

their greatness, and love for them, demands that Muslims should not slide into attitudes of excess or deficiency like the Jews and Christians - for the Jews did not hesitate from even killing their prophets while the Christians turned their messenger into a God.

Regarding the meaning of the word: خَزَائِنُ (treasures) appearing in the statement made in the first sentence, that is, 'I do not say to you that with me are the treasures of Allah,' scholars of *Tafsīr* have named many things. But, the Holy Qur'an itself, wherever it has mentioned the treasures of Allah, has said: وَإِنَّ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ (there is not a thing the treasures of which are not with Us - 15:20). This tells us that the sense of 'the treasures of Allah' encompasses everything in this world and cannot be definitely applied to some particular things. As for commentators who have named particular things, they are doing so as an example. Therefore, there is no contradiction here. Finally, let us bear in mind: When this verse clearly declares that the 'treasures of Allah' are not even in the hands of the one foremost among prophets and messengers, Sayyidnā Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafaḥ صلى الله عليه وسلم, how can we assume that a *Buzurg* (pious elder) or *Walī* (man of Allah) of the Muslim Community could do what they wished and grant anything to anyone as they chose? This is sheer ignorance.

In the third sentence of the answer given in verse 50, was: وَلَا أَقُولُ لَكُمْ وَإِنِّي مَلَكٌ which means 'I do not say to you that I am an angel' - because they refused to accept him as a Messenger based on his human identity. [The pattern of this sentence is the same as the first] However, the pattern of the sentence has been changed in the sentence which appears in the middle of these two where the text does not say something like - I do not say to you that I know the Unseen - and what was said actually was: وَلَا أَعْلَمُ الْغَيْبَ (nor do I have the knowledge of the Unseen).

In his *Tafsīr al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ*, Abū al-Ḥayyān has pointed out to a subtle justification for this change in diction. According to him, being or not being the possessor of all Divine treasures; and similarly, the likelihood of a person being or not being an angel are things which are related to observation. The addressees of the answer knew it all, they knew that the entire treasures of Allah are not in his hands nor is he an angel. Their demands were simply based on malice and hostility. In reply to them, it would have been enough to say that 'I have never

claimed that I am the owner of the treasures of Allah', or that 'I am an angel.'

But, the problem of '*Ilm al-Ghayb*' (the knowledge of the Unseen) was not something of that nature - because they already had this kind of belief about their astrologers and soothsayers: That they know the Unseen. So, having this kind of belief about the Messenger of Allah was not unlikely - specially when they had also heard many news of the Unseen through the blessed speech of the Holy Prophet ﷺ and had witnessed that they happened as told. Therefore, at this place in the text, a simple negation of the claim and saying was not considered enough. In fact, what was negated was the actual act. He said, "لَا أَعْلَمُ" (nor do I have the knowledge of the Unseen). By saying so, also removed was their misunderstanding that a certain knowledge of things Unseen given to an angel or a Rasūl (Messenger) or a *Walī* (man of Allah) through *Waḥy* (revelation) or *Ilhām* (inspiration) from Allah Ta‘ālā, cannot be called '*Ilm al-Ghayb* (the knowledge of the Unseen), or its knower, the '*Ālim al-Ghayb* (one who has the knowledge of the Unseen), in accordance with the terminology of the Qur‘ān.

Right from here also comes the clarification that no Muslim can doubt the fact that Allah Ta‘ālā had blessed the Holy Prophet ﷺ with the knowledge of many things of the Unseen, so many as would surpass the combined knowledge of angels and human beings from the first to the last. This is the belief of the entire Muslim *Ummah*. Of course, right along with it, according to countless statements of the Qur‘ān and Sunnah, it is also the belief of all early and later Imāms that the All-Encompassing Knowledge (*al-‘Ilm al-Muḥīṭ*) of the whole universe is the exclusive attribute of none but Allah Ta‘ālā. Neither can an angel or messenger be equal to Him in being the *Khāliq* (Creator), the *Rāziq* (Provider) and *Al-Qādir Al-Mutlaq* (Absolutely Powerful); similarly, nor can anyone be equal to Him in His All-Encompassing Knowledge. Therefore, no angel or prophet, despite having the knowledge of a great many things of the Unseen, can be called '*Ālim al-Ghayb* (the Knower of the Unseen).

But, about the many excellences of our master, Muḥammad al-Muṣṭafā ﷺ, we can simply say:

بعزاز خدا بزرگ توئی قصه مختصر

Ba'd az Khudā buzurg tūee qiṣṣah mukhtaṣar!

After God, you are the revered one that is all!

His excellence in knowledge is ahead of angels, prophets and messengers, but is not equal to the knowledge of Allah Ta'ālā. Claiming such equality is the path of excess taken in Christianity.

At the end of the verse (50), it was said that the blind and the sighted cannot be equal. It means that they should get rid of their selfish concerns, leave obstinacy and hostility, and see reality as it is so that they may no longer be counted among the blind. For them, the need was to start seeing, to wise up, for they could have their missing sights back with them with a little thought and concern (for what is right and true).

In the next and the last verse (51), the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been instructed that, after all these clear statements, if they still remain obstinate, he should draw a line, stop all debate, and get busy with his real mission, that is, the duty of *Tablīgh*, the real mission of prophethood. And onwards from there, let him turn the focus of his call to faith and warning against its rejection to people who believe in being produced before Allah Ta'ālā to give an account of their deeds on the Last Day of *Qiyāmah* - for example, the Muslims - or those who are, at least, no deniers, even if that is in a certain degree of being probable, for they would at least have the apprehension that, perhaps, they may have to be answerable for their deeds.

To sum up, there are three types of people who believe or do not believe in *Qiyāmah*: (1) Those who believe in it as being certain; (2) Those who doubt or waver; and (3) Those who reject it totally. Though, the blessed prophets have been commanded to convey their call and warning to all these three classes of people, as evident from many statements of the Holy Qur'an. But, as the likelihood that the call will be more effective among the first two classes of people is more pronounced, instruction has been given in this verse to pay special attention to them: وَأَنْذِرْ بِهِ الَّذِينَ يَخَافُونَ أَنْ يُجْعَلُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ (And warn, with it, those who have the fear of being gathered before their Lord).

Verses 52 - 55

وَلَا تَطْرُدِ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْغَدَاةِ وَالْعَشِيِّ يُرِيدُونَ
وَجْهَهُ ۗ مَا عَلَيْكَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَمَا مِنْ حِسَابِكَ
عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ فَتَطْرُدَهُمْ فَتَكُونَ مِنَ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَكَذَلِكَ
فَتَنَّا بَعْضَهُمْ بِبَعْضٍ لِيَقُولُوا أَهَؤُلَاءِ مَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ
بَيْنِنَا ۗ أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِالشَّاكِرِينَ ﴿٥٣﴾ وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ
يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ
الرَّحْمَةَ ۗ أَنَّهُ مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ
وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٥٤﴾ وَكَذَلِكَ نَفِصِّلُ الْآيَاتِ
وَلِتَسْتَبِينَ سَبِيلُ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And do not expel those who call their Lord morning and evening seeking His pleasure. You are not responsible for anything in their account and they are not responsible for anything in your account that you expel them out and thus become one of the unjust. [52]

And in this way We have tested some of them through some others, that they say, "Are these the ones, from among us all, whom Allah has favoured?" Is it not that Allah knows the grateful best? [53]

And when those who believe in Our verses come to you, say, "Peace on you. Your Lord has prescribed for Himself the mercy that whoever does something bad in ignorance, then repents after that and corrects himself, then He is Most Forgiving, Very Merciful. [54] And that is how We make the verses elaborate, so that the way of the guilty may become exposed. [55]

Commentary

In Islam there is No Distinction between Rich and Poor, High or Low

As for people who failed to feel human despite being human, even touched the outer limit of rating human beings as one of the smartest

animals of the world, who did not hesitate in harnessing other 'animals' in their service, what would they know about the purpose of creation other than taking the fulfillment of their immediate physical compulsions and needs, and acting in accordance with animal instincts as the purpose of their lives - very much like an animal would do. When this be the only purpose of life, then, it is also obvious that the criterion of recognizing good and bad, small or big, high or low, noble or mean can hardly be any other than whoever has more and better to eat and drink, wear and use up, and things and resources to live around with and hold on to, shall be successful, honourable and noble - and whoever has less of these shall be low life and doomed!

The truth of the matter is that, given this view of life, talking about good morals and good deeds as a criterion of judging the nobility of human beings remains out of the question. In that case, only that deed will be good and that morality will be virtuous through which these animal objectives could be fully realized.

Therefore, the first and the last lesson given by the blessed prophets and the religions they brought with them was that there is a life after this life, which will be eternal and uninterrupted. Its peace will be perfect and eternal, and so will be its pain, perfect and eternal. The life of the present world is not its own purpose. Instead of that, the real purpose of this transitory life is to get together everything which is going to come out handy in the other life - (delightfully summarized with a punch by an Urdu poet who said):

رہا مرنے کی تیاری میں مصروف

مرا کام اور اس دنیا میں تھا کیا

Remained busy getting ready to die -

What else was that I had to do in this world?

This is the line of distinction between human beings and animals - that animals have no concern for the next life, contrary to human beings whose greatest concern, at least in the sight of reasonable and far-sighted people, is to correct, nurse and build the prospects of the next life. Given this belief and point of view, the standard of nobility and menialness, honour and disgrace will obviously not be eating and drinking lavishly, living plentifully or qualitatively, or making and

holding wealth and property greedily - instead, the standard will be good morals and righteous deeds on which depends the real honour of the *Ākhirah* (Hereafter).

Whenever people in this world have shifted away from the teachings of the prophets عليهم السلام and from belief in the *Ākhirah*, the natural outcome was there for everyone to see. Money and things became the cold criterion of character and status. Those successful in this race were taken as high and classy, and whoever was left behind, or remained an under-achiever, was taken to be poor, honourless, mean and low.

Therefore, in all ages (including ours with the loudest claims to democracy and justice), people caught in the maze of worldly life have been practicing class distinction of rich and poor and high and low openly or secretly under a thousand guises whereby they would assign all virtues to the rich and influential and condemn the poor as low-life.

This is what the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام did. They criticized the believing poor following this standard, when they said that they would not sit with such lowly people. They said that if he wished them to hear his message, he should first turn those poor wretches out of his company. They even said: *قَالُوا أَنُؤْمِرُ لَكَ وَأَتَّبَعَكَ الْأَلْدَلُونَ* [26:111]. It means: ‘How can it be that we are to believe in you while those following you are lowly people?’ Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام answered their heart-rending remark in his own prophetic diction when he said: *وَمَا عَلِمْتُ بِمَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ إِنَّ* *حِسَابَهُمْ إِلَّا عَلَى رَبِّي كُنتُمْ تُشْعُرُونَ* [26:112]. It means: ‘I do not know about what they do (which could help him decide whether they were high or low) so (the reality of everyone’s deeds and) their accounting is the responsibility of none but my Lord (who is aware of the secrets of the hearts), if you understand.’

By saying so, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام brought these ignorant and arrogant people oblivious of the reality of human nobility and ignobility to see the truth of the matter - as they were the ones who used these terms without knowing what they really meant and just went ahead stamping the rich as noble and the poor as wretched, while money is no criterion of virtues and vices. The criterion is deeds and morals. At this occasion, Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام could have said that those people were nobler and more respectable than them as far as the standard of

deeds and morals was concerned. But, his prophetic method of preaching and correcting did not permit him to say something like that lest his addressees are provoked adversely. Therefore, he thought it to be sufficient to say that lowliness depended on deeds and since he did not know about their deeds fully, he could not decide as to who was noble and who was not.

