكُرُوا اللَّهَ ذِكْرًا كَثِيرًا* (Remember Allah remembering abundantly). The reason is that all modes of worship, other than *Dhikr*, have some conditions and rules without observing which those acts of worship are not considered to have been duly performed. This is contrary to *Dhikr* which can be performed at all times and under all conditions whether standing, sitting, lying, with or without *wuḍū*. Perhaps, this verse is indicative of this element of wisdom.

The second sign of the people of wisdom given in this verse is that they deliberate in the creation of the heavens and the earth:

يَتَفَكَّرُونَ فِي خَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

And ponder on the creation of the heavens and the earth - 191.

Here we need to determine the meaning of this act of 'pondering' and the level at which it operates.

The Arabic words, *Fikr* and *Tafakkur*, literally mean to ponder, to deliberate and think about something which is an effort to arrive at its reality. From this verse we find out that this act of pondering is also an act of worship and very much like the *Dhikr* (Remembrance) of Allah. The difference is that the objective of *Dhikr* is the remembrance of the Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah while the objective of *Fikr* and *Tafakkur* or thinking and deliberation relates to His creations. This is because the perception of the reality of the Divine Being and the Attributes is beyond human reason. Deliberation of this aspect results in nothing but wonder. The great poet, Rumi said:

دور بینان بارگاہِ الست ، غیر ازیں پیے نبرده اندکہ ہست

Expert watchers of the Court of the Being of the Covenant

Found out nothing but that He is.

In fact, this is an area of inquiry where excessive deliberation in the Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah could, at times, cause one's imperfect reason to stray into error. Therefore, the greatest among spiritual masters have emphatically advised:

تَفَكَّرُوا فِي آيَاتِ اللَّهِ وَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُوا فِي اللَّهِ

Deliberate in the signs of Allah, but do not deliberate in Allah.

It means that there are signs in what Allah has created. One should think about these signs. But, one should not deliberate into the very Being and Attributes of Almighty Allah for that is beyond one's reach. One can see everything in the light of the sun. But, should one wish to see the sun itself, his eyes would get dazzled. Who is Allah? What is He like? These are questions all wise thinkers and spiritual masters have answered by suggesting :

نہ ہر جائے مرکب توں تاخت

کہ جاہا سیر باید انداخت

You do not have to mount an assault on every field of inquiry
For, there are places where you should simply surrender.

However, thinking about creation inevitably leads one to realize the presence of its Creator. Look at the enormous expanse of the sky above us with the sun, the moon and the many planets and stars bound with the solar and lunar system under firm and pre-determined laws working so well for thousands of years without being serviced or refurbished in some workshop. Then, there is this earth of ours, its rivers and mountains holding many marvels of creation, the trees, animals and hidden minerals, and the air that circulates in between the heavens and the earth and the rains that come and the electricity generated therein. This whole system so elaborately set up leads every sane person who is willing to think and understand that there is some special Being which is far ahead of everyone in power and control. This is what *Ma'rifat* is, the stage of knowing, realizing. So, this kind of deliberation which leads to the discovery of the Divine is an act of worship, a great one indeed. For this reason, Ḥaḍrat Ḥasan Baṣrī said: *تفكر ساعة خير من قيام ليلة* (Ibn Kathīr) which means: An hour spent in thinking about the signs of Allah is better and far more useful than a whole night standing in worship.

Ḥaḍrat 'Umar ibn 'Abdul-'Azīz has characterized this deliberation as a superior act of worship (Ibn Kathīr).

Sayyidnā Ḥasan ibn 'Āmir رضى الله عنه said that he had heard from many noble Companions that deliberation is the light of faith.

Ḥaḍrat Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī said: When I go out from my house, everything I cast my glance on makes me realize that it contains one or the other blessing of Allah for me and that in its presence I have a good source of learning my lesson (Ibn Kathīr). So, the knowers of the secrets of the self have always maintained:

Every blade of grass sprouting from the earth

Says: He is One and in Him there is no partner.

Ḥaḍrat Sufyān ibn 'Uyaynah has said: Reflection is a beam of light entering your heart.

Ḥaḍrat Wahb ibn Munabbih said: One who thinks a lot will understand reality, and who understands will arrive at sound knowledge, and who has sound knowledge is bound to act accordingly (Ibn Kathīr).

Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه said: A pious man saw an ascetic sitting at a spot with a graveyard on one of his sides and a garbage dump on the other. The passing pious man remarked - You have two treasure troves before you, one of them is the human treasure known as graveyard and the other is the treasure of wealth and property turned into refuse and filth. These two treasures are enough to learn your lesson. (Ibn Kathir)

Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar رضى الله عنه used to go out of the city into some wilderness with the express purpose of training and teaching his heart. When he reached there, he would ask the spot of land: Where are those who lived here? (اين اهلك؟) After that, he would answer his own question by saying: Everything must perish save the presence of His being (كُلُّ شَيْءٍ وَهَالِكٌ إِلَّا وَجْهَهُ). (Ibn Kathir). This was how he summoned and preserved the remembrance of Afterlife in his heart.

Hadrat Bishr al-Hāfī said: If people pondered over the greatness of Almighty Allah, it would have become impossible for them to remain sinful and disobedient.

Sayyidnā 'Īsā عليه السلام said: O you who were created weak, fear God wherever you are. Live in the world like a guest. Make prayer places your home. Let your eyes weep fearing God, let your body remain patient and let your heart keep reflecting. Used to this, worry not about tomorrow's bread.

It is this kind of thoughtfulness and concern that these verses identify as the superior quality of wise people. Pondering over the creation of Almighty Allah, such people get to know their Creator and are personally convinced of the temporality of the physical world. This is a superb act of worship resplendent with the light of faith. Similarly, those who see and experience the signs of Almighty Allah yet get entangled with the superficial glamour of what has been created - as a result of which they fail to know their real master - is rank heedlessness and very much juvenile. Sages have warned that whoever fails to learn a lesson from the universe before his eyes will find that the ability of his heart to realize the truth has corroded in proportion to his heedlessness. The eager protagonists of scientific progress all too engrossed in their breakthroughs fail to pay heed to their own ultimate fate. Consequently, the speed with which developments in scien-

tific inquiry unfold the secrets of Allah's creation is also the speed at which they are receding farther away from reality and God. Commenting on the post-industrial revolution thinking, Akbar of Allahabad, poet, humourist, said:

بھول کر بیٹھا ہے یورپ آسمانی باپ کو
بس خدا سمجھا ہے اس نے برق کو اور بھاپ کو
Europe has forgotten the Father in the Heaven
For them, electricity and steam are as good as God.

It is about such visionless people with the dead weight of education and culture on their backs, the Holy Qur'an says:

وَكَايِنٍ مِّنَ آيَاتِ فِي السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْاَرْضِ يَمُرُّوْنَ عَلَيْهَا وَهُمْ عَنْهَا مُعْرِضُوْنَ

And there are so many signs in the heavens and the earth which these people pass by with faces turned askance paying no heed to them - 12:109.

Now, as we move to the last part of this verse (191), رَبَّنَا مَا خَلَقْتَ هٰذَا بٰطِلًا (Our Lord, You have not created all this in vain), we can clearly see that this is the outcome of pondering over the signs of Allah's power. It means that there is nothing purposeless in Allah's creation. On the contrary, there are thousands of wise considerations behind it. Things have been harnessed to serve human beings with man being the user of resources in the whole universe. This should make human beings see that the universe has been created for their benefit and in their interest. Likewise, every human being has been created to obey and worship Allah. This is his or her purpose of life.

Further on, from verses 192 to 194, there appears a set of pleas and prayers from such people, people who realized that this universe is no exercise in futility and that it is brimming with open proofs of the great power and wisdom of its Creator. So, once they knew their Creator and Sustainer, they submitted before Him.

1. The first request they make is: نَفِّسْنَا عَنَّا النَّارَ : Save us from the Fire.

2. The second request is: Save us from the disgrace of the Hereafter for whoever is condemned to the Fire stands humiliated before the whole world. Some scholars have said that humiliation on the plains of Ressurrection will be so disgraceful a punishment that one

would wish to be cast into the (fire of) Hell but that the multitudes present on that fateful day do not get to hear about his or her misdeeds.

3. The third request is: 'We have heard the message given by the herald sent by You, that is, the message of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and we believed in him. So, forgive our major sins and expiate our shortcomings and misdeeds and give us death in the company of the righteous, that is, make us a part of their group.'

These three requests were aimed at safety against punishment and pain and loss. The fourth request is about promised blessings, the blessings of Paradise promised through the noble prophets. This prayer for blessings is being made with the added request that there be no disgrace on the Day of Judgment. In other words, the request is to be excused from the torturous procedure of accounting (for all of one's deeds), disgrace (as a result of misdeeds) and then forgiveness (on account of Allah's mercy). The prayer is for outright forgiveness for Allah does not go back on His word. What is the purpose of this submission and re-submission? The purpose is to say: O Allah, enable us to become deserving, and a beneficiary of this promise (made by You), and enable us to remain steadfast so that we breath our last in this world with faith in our heart (ایمان) and busy doing what is good in Your sight (عمل صالح).