The same thing has been happening in every age, after the age of Sayyidnā Nūḥ, when poor people of successive times, no matter how noble and respectable in terms of their morals and deeds they may have been, were still down-graded as lowly by materialistic and arrogant people. Yet, these were the people who, guided by their far-sightedness and good morals, were the first ones to say yes to the call of prophets in one after the other age. In fact, for later scholars of religions and communities this became the proof of the veracity of a prophet that his early followers are the poor ones of the community. This was the reason why, when the letter of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم reached the Byzantine ruler, Heracles (Hiraql) inviting him to embrace Islam, he wished to investigate into the veracity of his prophethood. For this purpose, he asked from people who knew the Prophet of Islam some questions. One of these questions was: Whether most of his followers were from among the rich, or the poor? When he was told that they were poor people, he said: These are usually the first followers of messengers and prophets.

The same question rose again during the blessed time of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. Its answer appears in the present verses with particular instructions.

Reports Ibn Kathīr from Imām Ibn Jarīr: Some chiefs of disbelievers from the tribe of Quraysh - 'Utbah, Shaybah, Ibn Rabī'ah, Muṭ'im ibn 'Adiyy, Ḥārith ibn Nawfal and others - came to the Holy Prophet's uncle, Abū Ṭālib and said to him: One of the problems, which stops us from listening to and accepting what Your nephew Muḥammad ﷺ tells us, is that people who surround him all the time are either our slaves who were set free by us, or they are people who were living at our mercy only. Now, with such lowly people around him, we cannot attend his sittings. You tell him, if he would ask these people to leave when it is time for us to come in, we could listen to him and think about it.

When his uncle, Abū Ṭalib reported this to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, Sayyidnā ‘Umar offered his advice by saying: What is wrong with it? Try this too for a few days. These people love us and they are not formal. When these chiefs are to come, they would move away from the sitting.

Thereupon, this verse was revealed in which the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been emphatically prohibited to do something like that. It was after the revelation of the verse that Sayyidnā ‘Umar had to apologize by admitting that his advice was wrong.

And these poor people about whom this conversation took place were, at that time, no less a people than Sayyidnā Bilāl al-Ḥabashī, Sayyidnā Ṣuhayb ar-Rūmī, Sayyidnā ‘Ammār ibn Yāsir, Sayyidnā Sālīm Mawlā Abī Ḥudhayfah, Ṣabīḥ Mawlā Usayd, Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn Mas‘ūd, Sayyidnā Miqdād ibn ‘Amr, Sayyidnā Mas‘ūd Ibn al-Qārī, Sayyidnā Dhush-Shimālyn, and other noble *Ṣaḥābah* (may Allah be pleased with all of them) the testimonial of whose nobility and honour came from the heavens. And at another place in the Holy Qur‘ān, the same subject was stressed upon in these words:

وَاصْبِرْ نَفْسَكَ مَعَ الَّذِينَ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ بِالْعَدَاوَةِ وَالْعِشْيِ يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ وَلَا تَعْدُ عَيْنُكَ عَنْهُمْ تُرِيدُ زِينَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ۗ وَلَا تَطِعْ مَنْ أَغْفَلْنَا قَلْبَهُ عَن ذِكْرِنَا وَاتَّبَعَ هَوَاهُ وَكَانَ أَمْرُهُ فُرُطًا ه

And hold your self with those who call on their Lord morning and evening, seeking His pleasure only. And do not cast your eyes (for others) beyond them, seeking the embellishment of the present life. And do not obey the one whose heart We have made neglectful of Our remembrance, and who follows his own desires, and whose case is that of excess - 18:28.

In the present verse, the quality of these poor people has been identified as: They call on their Lord morning and evening. Here, morning and evening refer to all times of the day and night according to usage. As for calling, it means *‘Ibādah* or worship. Also placed here is a restriction along with this *‘Ibādah*, at whichever time of the day and night it may be, that is: *يُرِيدُونَ وَجْهَهُ*: ‘seeking Him only.’ This tells us that *‘Ibādah* (worship of Allah) without *Ikhhlās* (absolute sincerity before Him) is not trustworthy.

As for the saying: ‘You are not responsible for what is in their account, and they are not responsible for anything in your account,’ according to the interpretation of Ibn ‘Aṭīyah and Al-Zamakhsharī and others, here the pronouns in: *حسابهم* (*Hisābihim* : their account) and *عليهم* (*‘Alaihim* : they are not responsible) refers to these chiefs of disbelievers, those who insisted on removing poor Muslims from the gathering at the sitting. So, Allah Ta‘ālā told the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم not to bother with them whether, or not, they enter the fold of faith - because he was not responsible for anything in their account, just as they were not responsible for anything in his account. If he were responsible for that, that is, he would have been questioned as to why these people did not become Muslims, then, in that situation, he could have removed the poor Muslims from his sitting just for the sake of the chiefs of the disbelievers. And now, when this is not so, removing them from the sitting was rank injustice. And if he were to do something like that, he would have become one of the unjust.

In the second verse (53), it was said that this is how Allah had tested some of them through some others, so that these chiefs of the disbelievers should be able to see the great subduing power of Almighty Allah when poor Muslims, whom they took to be lowly, reached stations unimaginable and won signal honour and recognition both in this world and in the *Ākhirah*, just because they chose to follow the Messenger of Allah. Then, let them go about saying: Were these poor people the only ones to deserve honours and rewards from Allah and to have been so blessed at the expense of us, the noble ones?

According to *Kashshāf* and other classic commentaries, this saying of theirs is an outcome of their trial taken through poor and weak Muslims. They failed in this test. Rather than ponder over this great demonstration of Allah’s absolute power and conclude therefrom that nobility does not depend on wealth or power, instead, it does on morals and deeds - they started blaming Allah for giving them the honour while they were the ones deserving of it. In answer, Allah Ta‘ālā once again pointed out to the reality behind it by saying: *أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَعْلَمَ بِالشَّاكِرِينَ* (Is it not that Allah knows the grateful best?) It means that Allah knows best as to who has the taste for truth and aptitude for gratitude. In other words, in the real sense, a person of nobility and honour is he

who recognizes the right of his Benefactor and is grateful to Him, and it is he who is deserving of all reward and honour - and definitely not the one who, day in and day out, despite being soaked with the blessings of his Provider and Benefactor, goes on disobeying Him.

Some Injunctions and Instructions

Given below are some injunctions and instructions which emerge from these verses:

1. No one has the right to look down upon anyone in tattered clothes or broken down condition. At times, there are people carrying those outward looks who happen to be very honourable and accepted in the sight of Allah. In a *Hadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is reported to have said: ‘Many a broken-down, dust-stained people are such as are held dear by Allah. If they were to swear by Allah about something that it would be like that, Allah Ta‘ālā does honour their swearing by Him (and lets it be like that).

2. Taking material affluence as the criterion of nobility and lowliness is an insult to humanity. It really depends on good morals and deeds.

3. For a reformer and preacher of any nation, though a universal call which addresses everyone, ayes or nays, followers or dissenters, is necessary, yet, foremost is the right of those who own his teachings and follow it. Putting them as secondary, or ignoring them for the sake of others is not permissible. For example, in the case of Muslims, the education and reform of unaware Muslims should not be put off in favour of carrying the call to non-Muslims.

4. The rewards and blessings of Allah keep increasing in relation to the measure of gratitude. A person who wishes an increase in Divine rewards, must make gratitude, expressed through word and deed, his way of life, a constant of personality.

About verse 54: وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ (And when to you come those who believe ...), there are two interpretations given by leading authorities in *Tafsīr*:

1. Most of them have declared it to be related to previous verses and event. In support, they refer to the narration about the event when the chiefs of Quraysh demanded through Abū Ṭālib that his

nephew should first remove the poor people around him, with whom they could not sit, then they would come and listen to him, and think about it. Thereupon, it was Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه who advised that it did not matter much, for Muslims were sincere friends and if requested they would move out of the sitting so that the chiefs of Quraysh could listen to the Word of Allah and become Muslims.

But, in the previous verses, came the command against this advice that this should never be done. Doing this would be cruel and unjust. The revelation of this verse made Sayyidnā 'Umar رضى الله عنه realize the gravity of his error. He feared he had become a sinner by advising against what was the will of Allah. He came to tender his apology for it.

Thereupon, the present verses were revealed to comfort him. In gist, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been asked here to assure them that there will be no retribution for their past mistakes. In fact, not simply that there will be no retribution for the mistake, but that they will also be blessed in many ways by the most merciful Allah. He has also been asked to tell them about His Law that if a Muslim does something evil in ignorance, then gets alerted, repents and corrects his ways for the future, Allah Almighty will forgive him his past sins - and will also not deprive him of His blessings in this world and in the world to come. According to this explanation, these verses were revealed as related to this particular event described in previous verses.

2. Some commentators have taken these verses to be carrying an independent set of rules for guidance. These relate to people who have committed a sin, then felt ashamed of what they did, and repented, and corrected their ways.

A little deliberation will show that there is no contradiction between the two sayings - because it is universally agreed that an injunction of the Holy Qur'an which has been revealed in the background of a particular event, subject to the condition of its words and subject being general, shall not remain restricted to that event, instead of which, it shall have the status of a general injunction. Therefore, even it were to be granted that the said verses did come to be revealed about the event mentioned, still then, this injunction shall have the status of a general rule of conduct which will cover every sinner who

gets alarmed even after having committed the sin, then feels ashamed, repents, corrects and turns watchful for the future.

Now let us turn to a fuller explanation of these verses. It is said in the first verse (54): *وَإِذَا جَاءَكَ الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِآيَاتِنَا فَقُلْ سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ*: It means: When those people come to him who believe in His *Āyat* (the word, ‘*Āyat*’, at this place, could mean the *Āyat* or Verses of the Qur‘ān, and the *Āyat* or general signs of the perfect power of Allah *Jalla Sha‘nuhu* as well), the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been instructed to address them by saying: *سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ* (Peace be upon you). Here, ‘*Salāmun ‘Alaikum*’ could have two meanings. It could either mean: Convey to them the *Salām* or greetings of Allah *Jalla Sha‘nuhu* - which is the highest honour they could receive. Given this interpretation, that becomes the best antidote for the heart-break of poor Muslims, about whom the chiefs of the Quraysh had said that they should be removed from the gathering before they come. Or it could also mean: You give them the good news of their being safe and protected - that is, if they have fallen short or even made a mistake in what they have done, that will stand forgiven, and that they shall stay protected against all sorts of calamities.

In the next sentence of the verse: *كَتَبَ رَبُّكُمْ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ*, the promise of additional favour and reward has been made by saying : You tell these Muslims that Allah has taken it upon Himself that mercy shall be shown to them. Therefore, let them not be frightened or nervous. First of all, by using the word, *Rabb*, the assertion in the verse has been provided with a proof - that Allah is your Nurturer, Nourisher, Sustainer. It is obvious no nurturer would let what is being nurtured go to waste. Then, the mercy which was promised by that *Rabb* has been further clarified through a weighty, yet endearing, statement that ‘their *Rabb* has prescribed this mercy on Himself’. It is obvious when even an average good person would not go back on his promise, how could this be ever imagined when referred to the Lord of the Worlds Himself, specially so when this promise has been preserved as a written document.

Based on a narration of Sayyidnā Abū Hurairah رضى الله عنه, it has been reported in the Ṣaḥīḥ of Al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and in the Musnad of Aḥmad, that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: When Allah Ta‘ālā created the whole creation and determined the destiny of every-

one, then, in a Book with Him on the ‘Arsh, He wrote: *إِن رَّحْمَتِي غَلَبَتْ غَضَبِي* (My Mercy is dominant over My Wrath).

And Sayyidnā Salīm *رضى الله عنه* says: We have seen written in the Torah, when Allah created the heavens and the earth and the entire creation in them, He divided His mercy in a hundred parts. One part from this He distributed all over the creation - and wherever any effect of this mercy is found among human beings, animals and other elements of creation, that owes itself to this same part. The mutual love and concern found among parents and children, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, among relatives, neighbours and friends, are all the outcome of this share from the mercy of Allah. The rest of the ninety nine parts of mercy have been kept by Allah Ta‘ālā for Himself. There are other narrations in which this has been described as a *Hādīth* from the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم*. This goes to show the quality and extent of Allah’s mercy for His creation.

It goes without saying that no ‘*Ibādah* (worship) or ‘*Iṭā‘ah* (obedience) can be good enough so as to be considered as presentable before Allah *Jalla Sha‘nuhu* - neither by an angel nor by a human being. We should not see our ‘*Ibādah* and ‘*Iṭā‘ah* and good deeds in isolation. If we were to look at them as related to the highest of the high, we would humbly realize that what we have been able to do was not any better than what is simply bad. Still one has to be thankful for being able to do what was possible specially when no human being is free of real evils and sins - unless protected by Allah. Under this situation, justice would have demanded that no one remains safe from a general punishment. But, what is actually happening is that every human being is being showered with the blessings of Allah all the time. This, then, is the direct outcome of that mercy which the great Lord-Nourisher of the universe has put it down in writing as His responsibility.

Every Sin is Forgiven by *Taubah* [Repentance]

This perfect mercy of Allah appears mentioned in the form of a rule in the third sentence of verse 54: *أَنَّهُ مَنْ عَمِلَ مِنْكُمْ سُوءًا بِجَهَالَةٍ ثُمَّ تَابَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ وَأَصْلَحَ فَأَنَّهُ غُفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ* It means: One of you who happens to have done something bad by having acted ignorantly, then repents after that and corrects his conduct, then Allah Almighty is most forgiving, He will forgive him his

sins; and He is very merciful, so forgiveness alone will not be considered enough, for he will be blessed with rewards also.

From the word, “*جَاهِلًا*” (*Jahālah*; literally: ignorance, used in the sense of acting ignorantly) one may think that this promise of forgiveness is valid only when a sin is committed in a state of ignorance, not knowing what is being done - and the commitment of a sin knowingly would be considered excluded from the purview of this injunction. But, this is not true - because *Jahālah* (ignorance) here means acting ignorantly which refers to the act of ignorance, that is, one ends up doing something as would have been done by one who is ignorant and unaware of the outcome of his or her act. It is not necessary that the doer of the act be ignorant in reality. This is confirmed by the use of the word *Jahālah* itself - as the word, *Jahalah* has been used here instead of using the word, *Jahl*, most likely to point out to this refinement in meaning. The reason is that *Jahl* (also meaning ignorance) is an antonym of ‘*Ilm* (Knowledge) while *Jahālah* stands in contrast to forbearance and dignity. In other words, the word, *Jahālah* is employed, in usage, to ignorance which is demonstrated practically, in deed. A little thought will reveal that a sin, whenever it is committed by someone, comes about to be because of this practical ignorance. Therefore, some pious elders have said that a person who acts against any command given by Allah and His Messenger is *Jāhil* (ignorant). It refers to this very practical ignorance. For this, it is not necessary to be uninformed and lacking in knowledge - because countless definitive statements of the Holy Qur‘ān and Ṣaḥīḥ *Aḥādīth* (*Naṣṣ*) prove that every sin can be forgiven by making *Taubah* (repentance), whether committed by heedlessness or ignorance, or knowingly and deliberately through self-wickedness or a blinded following of (the drum-beats of) one’s own desire.

At this point, it is also worth noticing that the promise of mercy and forgiveness made to sinners in this verse is conditioned with two things: (a) *Taubah* (repentance), and (b) the *Iṣlāḥ* of ‘*Amal* (the correction of misdeed). *Taubah* means being ashamed of the sin. Says the *Ḥadīth*: *إِنَّمَا التَّوْبَةُ النَّدَامَةُ* (*Taubah* or repentance is another name of *Nadāmah*, that is, being ashamed of or having remorse).

As for the second condition, that is, the correction of deed, it means

that one should see to it that what happened before will not be repeated in the future. So, this process of trying to better one's doings includes the making of a firm determination not to go near that sin ever again by fully auditing and checking one's behaviour at all times, and also included here is that all rights belonging to someone which have been violated or compromised because of that sin, should be compensated to the best of one's capability. They may be the Rights of Allah (*Huqūqullāh*) or the Rights of the Servants of Allah (*Huqūq al-Tbād*). Examples of the Rights of Allah are: Falling short in the duties and obligations like *Ṣalāh*, *Ṣawm*, *Zakāh* and *Hajj*. And the examples of the Rights of the Servants of Allah are: Usurping someone's property unlawfully, to attack someone's honour, and to cause pain to someone by using bad language or causing such pain in some other manner.

Therefore, for *Taubah* (repentance) to be total and complete, the way it is necessary to first feel ashamed of the past sin, then seek forgiveness from Allah Ta‘ālā, then resolve to keep one's conduct correct and straight in the future and never go near that sin again - similarly, it is also necessary that the prayers (*Ṣalāh*) and fasts (*Ṣawm*) which were missed due to heedlessness should be replaced by doing *Qaḍā'* for them. Then, any *Zakāh* which has not been paid earlier should be paid now. If there is a shortcoming in taking care of what was obligatory in *Qurbānī* (Sacrifice) or *Ṣadaqatul-Fitr* (post-Ramaḍān charity for the poor and needy), that should be paid off. If one has not done his or her Hajj, despite its being *Fard*, an absolute obligation, one should do it now; and if it is not possible to do so personally, one should arrange to have it done on his or her behalf (*Hajj Badal*). And if, one does not have the time to arrange for an authorized proxy for Hajj, and does not have the convenience to personally make up for whatever was missed and the *Qaḍā'* of which had become due - during his lifetime - then, he or she should make a *Waṣīyyah* (will) so that their inheritors or heirs could take care of paying the *Fidyah* (ransom) of the obligations due against him or her, or make arrangements for Hajj on his or her behalf. In short, for 'the correction of deed,' the correction of the future conduct only is not enough - it is also necessary to make amends by paying off for obligations left unperformed in the past.

Similar is the case of the Rights of the Servants of Allah (*Huqūq al-*

(*Ibād*). If someone's property has been taken unlawfully, it should be returned to him, or have him forgive it. And if someone has been caused pain physically or verbally, forgiveness must be sought from the aggrieved person. And if, it is not possible or within one's control to have him forgive it - for example, he dies; or goes away to a place the address of which is not known - then, the way out is that one should make it a point to keep praying for his forgiveness before Allah Ta‘ālā consistently. If so, it can be hoped that the holder of the right will be pleased and the person who was unable to have the forgiveness of the deceased during his lifetime will become absolved of what was due on him.

Verses 56 - 58

قُلْ إِنِّي نُهِيتُ أَنْ أَعْبُدَ الَّذِينَ تَدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ قُلْ لَا
 أَتَّبِعُ أَهْوَاءَكُمْ قَدْ ضَلَلْتُ إِذَا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُهْتَدِينَ ﴿٥٦﴾
 قُلْ إِنِّي عَلَىٰ بَيِّنَةٍ مِّنْ رَبِّي وَكَذَّبْتُمْ بِهِ مَاعِنْدِي
 مَا تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِهِ إِنْ الْحُكْمُ إِلَّا لِلَّهِ يَقْضُ الْحَقَّ وَهُوَ خَيْرُ
 الْفَاصِلِينَ ﴿٥٧﴾ قُلْ لَوْ أَنَّ عِنْدِي مَا تَسْتَعْجِلُونَ بِهِ لَقُضِيَ
 الْأَمْرُ بَيْنِي وَبَيْنَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِالظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٥٨﴾

Say, "I have been forbidden from worshipping those you call beside Allah." Say, "I do not follow your desires. In that case, I would be going astray and would no more be of those on the right path. [56]

Say, "I am on clear guidance from my Lord, and you have belied it. What you hurry about is not there with me. The Decision belongs to none but Allah. He relates the Truth and He is the best decision-maker. [57] Say, "If what you hurry about were with me, the matter between me and you would have been over. And Allah knows the unjust best." [58]

The Linkage of Verses

In the verses cited above, the answer to disbelievers who were demanding that the Divine punishment should come to them posthaste

was given in: **وَهُوَ خَيْرُ الْفَاصِلِينَ** (He is the best decision-maker) while the mention of the perfect power of Almighty Allah was made in: **وَاللَّهُ أَكْبَرُ** (Allah knows the unjust best). Next from here, there is a description of the encompassment of the Knowledge and Power of Allah Ta‘ālā on all conceivable data and destiny.

Verses 59 - 62

وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبُرِّ
وَالْبَحْرِ وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٍ فِي ظِلْمٍ
الْأَرْضِ وَلَا رَطْبٍ وَلَا يَابِسٍ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٥٩﴾
وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا جَرَحْتُم بِالنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ يَبْعَثُكُمْ
فِيهِ لِيُقْضَىٰ أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا
كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَهُوَ الْقَاهِرُ فَوْقَ عِبَادِهِ وَيُرْسِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ
حَفَظَةً حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَكُمْ الْمَوْتُ تَوَفَّتْهُ رُسُلُنَا وَهُمْ
لَآيْفِرُّونَ ﴿٦١﴾ ثُمَّ رُدُّوْا إِلَى اللَّهِ مَوْلَاهُمُ الْحَقُّ ۗ أَلَا لَهُ
الْحُكْمُ ۗ وَهُوَ أَسْرَعُ الْحَاسِبِينَ ﴿٦٢﴾

And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. No one knows them but He. And He knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf ever falls but He knows it, nor a grain in the dark hollows of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry, but are in a manifest book. [59]

And He is the One who takes you away by the night and knows what you do by the day, then He makes you rise therein, so that a fixed term may be fulfilled. Thereafter, to Him you are to return; then He will tell you what you have been doing. [60]

And He is Dominant over His slaves and He sends to you those who take care of you until when death comes to one of you, Our deputies take him in full, and they neglect nothing. [61] Then they are returned to Allah, their real Master. Behold, to Him belongs the judgement, and He is the swiftest reckoner. [62]

Commentary

How to Stay Safe from Sins - The Master Prescription

Of all the religions of the world, belief in *Tauḥīd*, monotheism in its pure and applied form, is the distinctive feature of Islam. It is also obvious that *Tauḥīd* is not limited to taking the being of Allah Ta'ālā as one. Instead, *Tauḥīd* is believing in Him as being unique and without equal in all His attributes of perfection and in not taking any created being, other than Him, to be a sharer or partner in these attributes of perfection.