Verses 195 - 199

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِّنْكُمْ مِّمَّنْ ذَكَرَ أَوْ أُنْشِيَ ۚ بَعْضُكُمْ مِّنْ بَعْضٍ ۗ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُودُوا فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۗ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ ﴿١٩٥﴾ لَا يَغْرَنَكَ تَقَلُّبُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي الْبِلَادِ ۗ فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿١٩٦﴾ مَتَاعٌ قَلِيلٌ ثُمَّ مَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمِهَادُ ﴿١٩٧﴾ لَكِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ

تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا نُزُلًا مِّنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ وَمَا
عِنْدَ اللَّهِ خَيْرٌ لِلَّابْرَارِ ﴿١٩٨﴾ وَإِنَّ مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ لَمَنْ يُؤْمِنُ
بِاللَّهِ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ وَمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْهِمْ خَشِعِينَ لِلَّهِ لَا
يَشْتُرُونَ بِآيَاتِ اللَّهِ ثَمَنًا قَلِيلًا أُولَئِكَ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ
إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ﴿١٩٩﴾

So, their Lord answered their prayer, "I do not let go to waste the labour of a worker from you, male or female. You are from one another. So, those who emigrated, and were expelled from their homes, and were tortured in My way, and fought, and were killed, I shall certainly write off their evil deeds, and shall certainly admit them into gardens beneath which rivers flow, being a reward from Allah. And it is Allah with Whom is the beauty of reward. [195] The moving of the disbelievers about the earth should not deceive you. [196] It is just a little enjoyment. After that their resort is Hell, and it is an evil abode. [197] But those who fear their Lord, for them there are Gardens beneath which rivers flow, where they shall live forever - hospitality from Allah. And what is with Allah is best for the righteous. [198] And surely, among the people of the Book there are those who believe in Allah and in what has been sent down to you and what has been sent down to them humbling themselves before Allah. They do not barter away the verses of Allah for paltry (worldly) gains. They have their reward with their Lord. Surely, Allah is swift at reckoning. [199]

Mentioned in verses previous to this were some prayers made by good believers.

The first verse (195) appearing above reports that these prayers have been accepted and believers have been given the good news that great rewards have been marked for their good deeds. In the second and third verses (196-197), Muslims have been instructed not to be deceived by the apparent affluence and worldwide maneuvering of disbelievers for this is transitory and the punishment which follows in its wake is eternal.

The fourth verse (198) reasserts the promise of the lasting blessings of Paradise for Muslims who always keep fearing Allah.

The fifth verse (199) particularly mentions the great reward that awaits those Muslims who used to be from among the People of the Book but chose to embrace Islam as their faith.

Commentary

While explaining the statement: لَا كُفْرَانَ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ (I shall certainly write off their evil deeds) in Verse 195, Maulāna Ashraf 'Alī Thānavī has restricted it to the forgiveness of sins and shortcomings relating to the fulfillment of the rights of Allah. The reason is that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has said in *Hadith* that debts are not included under the purview of this verse. The rule is that the person concerned or his heirs should pay off the debt or have it forgiven. There is no other alternative in this case unless Allah Almighty is specially generous for someone and puts it in the heart of the wronged party that they should relent and forgive. This would, then, be a different matter. In fact, with some, this would also be the case.

So, let us keep in mind that all sins are forgiven following *Hijrah* (Emigration) and *Shahādah* (Surrendering life in the way of Allah, martyrdom) but the forgiveness of debts and other rights of people (*Huqūqul-'Ibād*) has not been promised.

Verse 200

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اصْبِرُوا وَصَابِرُوا وَرَابِطُوا وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ
لَعَلَّكُمْ تُفْلِحُونَ ﴿٢٠٠﴾

O those who believe, be patient, be more patient than others, and guard your frontiers, and fear Allah, so that you may be successful. [200]

This is the last verse of Sūrah 'Al-'Imrān. The advice given here is quintessential for all Muslims.

Commentary

There are three things in the verse Muslims have been charged with. These are *Ṣabr*, *Muṣābarah* and *Murābaṭah*. The fourth element is *Taqwā* which is a necessary ingredient of all three. Their meanings are being given below.