Some of these attributes of Divine perfection are: Life, Knowledge, Power, Hearing, Seeing, Will, Creation, Sustenance. Allah is so perfect in all His attributes that no created being can be equal to Him in any of the attributes. Then, out of these, two attributes are most distinct. These are Knowledge (*Ilm*) and Power (*Qudrah*). His Knowledge encompasses and embraces all existents and non-existents, open and secret, large or small, atoms and particles. So it is with His Power which surrounds and controls everything fully and conclusively. The two verses (59 & 60) cited above describe these two attributes - and these two attributes are mysteriously unique. If anyone were to bring himself around to believe in these two attributes strongly and completely, and thereby start imagining them as being present before him, then, he just cannot ever even think of committing a crime or sin. It goes without saying that here is a person who, in all states of word and deed, rest and movement, remains conscious of the presence and knows that there is someone All-Knowing, All-Aware, All-Powerful watching over him all the time, and Who knows him outside in and inside out and Who is aware of even the intention of the heart and the passing thought of the mind, then, how would he ever be able to take even a tiny step towards any disobedience to his All-Powerful Master? This is the legendary philosopher's stone of what is known as *Istihḍār* in religious terminology [or, to make it more recent, it is like building a web site in your heart with this frame of reference being always online, just click and connect! - Tr.]

In the end, we can say that these two verses are sovereign prescriptions which can make one a model human being, correct and groom deeds and morals, and keep them that way all along.

It was said in the first verse (59): وَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يُعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ (And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. No one knows them but He). The word, ‘مَفَاتِحُ’ (*Mafāṭiḥ* : keys) is plural. Its singular can be: مَفْتِاحٌ : *Maf-tah*, pronounced with a vowel point a on the letter *Mim*, which denotes treasure; and it could also be: مِفْتَاحٌ : *Miftāḥ*, pronounced with a vowel point i on the letter *Mim*, which means key. The word, *Mafāṭiḥ* accommodates both meanings. Therefore, some commentators and translators have rendered it as treasures while some others take it as keys. The outcome, however, is the same because owning the keys to the treasures is taken as the owning of the treasures.

Knowledge of the Unseen and Absolute Power: Two Attributes of Allah, not shared by anyone

‘*Al-Ghayb*’ means things which have not come into existence, or in existence they have come but Allah Ta‘ālā has not let anyone know them (*Mazhari*). The first kind relates to conditions and events about *Qiyāmah*, or future happenings in the universe - for example, who will be born when and where? Who will do what? Who will live how long? Who will have how many breath counts? Who will take how many steps? Who will die where and buried where? Who will get what sustenance, and how much, and at what time? When will it rain, and where, and how much?

The example of the second kind is the foetus which has come to exist in the womb of a woman, but no one can be certain in the absolute sense, as universally applicable with inevitable reliability and accessibility, about the foetus being good natured or bad tempered, handsome or ugly, even a male or female (the radiological determination of which at the later trimesters of pregnancy is a different matter and does not affect the premises of the present discussion). Similar is the case of many other things which, despite having come into existence, remain unseen and unknown to the created beings.

So, the sentence: عِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ means that with Allah are the keys (or treasures) of the Unseen. The sense of being ‘with him’ (عِنْدَهُ) is that they are owned by Him and are in His possession. The outcome is that He is the One who has control of the treasures of the Unseen and it is He who has the exclusive power to bring them into existence and make them manifest as and when He has determined. This is as has been

said in another verse of the Holy Qur'an : *وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا عِنْدَنَا خَزَائِنُهُ وَمَا نُنزِّلُهُ إِلَّا بِقَدَرٍ مَعْلُومٍ* which means: We have treasures of everything, but We send them down in a particular measure (15:21).

In short, from this one sentence, it stands proved that the knowledge of Allah is perfect, and so is His power, and also that this all-encompassing knowledge and absolute power is the exclusive attribute of Allah *Jalla Sha'nuhu*, and that no one can acquire or have it. By putting the word, *عِنْدَهُ* (*indahū*: with Him) before, according to the rules of the Arabic grammar, a pointed reference has been made towards this restriction and particularity. Immediately after, this hint has been changed into full clarity when, to drive the point home, it was said: *لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ* (No one knows them but He).

So, this sentence proves two things: (1) The awareness of Allah about everything Unseen by virtue of His all-encompassing knowledge, and His being dominant over all of them by virtue of His perfect power; and (2) The inability of any created being or thing, other than Allah *Jalla Sha'nuhu*, to acquire or have such knowledge and power.

The meaning of the word, '*Al-Ghayb*' (Unseen), as in the terminology of the Qur'an, which has been stated above (with reference to Tafsir Mazhari) - that it means things which have not yet come into existence, or have come into existence but have not yet been fully unveiled to any created being - was to be kept in sight, the common doubts which bother people when they take a shallow view of the question of *Ghayb*, would be automatically removed.

Usually what happens is that people take the word, *Al-Ghayb* (Unseen) in a literal sense, that is, that which is absent from our knowledge and perception - whether the sources of acquiring its knowledge be present in the sight of others - thus, they would start calling that too as the *Ghayb*. As a result, all sorts of doubts abound. Take the example of astrology, divination of fortunes mathematically (*Ilmul-Jafr* : The knowledge of *Jafr*; vulg. '*Jafar*'), geomancy (*Ilmur-Raml*: The knowledge of *Raml*; vulg. '*Ramal*', meaning divination by means of figures and lines in the sand), or palmistry and things like that which are harnessed to acquire the knowledge of future events. Or, there may be someone who gets to know about future events through *Kashf* (illumination) and *Ilhām* (inspiration). Or, there are our

weather forecasters who by examining things like the drift, power and velocity of the monsoons predict rains and storms a lot of which turns out to be right too. But, common people hasten to take all these to be the Knowledge of the Unseen. Therefore, they start doubting about these verses of the Holy Qur'ān thinking that the Qur'ān tells us that the *'Ilm* of the *Ghayb*, the knowledge of the Unseen, is an attribute of Allah *Jalla Sha'nuhu*, while observation shows that others too get to acquire it.

The answer is clear. If Allah Ta'ālā has made one of His servants informed on some future event, that then, in the terminology of the Qur'ān, does not remain what the *'Ilm* of *Ghayb* or the knowledge of the Unseen is. Similarly, in accordance with the Qur'ānic terminology, knowledge (*'Ilm*) which can be acquired through means and instruments (technology) is no Knowledge of the Unseen (*'Ilm al-Ghayb*). Examples of this could be the weather reports of the meteorological departments and bureaus, or the diagnosis of the hidden condition of a patient by feeling the pulse (manually or instrumentally). The reason is that the weather forecaster or the physician got the chance to announce such information only when the substance of these events comes into existence and becomes obvious. The only difference is that it does not manifest itself openly until that time; it reveals itself, through technical instruments, to experts. People at large remain unaware. And when this substance becomes stronger, its manifestation becomes common. For this reason, weather forecasters cannot come up with what would be the breaking news of rains that will come one or two months from now - because the substantial evidence of rains has not presented itself before them. Similarly, no physician can diagnose the status of medicine or food taken a year or two ago, or a year or two after, by feeling the pulse (manually or instrumentally) today - because that does not habitually leave any effect on the pulse.

In short, these are things the existence of which is foretold by examining their traces and signs. Now, when the traces, signs and substances of these have come into existence, that does not remain part of the Knowledge of the Unseen (*'Ilm al-Ghayb*); rather, it has become a matter of observation. However, because of its being refined or weak, it has not become public knowledge. When it becomes stronger, it will

become a matter of common observation too.

In addition to this, the awareness acquired from all these things, despite that so much has taken place, still remains in the class of estimation and calculation. The real '*Ilm*' or Knowledge is the name of Certitude. That does not come out of any of these. That is why events attesting to the error of such information are many and frequent.

As for astrology and other disciplines, whatever there is based on mathematical computation is knowledge, but not *Al-Ghayb* (Unseen). It is like someone computes existing data and says that the sun will rise today at the hour of five and forty one minutes; or, there will be a solar or lunar eclipse on such and such date in such and such a month.

It is obvious that determining time by calculating the speed of that which is perceptible through the senses is very much like announcing the news of planes and trains reaching airports and stations. Moreover, the claim to be able to know things through astrology etc. is nothing but deception. The emergence of one truth out of a hundred lies is no knowledge.

When X-Ray equipment was invented, it was hoped that the determination of the sex of the foetus will be possible, but it did not serve the purpose satisfactorily (besides being radiologically harmful). Experts in our time (specially those associated with digital imaging who study the foetus in section view, or use water-induced method to let the foetus float in the womb which helps determine digitally if it is a boy) too are helpless as far as the first trimester of pregnancy is concerned. Nothing can be known at that stage.¹ But, during the later trimesters, predictions are made which can be called technical approximations at best and cannot be classed as certain knowledge and absolute awareness. Sometimes predictions can be correct, at others faulty or misread. This is not the Certitude of '*Ilm al-Ghayb*', nor qualifies as such.

The gist of the assertion is: That which is *Al-Ghayb* in the terminology of the Qur'ān is something no one knows but the most sacred

1. Even the test of genes to determine the gender of a child, cannot work before a certain stage of pregnancy which again is a matter of observation, and not the knowledge of the unseen. (Muhammad Taqi Usmani)

Allah. As for what people habitually get to know through causation or instrumentation is not really the *Ghayb* - though, it may be so called because of not having been manifested openly.

Similarly, when part of the knowledge of what belongs to the *Ghayb* has been given to some prophet or messenger, through *Wahy* (revelation), or to a man of Allah (*Waliy*) through *Kashf* (illumination) and *Ilhām* (inspiration), that then, does not remain *Ghayb*. This is called 'أَنْبَاءُ الْغَيْبِ' (the reports or news of the Unseen) in the Holy Qur'an, and not *Al-Ghayb*. This appears in several verses of the Qur'an, for example: تِلْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ الْغَيْبِ نُوحِيهَا إِلَيْكَ (These are some reports from the Unseen [events] which We reveal to you - 11:49). Therefore, when it is said: لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ (No one knows them but He) in the present verse, there is no room for any doubt or exemption in it.

In this particular sentence, a special attribute of Allah has been pointed out - that He is the Knower of the Unseen ('*Ālim al-Ghayb*). The sentences that follow contain a description of the knowledge of the Seen ('*Ilmush-Shahādah*), that is, the knowledge of things present and existing, in sharp contrast to the knowledge of the Unseen ('*Ilmul-Ghayb*). They too establish that the knowledge of Allah *Jalla Sha'nuhu* is all-encompassing leaving not the minutest particle outside its reach. It was said: And He knows what is in the land and the sea. Not a leaf ever falls but He knows it, nor a grain in the dark hollows of the earth, which too is within His knowledge; and so is, in His knowledge, everything fresh or wet or dry in the whole universe - and all of which lies recorded in writing on *al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūz*, the Preserved Tablet.

To sum up, it can be said that Allah Ta'ālā has two unique attributes of knowledge in which no angel or prophet or another created being shares with Him. These are: the Knowledge of the Unseen ('*Ilm al-Ghayb*) and the All-Encompassing Knowledge of existents (*al-Ilm al-Muḥīṭ*). These attributes have been described with a system. The first sentence says: وَأَعِنْدَهُ مَفَاتِحُ الْغَيْبِ لَا يَعْلَمُهَا إِلَّا هُوَ (And with Him are the keys of the Unseen. No one knows them but He). This was about the first attribute. In the sentences that follow, the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah about His universe of existents was identified first by saying: وَيَعْلَمُ مَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ (And He knows what is in the land and the sea). It

means the whole universe and all existents. This is like saying morning and evening in the sense of all the time or saying the East and the West in the sense of the whole world. Thus, by saying land and sea the sense given is that of the whole universe with its existents. So, the knowledge of Allah *Jalla Sha’nuhu* covers whatever there is.

Further on, this was explained by saying that the knowledge of Allah Ta‘ālā is not limited to what is big, He also knows what is the minutest and the most concealed: وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا (Not a leaf ever falls but He knows it). It means that the falling of every leaf in the whole wide world - before it falls, when it falls and after it falls - remains within His knowledge. He knows how many times each leaf on a tree will swing and sway and when and where it will fall and through what circumstances it will go through. The mention of ‘fall’ at this place is perhaps indicative of the life cycle of the leaf. Its fall from the tree is the end of its growth and botanical life. Its last condition has been pointed out here as a mirror to the rest of its conditions.

After that it was said: وَلَا حَبَّةٌ فِي ظُلْمَتِ الْأَرْضِ (Nor a grain in the dark hollows of the earth). Mentioned first was a leaf which falls in common sight. After that, it was a grain which is sowed in fields by a farmer, or gets buried somewhere in the dark and deep belly of the earth. Then, the same all-surrounding knowledge of Allah has been pointed out through things fresh and dry. In the end it was said that with Allah all these things were present in writing. According to some commentators, ‘كِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ’ (a manifest book) means *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūz*, the Preserved Tablet. Some others say that it denotes Divine Knowledge. It has been identified with ‘a manifest book’ because what is written stays preserved leaving nothing to chance or mistake or forgetting. This is similar to the all-encompassing knowledge of Allah *Jalla Sha’nuhu*, which is not based on conjecture - it is certain.

Many verses of the Holy Qur‘ān confirm that the kind of all-encompassing knowledge from which nothing, neither a particle nor its condition, remains excluded is but that of Allah *Subḥānuhu wa Ta‘ālā*. It was said in Sūrah Luqman:

إِنَّهَا إِنْ تَكُ مِثْقَالَ حَبَّةٍ مِنْ حَرْدَلٍ فَنَقُصْنُ فِي سَحَابَةٍ أَوْ فِي السَّمَوَاتِ أَوْ فِي
 الْأَرْضِ بَاتٍ بِهَا اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ

If it be (anything) even equal to the weight of a grain of mustard-seed, and though it be in a rock, or (anywhere) in the heavens or in the earth, Allah will bring it forth: for Allah is subtle and aware - 31:16.

It appears in the Āyatul-Kursī of Sūrah al-Baqarah:

يَعْلَمُ مَا بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَمَا خَلْفَهُمْ وَلَا يُحِيطُونَ بِشَيْءٍ مِّنْ عِلْمِهِ إِلَّا بِمَا شَاءَ ۗ

He knows what is before them and what is behind them. And they encompass nothing of His knowledge except what He wills - 2:255

In Sūrah Yunus, it was said:

وَمَا يُعْزُبُ عَنْ رَبِّكَ مِنْ مِّثْقَالِ ذَرَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي السَّمَاءِ

And not hidden from your Lord is (anything even) the weight of an atom in the earth or in the heaven - 10:61

And it appears in Sūrah Aṭ-Ṭalāq:

وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا،

And that Allah encompasses all things in (His) Knowledge - 65:12

This subject has been dealt with in the Holy Qur'an at many more places where it has been made very clear that the *Ilm* of *Al-Ghayb* (as determined in the Qur'an and explained earlier) or the all-encompassing knowledge of everything in the universe is the exclusive attribute of Allah *Jalla Sha'nuhu*. Taking the knowledge of an angel or messenger to be as all-compassing amounts to giving a messenger of Allah the status of Allah Himself and declaring him to be equal to Him - which is Shirk according to the Holy Qur'an. This aspect of Shirk has been pointed out in Sūrah Al-Shu'arā':

تَاللَّهِ إِنْ كُنَّا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ إِذْ نُسَوِّكُمْ بِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

That is (the *Mushriks* will say in *Qiyamah*), By Allah, we were in an error manifest when we held you (objects of worship) as equals with the Lord of the Worlds - 26:97,98

No doubt, Allah Ta'ālā had blessed His Messengers عليهم السلام, specially the Last among them صلى الله عليه وسلم, with the knowledge of many things from the Unseen, more than the knowledge of all angels and

prophets, but it is obvious that the knowledge of anyone cannot be equal to that of Allah, nor it can ever be. Otherwise, this will become the kind of excess the Christians committed in their reverence for the prophet when they started equating the prophet with God. This is *Shirk*. May Allah keep all of us protected from it.

Covered this far was the subject of the first verse as explained above. The second verse (60) describes Allah's attribute of power which is also exclusive to Him. It is said:

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا جَرَحْتُم بِالنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ يَبْعَثْكُمْ فِيهِ لِيُقْضَىٰ
أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى ۚ

And He is the One who takes you away by night and knows what you do by day, then He makes you rise therein, so that a fixed term may be fulfilled.

Hence, at work here is nothing but the most perfect power of Allah Ta‘ālā which has opened a window to what happens to human beings in life, in death and in rising again. Everyone sees it everyday. According to *Hadīth*, sleep is similar to death in that it does suspend the human body as it would be in death.

By giving an example of sleeping then waking up in this verse, Allah Ta‘ālā has alerted human beings that the way everyone, every night and every morning, witnesses the spectacle of personally rising up from simulated death (sleep), so it should not be difficult to visualise the certainty of collective death, and then, collective rising after it, which is called *Qiyāmah* or the Last Day. The argument is: The Supreme Being who can make this happen, could make that happen too. With His most perfect Power, this is as it shall be. Therefore, towards the end of the verse it was said: ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ مَرْجِعُكُمْ ثُمَّ يُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ (Thereafter, to Him you are to return; then He will tell you what you have been doing) meaning thereby that there will be the reckoning of deeds, then, will come their rewards and punishments.

In the third verse, this subject has been further enlarged by saying that Allah Ta‘ālā has absolute subduing power over all His servants. As long as He wills to have them living, He assigns angels to protect them as a result of which no one dares harm them. And when one has reached the appointed limit of one's age, these very guardian angels

become the agents of one's death without ever falling short in providing the relevant causes leading to one's death. Then, death is not all, for the matter is still not closed. Instead of that, there is the next phase, that of: رُدُّوْا اِلَى اللّٰهِ (Then they are returned to Allah - 62). It means that they will be made to rise again and be presented before Allah Ta‘ālā. If, at this point, one were to think of having to appear before the greatest Judge of judges and stand before Him to account for a whole life-time of deeds, one cannot even dare to imagine to come out unscathed and hope to escape punishment. Therefore, along with it, it was said: اِلَى اللّٰهِ مُوَلِّوْهُمُ الْحَقَّ (to Allah, their real Master - 62). It means that Allah Ta‘ālā is not only the Sovereign and the Judge of judges, He is also the Master and Guardian of His servants who reaches out to help them at all times of their need.

After that, it was said: اَلَا لَهٗ الْحُكْمُ (Beware, to Him alone belongs the judgement). This certainly leaves no doubt that He is the best in His decision and decree. However, one may be inclined to think how it will be possible for Allah who is One alone to take care of the reckoning of age-long deeds of billions and billions of human beings? Therefore, after that, it was said: وَهُوَ اَسْرَعُ الْحٰسِبِيْنَ (and He is the swiftest reckoner). It means that taking what is done by Allah on the analogy of what is done by human beings is ignorance. He shall do that in no time. (When His servants at the Mainframe factories of Cray and IBM can churn billions and billions of data in seconds, why anyone in his senses would ever doubt the power of the Maker of all makers ! -Tr.)

Verses 63 - 64

قُلْ مَنْ يَنْجِيكُمْ مِّنْ ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ تَدْعُوْنَهُ تَضَرُّعًا وَ
 خُفْيَةً لِّئِنْ اَنْجَاكُمْ مِنْ هٰذِهِ لَتَكُوْنَنَّ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِيْنَ ﴿٦٣﴾ قُلِ
 اللّٰهُ يَنْجِيكُمْ مِنْهَا وَمِنْ كُلِّ كَرْبٍ ثُمَّ اَنْتُمْ تُشْرِكُوْنَ ﴿٦٤﴾

Say, "Who delivers you from the darkneses of the land and the sea when you call Him in humility and low tones (promising that) If He delivers us from this, We shall truly become grateful? [63] Say, "Allah delivers you from it and from every pain, still, you associate partners with Him." [64]

Commentary

Some Manifestations of Divine Knowledge and Absolute Power

In previous verses, there was a description of the perfection of Divine Knowledge and Power, and of their unique expanse. Mentioned in the present verse, there are some manifestations of this very Knowledge and Power.

The word: ظُلُمَاتٌ (*Zulumāt*) in the first verse (63) is the plural of ظُلْمَةٌ (*Zulmah*) which means darkness [and which does not have a plural form in English leaving the translator with no choice but to improvise in order to convey the Qur’anic plural which is necessary as explained]. Thus, the expression: ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ in this verse means the many a darkness found on land and sea. Since darkness is of many kinds, such as, the darkness of night, the darkness of rain clouds, the darkness of dust storms and the darkness under the waves of the sea, it is to include all these kinds of darkness that the word, *Zulumāt*, has been used here.

So, the verse means that it was to warn the disbelievers of Makkah against their wrong doings that Allah Ta‘ālā ordered the Holy Prophet ﷺ to ask these people as to what they do when they find themselves in deep trouble during their land trips and sea voyages. Is it not that they would forget all about their idols and start calling on none but Allah? At times, they would confess to their modesty and helplessness openly, while at others, they would be admitting it in the heart of their hearts that no one other than Allah could really save them from such catastrophe. And along with this thought, they would promise to Allah that, should Allah save them from this catastrophe, they would definitely take to the ways of following truth and being grateful. In other words, once delivered, they would be grateful to Allah, would take Him as their real rescuer and helper, never ascribing any partner to His Divinity because no one they have been worshiping came up to help them in their hour of need. With this experience of theirs in view, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is being asked to find out from them as to who delivers them from their distress and possible destruction? Since their answer was already known as they could have not denied the open fact that no one came to help them in their distress, idol or whatever else they worshipped, except Allah. Therefore, in the second verse (64), Al-

lah Almighty has Himself taken the initiative and commanded the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم to tell these people that it is Allah alone who would deliver them from their distress, rather deliver them from every other distress or anxiety they may face in their lives. But, the problem was that they, despite having seen open signs and having found comfort after distress, would go back to *Shirk* and start indulging in the worship of false gods. Strange betrayal and fatal ignorance indeed!

Not only that these two verses tell us about the perfect power of Allah Ta'ālā which delivers human beings from their hour of distress, it also emphasizes that the removal of all sorts of hardships, troubles and anxieties is also in the hands of Allah Ta'ālā alone as evident from the behaviour of diehard disbelievers too who are ultimately compelled to turn to Allah when there is nothing left to turn to.

The Moral

May be, this behaviour of the disbelievers, despite its being a major crime in view of their betrayal, has a certain lesson to teach. That they do turn to Allah in the hour of their distress, as their confession of reality under duress, has for us Muslims a lesson to learn with the rasp of a lash - here we are still not prompt enough to remember Allah in our hour of trials despite having faith in the absolute power of Allah Ta'ālā. What happens is that all our attention is rivetted only to material support which we hope would get us out of trouble. No doubt, we do not take idols, icons and images as our saviours, but the tragic fact is that the many material support systems, logistics, mechanized rescuing squads on land, sea and in the air, and the backup of spot and distant instrumentations, have become no less than idols for us. So impressed with them and so engrossed in them we are that we somehow do not seem to think of Allah and His most perfect power.

Accidents and Hardships : The Real Remedy

Take sickness as an example. When we get sick, we think of nothing but our doctors and physicians. Take the example of a storm or flood. Once in it, we look forward to being rescued with material help and material means. We think on them depends our destiny, and in doing so, we just do not seem to remember the very Master of the universe in Whose control lies our destiny. We tend to do this, despite

that the Holy Qur'an has, time and again, stated it very clearly that hardships and accidents of the world are generally the outcome of the evil deeds of human beings themselves, and a mild sampling of the punishment of the Hereafter. If looked at from this angle, these hardships are, in a way, mercy for Muslims - for, through them, heedless people are, so to say, given a shot in the arm, so that they may use this occasion to survey their evil deeds and start thinking about how not to indulge in them anymore whereby they could remain safe from the greater and harsher punishment of the Hereafter. The same subject has been taken up elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an in the following words:

وَلَنذِيقَنَّاهُمْ مِنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

We shall make them taste a lesser punishment, prior to the greater punishment, so that they may return - 32:21.

Says another verse of the Qur'an:

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِيمَا كَسَبْتُمْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَ يَغْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ،

The hardship that reaches you is an outcome of your evil deeds while many of them Allah forgives - 42:30.

Talking about the verse of Sūrah Ash-Shūrā quoted above, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said:

By Him in whose hands lies my life, the common scratch from a piece of wood suffered by a human being, or a faltering of step or an itching in vein are all after-effects of some sin while the sins which Allah Ta'ālā forgives are many.

As said by 'Allāma Al-Bayḍawī, it means that the diseases and calamities faced by criminals and sinners are all vestiges of sins while the diseases and calamities of those who are infallible to or protected from sins are there to test their patience and fortitude, and to bless them with the higher ranks of Paradise.

So, the essential outcome is that the diseases, accidents, hardships, pain and anxiety faced even by human beings at large - who are not free of sins - are all the consequences and vestiges of sins.

This also tells us that the real cure and the primary way out of all such distressing happenings is that people should turn to Allah *Jalla*

Sha'nuhu, seek forgiveness from Him for all their past sins, and firmly resolve that they would abstain from them in the future, and pray to Him alone that He, in His mercy, removes their hardships.

However, it never means that the use of material means through medicine and treatment while sick, or to employ material methods of confronting accidents and calamities when struck by them, are useless efforts. Instead of that, the purpose is to emphasize that we should believe in Allah Ta'ālā as the prime mover and maker of things and happenings and, as for the use of material means, we should use them too taking them to be nothing but His blessing, because all means and instruments are invariably His creation and His blessings which serve human beings under His command and will. The fire, the air, the water, the dust, and all forces on the face of the earth are but subservient to the command of Allah Ta'ālā. Unless He so wills, neither can the fire burn, nor can water extinguish, nor a medicine bring benefit, nor some food hurt. Experience bears the truth that human beings once they become heedless to Allah Ta'ālā and start relying on their self-invented defence mechanisms what happens is that with every addition to their material logistics, there comes a relative increase in concerns and calamities.

That a medicine or clinical procedure may turn out to be personally beneficial at a given time, or a material way out to some problem may succeed, is quite possible even when one is involved with heedlessness and sin. But, when looked at collectively, in the perspective of the whole creation of Allah, all manifestations of the reliance on the material appear to be unsuccessful. Today, the number and variety of articles and instruments invented to remove pain and drudgery and to provide comfort and luxury with a gusto that knows no stopping, are things man had not even dreamt of only half a century ago. Who does not know that people at that time were totally deprived of ever-new life-saving drugs, medicine delivery systems, procedures, surgeries, experts, technicians, labs and hospitals and nursing homes? But, seen in a wider perspective, man deprived of all these facilities fifty years ago, was not as sick and harassed as the man of late nineties. Similarly, we have vaccines to fight against epidemics, mechanized units to control fire, medical and para-medical squads to cover accidents, and an

overseeing communications system which would hasten emergency information, relevant support of professionals and equipment. But, somehow the more we increase our material defences against accidents and calamities, the more we seem to be affected by them. To what reason could we ascribe this except that during the period now behind us the measure of heedlessness to and disobedience of the Creator of the universe of our existence was not as pronounced as it is in our day. Those people used their articles of comfort as blessings from Allah Ta‘ālā for which they were grateful too. But, the modern man wants to use these conveniences with a sense of hightened self-achievement which is rebellion in disguise. Naturally enough, despite all instrumentations and gadgeteries, men and materials, they cannot make people immune from being hit by such hardships.

Summing up the main elements of our explanations, we can say that Muslims should specially take a lesson from this reference to disbelievers that they too remembered Allah when in distress. It is the duty of a true Muslim that he should, in order to remove his pain and anxiety in distress, first rely on and turn to Allah Ta‘ālā, much more than simply relying on and turning to the material solutions of his trying situation. If he fails to do that, he will meet the same end being witnessed today. Plans will generally fall flat. A thousand efforts are made to stop floods and to minimize losses caused by them, but they keep coming. Ever-new methods of treating diseases are found and used, but diseases keep increasing. Devices and theories are employed to check rising prices of things - which seem to be effective too, though on the surface - but the result on the whole is that prices keep rising on almost a daily basis. Think of crimes like theft, robbery, kidnaping, bribery and smuggling. Governments all over the world, including the most advanced, are employing all sorts of material means to stop them. But, common people do not have to look into a crime graph to find out what is happening - they see that crimes are increasing. We can only wish that human beings of the modern era would do well by rising a little bit higher than the levels of person, identity, profit and loss, and surveying conditions prevailing, then, they would come to realize that, when seen collectively, all our material efforts have failed, in fact, they are compounding our problems. Then, if they were to look at the remedy proposed by the Qur‘ān which tells us that there is only

one way of staying safe from all kinds of hardship, and that is to turn to the Creator of the universe. Whatever material solutions there are, they are fine, they too should be used as blessings from Him. Other than this, there is no way to ideal security.

Verses 65 - 67

قُلْ هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ
 مِنْ تَحْتِ أَرْجُلِكُمْ أَوْ يَلْبِسَكُمْ شِيْعًا وَيُذِيقَ بَعْضَكُمْ بَأْسَ
 بَعْضٍ ۗ اُنظُرْ كَيْفَ نَصَّرَفَ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَفْقَهُوْنَ ﴿٦٥﴾
 وَكَذَّبَ بِهِ قَوْمُكَ وَهُوَ الْحَقُّ ۗ قُلْ لَسْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ بِوَكِيلٍ ﴿٦٦﴾
 لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ مُّسْتَفَرِّزٌ ۖ وَسَوْفَ تَعْلَمُوْنَ ﴿٦٧﴾

Say, "He is fully capable that He should send a punishment from above you or from beneath your feet, or to put you in confusion through divisions and make some of you taste troubles through some others." See how We bring forth a variety of Verses, so that they may understand. [65] And your people have belied it despite its being the truth.

Say, "I have not been entrusted with your task. [66] For every event there is a point (of time and place) to occur, and (that) you will know." [67]

Commentary

Mentioned in the previous verses was one manifestation of the knowledge and power of Allah Almighty that He alone can remove human distress and whoever calls on Him while in difficulty shall find His help before his eyes. The reason is that He is perfectly powerful over the whole universe and He is also perfectly merciful to His entire creation. No one else has that perfect power and universal mercy.

Mentioned in the present verses is another side of His perfect power - that He can punish any individual or group for its contumacy if He wills to do so. And doing so is easy for Him. To punish a criminal, He needs no police or army or helper like the rulers of the mortal world. This aspect was stated by saying: هُوَ الْقَادِرُ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَبْعَثَ عَلَيْكُمْ عَذَابًا مِّنْ فَوْقِكُمْ أَوْ مِنْ تَحْتِ

أَوْ يُرْسِلْكُمْ أَوْ يُبَدِّلْكُمْ سَيْمًا (He is fully capable that He should send a punishment from above you or from beneath your feet, or to put you in confusion through divisions).

Three Kinds of Divine Punishment

Identified here are three kinds of Divine Punishment: (1) That which comes from above, (2) that which comes from beneath, and (3) that which spreads out from within. Then, by bringing the word, ‘عَذَابًا’ with nunnation (*tanwin*) on an indefinite noun (*nakirah*), a warning - as admitted by the rules of Arabic grammar - has been served that there could be different sub-divisions and forms within these three kind.

According to commentators of the Qur‘ān, there have been many examples of punishment coming from above among past communities as the flood which came upon the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام, the wind storm which overtook the people of ‘Ād, the raining of stones on the people of Sayyidnā Lūṭ عليه السلام, the raining of blood and frogs upon the Banī Isra‘īl and the pelting of pebbles by flights of birds on the People of the Elephant (*aṣḥāb al-fīl*) when they invaded Makkah which left all of them reduced to chaff chewed out.

Similarly, various forms of the coming of punishment from beneath have also appeared among past communities. For the people of Sayyidnā Nūḥ عليه السلام there already was the punishment from above in the form of rain-storm, then they were also caught up in the punishment from beneath when the water under the ground started forcing out whereby they came into the grip of two punishments at the same time, that is, the punishment from above and the punishment from beneath. The people of the Pharaoh were drowned in the punishment from beneath their feet. Qārūn (Korah) fell a victim to this very punishment when he, along with his legendary treasures, sank down into the earth as if swallowed by it.

Early *Tafsīr* authorities, Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās رضى الله عنه and Mujāhid have said that the punishment from above means that cruel rulers and merciless officials come to rule over a people while the punishment from beneath means that one’s own subordinates and servants turn into traitors, idlers and thieves.

Some sayings of the Holy Prophet ﷺ also confirm the *Tafsir* of Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās given above. The saying of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم which follows has been reported in Mishkāt with reference to Shu‘abul-Īmān of Al-Baihaqī: كَمَا تَكُونُونَ كَذَلِكَ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْكُمْ, that is, ‘as are your deeds, good or bad, so shall be your rulers and officials set upon you.’ It means : If you are good, and obedient to Allah Ta‘alā, your rulers and officials will also be merciful and just. And if your deeds are evil, you will find that merciless and unjust rulers and officials have been set upon you.’ The well-known saying: أَعْمَالُكُمْ أَعْمَالُكُمْ (Your deeds : your rulers) means just the same.

According to a narration from Abī Nu‘aym in his Hilyah appearing in Mishkāt, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has been reported to have said:

Allah Ta‘alā says: I am Allah. There is no god worthy of worship but Me. I am the Master of kings. And I am the Sovereign. The hearts of kings are in My hands. When My servants obey Me, I pour mercy in the hearts of their kings and officials. And when My servants disobey Me, I harden the hearts of their rulers against them. They make them taste all kinds of evil punishments. Therefore, do not waste your energy in speaking ill of the rulers and officials. Turn to Allah and correct your deeds so that I may put your affairs right.

Similarly, there is a narration from Sayyidah ‘Ā’ishah رضى الله عنها in Abū Dāwūd and Nasā’ī in which the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is reported to have said:

When Allah Ta‘alā wishes well for a ruler, He gives them a good minister and deputy so that he may remind the ruler if he forgets something, and who helps the ruler when he acts right. And when some evil is destined for a ruler, evil people are made his ministers and deputies.

In the light of these *Hadīth* narrations and the explanation of related verses, the outcome is that hardships faced by people at the hands of their rulers are a punishment which comes from above - and that which is inflicted through servants and subordinates is a punishment which comes from beneath. They are no stray accidents. In fact, they are a punishment of one’s deeds under a Divine law. Imām Sufyān

Ath-Thawrī said: When a sin gets to be committed by me, I see its effect on my servant, even on my horse I ride and the donkey I use to carry my things. I can feel the change in their temper because all of them start disobeying me. Maulānā Rūmi, in his famous Mathnawī, says that Allah Ta‘ālā, by putting you under the apparent punishment which causes pain to you through ill-treatment at the hands of your cruel rulers or faithless subordinates in this mortal world, actually wishes to turn your attention towards Himself, so that you get alerted and start trying to make your deeds good, and as a result of which, you may save yourself from the much greater punishment of the Hereafter.

To sum up, we can say that, according to the *Tafsīr* of Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Abbās, the oppression of rulers is the punishment which comes from above, and the dishonesty, idling and treachery of subordinates is the punishment which comes from beneath, and the remedy for both is the same - that everyone should look back and examine what each one has done, leave paths of error, avoid being disobedient to Allah, then, nature will be commanded to take its desired course creating conditions which would remove the hardship. Otherwise, trying to remove them and correct the situation through material ways and means alone will be nothing but self-deception, an experience we have been having all the time.

The different explanations of the punishment from above and from beneath which you have heard just now are really no different from each other - because the word, عَذَابٌ (*adhāban*) meaning ‘punishment,’ which appears in this verse, in fact, embraces all these explanations. Punishments coming from the skies like the rocks, pebbles, blood, fire, flood, and the oppression of rulers, are all included under the punishment from above. As for the parting of the earth and the sinking of a people in it, or being drowned in water forcing out from the earth, or becoming a victim of problems at the hands of subordinates, all these are punishments from beneath.

There is a third kind of punishment mentioned in this verse, and that is: أَوْ يُلَبِّسَكُمُ شَيْعًا (or put you in confusion through divisions ...). It means that you may be split into parties confronting each other and it becomes a punishment from within. The word, يُلَبِّسَكُمُ (*yalbisakum*

translated as ‘put you in confusion’) used here comes from the root: لبس (*labasa*) which basically means to hide or cover up. It is in that sense it is used to refer to clothes which cover the human body. And for this reason, its derivation: التباس (*iltibās*) is used in the sense of doubt, where the meaning of what is said remains hidden, that is, it is not open and clear.

As for the word: شيع (*shiya’*), it is the plural form of: شيعَة (*shi‘ah*) which means to be a follower, adherent or partisan of someone. It appears in the Holy Qur’an: وَإِنَّ مِنْ شِيعَتِهِ لِبُرْهَانٍ that is, ‘following in the footsteps of Nūḥ عليه السلام is Ibrāhīm عليه السلام - 37:83.’ Therefore, in common usage, the word: شيعَة (*shi‘ah*) is used to denote a group which gets together for a particular purpose, and its members help each other in achieving that purpose. In the current idiom, it would mean a faction or party.

So, the verse could be translated in the sense that one kind of ‘*Adhāb*’ (punishment) is that a nation or community breaks up into factions and parties and starts confronting each other. Therefore, when this verse was revealed, the Holy Prophet ﷺ addressed Muslims and told them:

لَا تَرْجِعُوا بَعْضِي كُفَّارًا يَضْرِبُ بَعْضُكُمْ رِقَابَ بَعْضٍ

Do not renege after me becoming like disbelievers striking at the necks of each other. (Deduced by Ibn Abī Ḥātim from Zayd ibn Aslam as in Mazhari)

Sayyidnā Sa‘d ibn Abī Waqqāṣ رضى الله عنه says: Once we were going with the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم. When we reached Masjid Banī Mu‘āwiyah, the Messenger of Allah صلى الله عليه وسلم went into the Masjid and offered two *raka‘ah* of Ṣalāh. We too offered two *raka‘ah*. After that, he became busy with *Du‘ā*, and kept praying for a fairly long time. After that, he said: ‘I asked my *Rabb* for three things: (1) My *Ummah* may not be destroyed by drowning: Allah Ta‘ālā answered this prayer; (2) My *Ummah* may not be destroyed by famine and hunger: This too was answered; (3) My *Ummah* may not be destroyed by infighting: I was stopped from making this prayer.’ (Mazhari with reference to Baghawī)

Another *Ḥadīth* on the same subject has been reported from Sayy-

idnā ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar رضى الله عنه where one of the three prayers is that ‘may Allah not set an enemy upon my *Ummah* who destroys all of them.’ This prayer was answered. As for infighting and mutual confrontation, he was forbidden from making the prayer.

These narrations prove that, though the kind of punishments which visited earlier communities from above them and from beneath them and which destroyed all of them, will not visit the *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم - but, there is one ‘*Adhāb*’ (punishment) which will keep visiting this *Ummah* too during their life in the present world. That ‘*Adhāb*’ is their infighting and the mutual confrontation between their factions and parties. It was for this reason that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم has emphatically forbidden his *Ummah* from becoming divided in sects, factions and parties and from challenging and fighting each other among themselves. Actually, he has, on every possible occasion, tried to put the fear of Allah in every heart by warning that the Divine punishment, if it has to come upon Muslims within their life in this mortal world, it will come because of nothing else but their mutual confrontation and infighting.

This subject has been further clarified in a verse of Sūrah Hūd where it is said:

وَلَا يَزَالُونَ مُخْتَلِفِينَ إِلَّا مَن رَّحِمَ رَبُّكَ (هود)

But they will continue in their differences, except those whom Allah has blessed with mercy - 11:118

In this light, it becomes all the more clear that those who differ with each other (without a valid Islamic legal justification) are either deprived of Divine mercy, or far-removed from it. Before we move on to analyse the subject, quoted below are two verses from Sūrah ‘Al-‘Imrān which would make the problem easier to understand:

وَاعْتَصِمُوا بِحَبْلِ اللَّهِ جَمِيعًا وَلَا تَفَرَّقُوا

And hold on to the cord of Allah, all of you, and be not divided - 3:103

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا

And do not be like those who became divided and fell into disputes ... - 3:105

The Anatomy and Rationale of Differences

The essence of all *Āyāt* and *Riwāyāt* (Verses and *Hadīth* Narrations) presented here is that difference is ill-fated and blameworthy. If we were to ponder over the causes of the decline and dismemberment of Muslims materially and spiritually, we will see that the root of most troubles lies in this very mutual difference and discord we are talking about. Unfortunately, as a result of our own misdeeds, this ‘*Adhāb*’ has come to sit on our heads like an octopus. Otherwise, we were a people whose pivot of unity was one single *Kalimah* of *لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ مُحَمَّدٌ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ* (There is no god worthy of worship but Allah, Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah). All men and women having faith in this *Kalimah*, anywhere on this earth, speaking any language, of any colour, of any race, any lineage, were brothers and sisters to each other. Mountains and rivers were no handicap in their unity. The difference of race, family, colour and language were no hurdles in their way. Their unity was tied with this *Kalimah* irrespective of their nationality. That they were Arabs or Egyptians or Syrians or Turks or Indian or Chinese did not matter. These divisions were simply for the sake of identity and introduction, and that was it, no more. The poet of neo-Islamic Renaissance, Muḥammad Iqbal summarized it by saying:

درویشِ خدامست نہ شرقی ہے نہ غربی
گھر اس کا نہ دہلی نہ صفابان نہ سمرقند

The dervish of Allah cares not
For he is neither of the East, nor of the West
For him there is no home
Neither Delhi, nor Isfahan, nor Samarqand ...

In our day, intrigues backed by constantly concerted efforts have succeeded in dividing them once again into racial, linguistic and regional nationalities. Worse came to happen when these very entities, hit by internal disruption and chaos, ended up splitting themselves into many more additional factions. The people whose hallmark was to forgive, forego and sacrifice even in the case of others when they would readily surrender their most just rights for the sake of avoiding confrontation now have many individuals within their fold who would not hesitate to sacrifice even the most precious relationship for the sake of the cheapest and the meanest of gains. This is the difference born out

of self-interest, wanton desires and fancies which is a bad omen for any community or nation, and certainly a cash punishment for them right here in the present world.

However, it is necessary to understand at this point the difference which has been declared in the Qur'an as Divine punishment, and deprivation from Divine mercy, is that particular difference which either appears in Principles and Beliefs or is because of self-interest, wanton desires and fancies. Not included here is the particular difference of opinion which was based on the Principles of *Ijtihad* carried out in the light of the Qur'an and Sunnah, and it was under these Principles that the difference of opinion in subsidiary matters and *masā'il* has continued being there among the jurists (*Fuqahā'*) of the Muslim *Ummah* from the early period of *Ṣaḥābah* (Companions) and *Tābi'īn*. (Successors to Companions). It should be borne in mind that in these subsidiary matters, the frame of reference under which such difference of opinion may show up is restricted to Qur'an, Sunnah and *Ijmā'* (consensus). Here, the intention of everyone is to obey and act in accordance with the injunctions of Qur'an and Sunnah. But, the difference which emerges here is that of *Ijtihad* and opinion in the deduction of solutions to subsidiary problems as interpreted from words left condensed or ambiguous in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Such difference has been called *Raḥmah* or mercy in *Ḥadīth*.

The following narration has been reported in Al-Jāmi' Al-Saghīr [with reference to Naṣr Maqdisī, Baihaqī & Imām al-Haramayn]: اِخْتِلَافُ أُمَّتِي رَحْمَةٌ (The difference of my *Ummah* is mercy). It has been made particular to the community of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم because any difference which arises among the '*Ulamā'*', who uphold nothing but the truth, and Muslim jurists who are unalienably God-fearing, shall always be governed by the principles of the Qur'an and Sunnah. Then, this would be with an intention which is absolutely true and with an approach which is inevitably for the good pleasure of Allah. This difference will never be motivated by any self-interest or desire for recognition, office or money. Therefore, that difference will never become the cause of confrontations. Instead of that, as determined by 'Allama 'Abdur-Rauf al-Munāwī, the commentator of Al-Jāmi' Al-Saghīr, the different approaches (*Maslak*) of the jurists of Muslim community will have the

same status which was given to different religious law systems of the blessed prophets in past periods of time - in that they all were, despite being different, nothing but the very injunctions of Allah. Thus, the different approaches (*Maslak*) credited to the great Mujtahid Imāms of the Muslim *Ummah* shall be called, because of their being under the principles of the Qur'ān and Sunnah, nothing but the commandments and injunctions of Allah and *Rasūl*.

An example of such difference based on *Ijtihād* can be readily seen on the main streets of our cities where the streets are demarcated into various sections or lanes for the convenience of those who move on them. A section would be used by buses while another by cars and vans. Similarly, a section of the street may be reserved for cyclists and pedestrians. Though this division of one main street into several lanes is outwardly a form of difference but, since everyone is headed in one single direction and everyone moving through each lane will ultimately reach one desired destination. Therefore, this difference of routes or approaches, rather than being harmful, is functionally useful for all movers - a lot of space and mercy indeed.

This is the reason why leading Mujtahid Imāms and the Jurists of the Muslim Community agree that the *Maslak* or approach taken by any of them is not false, and it is not permissible for anyone to call those who follow it as being sinners. The essence of the difference in *Madhab* or approaches or schools of thought represented by Mujtahid Imāms and Jurists has a limited frame of reference. The approach taken by one Mujtahid happens to be weightier in his sight, but he himself would not call the approach of another Mujtahid as false. In fact, they pay due regard and respect to each other. A look into the mutual relationships of the jurists (*Fuqahā'*) among the *Ṣaḥābah* and *Tābi'īn*. and the four leading Mujtahid Imāms and the events and happenings surrounding them are open testimony to the fact that, despite their differences in technical, intellectual and juristic approaches, they had excellent mutual working relationships, giving each other full respect and recognition. That they would be arrayed against each other in rancour, hostility and infighting was absolutely out of question in their case. The same spirit and *modus operandi* continued with those who later on came as followers of the main juristic schools - as far as

they remained adhering to sound knowledge and honest attitude, their mutual relationships remained based on cordiality and respect like their predecessors.

This is the difference we are talking about. This difference is mercy indeed, for people a source of myriad openings and conveniences and leaves, and certainly a reservoir of beneficial results. As far as subsidiary questions are concerned, the truth is that the difference of proponents in them is not harmful, if it remains within its proper bounds. In fact, it serves as an aid in enlarging and identifying different aspects of a question which makes it possible to arrive at a sound resolution of the problem. It goes without saying that in a meeting of honest minds, the absence of some difference of opinion about a question is just not conceivable. Something like this can happen among a set of people who cannot or do not understand the problem at all, or among pragmatic secular people who would not hesitate to agree to an opinion, even though against their conscience, just to accomodate some party, pressure group or interest lobby.

So, difference of opinion which is within its bounds, that is, not in the categorical imperatives of the Qur‘ān and Sunnah concerning articles of faith and decisive injunctions, and which is only in subsidiary questions requiring *Ijtihād* , and that too where the definitive texts of Qur‘ān and Sunnah are either silent or ambiguous, and again if the effort so made does not go to the outer limit of name calling, blame throwing and infighting, then, that difference of opinion will, instead of being harmful, be beneficial - a blessing and mercy. Think of this universe of our experience. Things differ in shape, form, colour, smell, property and functional benefits. There are countless living organisms. They differ, so do human beings, different temperaments, occupations, skills, ways of living - these differences are the charm of living which provides open avenues of countless benefits.

Many people who are not aware of this reality, would look down even upon the normal differences in the legal solution of problems (*fatāwa*) credited to great Jurists and true ‘*Ulamā*.’ They are heard complaining: When ‘*Ulamā*’ differ, where do we go? Frankly, this is a simple matter. Take the example of a sick person about whose condition physicians differ. Naturally everyone tries to find out a physician

who has the desired experience and technical expertise and he is the one entrusted with the charge of treating the patient. No one goes out speaking ill of other doctors in town. The same thing happens in legal cases. Lawyers may differ in their opinions. Naturally people entrust their case to a lawyer who is efficient and experienced in their estimation, and act on his advice. They do not run around maligning others in that profession. This principle should be operative here too. When the *Fatāwa* given by ‘*Ulamā*’ about a problem turn out to be different (reasons to be investigated in the parameters of the original inquiry), then, one should make his best efforts to locate an ‘*Ālim*’ who, in their judgement, is better than others in ‘*Ilm*’ (expertise in religious knowledge) and *Taqwā* (fear of Allah, fear of being responsible before Him) and follow the advice given by him. There is no need for them to waste their time in finding fault with other ‘*Ulamā*.’

In *I‘lām Al-Muwwaqqi‘īn*, ‘*Allāmah Hāfiẓ ibn al-Qaiyyim* has reported that the choice of an expert Mufti - and in case of a difference of opinion, the giving of preference to the *Fatwā* of an ‘*Ālim*’ who, in the opinion of the seeker, is the best of all in ‘*Ilm*’ and *Taqwā* - is the duty of every Muslim himself who has such a problem on hand. That he starts giving preference to one of the different *Fatāwa* of ‘*Ulamā*’ is certainly not his job. But, it is no one’s job but his own that he should act according to the *Fatwā* of anyone from among the Muftīs and ‘*Ālims*’ whom he considers the best in knowledge and honesty. After that, he should not go about denouncing other Muftīs and ‘*Ālims*’. Once a person has done what is required of him, he is totally free of blame in the sight of Allah. In case, the giver of *Fatwā* did make a mistake in the real sense, then, he himself will be responsible for it.

In short, not every difference is absolutely blameworthy, nor every agreement absolutely praiseworthy and desirable. If thieves, robbers and rebels were to join hands and form a union of their own, who would not take this union of theirs blameworthy and fatal for the society. Contrary to this, police action or public protest against such groups is considered praiseworthy and beneficial by all reasonable people.

This tells us that the problem does not lie in difference of opinion, nor does it lie in acting according to a particular opinion, instead, all

problems show up when others are suspected and slandered - which is an outcome of lack of knowledge and honesty and plenty of self-serving desires and fancies. When a nation or country stoops to that level, this merciful difference is changed into punishing difference. Of all the people, Muslims themselves split into parties, fight among themselves, even do the impossible by killing each other. Hurling insults on others is taken to be a defence of religious position, although, religion has nothing to do with such excess and aggression. In fact, this is the confrontation and fighting which has been sternly prohibited by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم. In authentic *Āḥadīth*, it has been cited as the cause of peoples and nations going astray. (Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah)

In the second verse (66), after mentioning the anti-truth stand taken by the Quraysh of Makkah, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, also from the same tribe, has been instructed that he should tell those people asking about the precise time when the promised punishment will come that he has not been appointed to do that for them. The truth is that for everything there is a point of time as determined in Divine knowledge. It will come at its own time, and they will see for themselves what happens when it does.

Verses 68 - 73

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ الَّذِينَ يَخُوضُونَ فِي آيَاتِنَا فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ حَتَّى
يَخُوضُوا فِي حَدِيثٍ غَيْرِهِ ۗ وَإِمَّا يُنسِيتُكَ الشَّيْطَانُ فَلَا تَقْعُدْ
بَعْدَ الذِّكْرَى مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ ﴿٦٨﴾ وَمَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ
مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَلَكِنْ ذِكْرَى لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾
وَذَرِ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لَعِبًا وَلَهْوًا وَعَرَّتْهُمْ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا
وَذَكَّرِ لَهُ أَنْ تَبْسَلَ نَفْسًا بِمَا كَسَبَتْ لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلِيٌّ
وَلَا شَفِيعٌ ۗ وَإِنْ تَعْدِلْ كُلَّ عَدْلٍ لَأَ يُؤْخَذَ مِنْهَا ۗ أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ
أَبْسَلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا ۗ لَهُمْ شَرَابٌ مِّنْ حَمِيمٍ ۗ وَعَذَابٌ أَلِيمٌ ۗ بِمَا كَانُوا
يَكْفُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾ قُلْ أَدْعُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ مَا لَا يَنْفَعُنَا وَلَا يَضُرُّنَا

وَنُرَدُّ عَلَىٰ أَعْقَابِنَا بَعْدَ إِذْ هَدَيْنَا اللَّهَ كَالَّذِي اسْتَهْوَتْهُ الشَّيَاطِينُ
 فِي الْأَرْضِ حَيْرَانٌ ۚ لَهُ أَصْحَابٌ يَدْعُونَهُ إِلَىٰ الْهُدَىٰ انْتِنَا ۗ قُلْ
 إِنَّ هُدَىٰ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْهُدَىٰ ۗ وَ أَمْرِنَا لِنُسَلِّمَ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٧١﴾ وَأَنْ
 أَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَهُوَ الَّذِي إِلَيْهِ تُحْشَرُونَ ﴿٧٢﴾ وَهُوَ الَّذِي
 خَلَقَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ بِالْحَقِّ ۗ وَيَوْمَ يَقُولُ كُن فَيَكُونُ ۗ قَوْلُهُ
 الْحَقُّ وَلَهُ الْمُلْكُ يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ ۗ عَلَيْهِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ ۗ
 وَهُوَ الْحَكِيمُ الْخَبِيرُ ﴿٧٣﴾

And when you see those who indulge in our verses adversely, turn away from them until they get busy with some other discourse. If Satan makes you forget, then, after the recollection, do not sit with the unjust people. [68] And those who fear Allah bear no responsibility for anything they are accountable for, but only for advising them, so that they may fear Allah. [69]

And avoid those who have taken their faith as game and play and the worldly life has deceived them, and preach with it (the Qur'an), lest one should be detained for what he earned, having none to help besides Allah, nor to intercede, and if he offers every ransom, it will not be accepted from him. They are those who are detained for what they earned. For them there is a drink of boiling water and a painful punishment, because they used to disbelieve. [70]

Say, "Should we call someone besides Allah, which can give neither benefit nor harm, and should we turn back on our heels after Allah has given us guidance, like the one whom the satans have taken away far into the wilderness leaving him bewildered; he has friends who call him to the right path (saying), "come to us." Say, "Allah's guidance is the guidance, and we have been ordered to submit to the Lord of the worlds, [71] and establish Ṣalāh, and fear Him. And He is the One before whom you are to be gathered. [72] And He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in all rightness, and the day He says, "Be" and it comes to be. His word

is the truth and His is the kingdom on the day the Horn shall be blown. He is the knower of the absent and the present, and He is Wise, All-Aware. [73]

Commentary

Avoid Gatherings of False People

In the present verses, Muslims have been instructed that they should, as a matter of principle, abstain from being a part of the gatherings frequented by those who prefer to follow the false - because a sin is a sin, whether you do it yourself or watch others doing it. Details follow.

The word: *يَخْوِضُونَ* (translated here as ‘indulge’) in the first verse (68) is from: *خَوَضَ* (*khawḍ*) which basically means to enter into water and wade through it. Then, it also denotes entering into activities which are vain, absurd or futile. This word has been used in the Qur‘ān usually in this very sense. Verses such as: *رَكْنَا نَخْوِضُ مَعَ الْخَائِضِينَ* ‘we used to indulge (in vain discourse) with those indulging - 74:45’ and: *فِي خَوْضِهِمْ يَلْعَبُونَ* ‘playing with what they are indulged in - 6:91’ are some examples.

Therefore, the Qur‘ānic expression referring to: *خَوْضَ فِي الْآيَاتِ* has been translated by Maulānā Ashraf Alī Thānavī and Shaykh al-Hind, Maulānā Maḥmūd al-Ḥasan in the sense of fault-finding and disputing, which means: ‘when you see those people meddling in the Āyāt of Allah just for fun and ridicule, or trying to find faults in them, turn away from them.’

The address in this verse is general, to everyone - which includes the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and the members of his community as well. The truth of the matter is that the address to the Holy Prophet ﷺ is there only to let Muslims at large hear it, otherwise he never participated in any such gatherings even during his childhood days. Therefore, he needed no prohibition.

Then, ‘turning away’ from the gatherings of false people could take many forms. For example, leave the gathering or get busy doing something else while being there without paying any attention to them. But, at the end of the verse, it was made clear that the first form is what is desirable, that is, one should not keep sitting in their gathering; one should rise and leave from there.

Said at the end of the verse was 'if Satan makes you forget', that is, if one went into their gathering unmindfully - whether while not remembering the prohibition of participating in such gatherings, or while not recalling that these people talk against the *Āyāt* of Allah and the *Rasūl* of Allah in their gatherings - then, in either situation, once it is remembered, one should leave that gathering immediately. To keep sitting there after having remembered is a sin. The same subject appears in another verse where, at the end, it has been said: If you kept sitting there, you will be like them (إِنَّكَ إِذَا مَنَّاهُمْ) (4:140).

In *Tafsīr* Kabir, Imām al-Rāzī has said that the real intent in this verse is to abstain from such sinful gatherings and their participants. The best course is to rise and depart from there. But, should leaving the gathering pose a danger to one's life, property or honour, it is permissible for common people to "turn away" in some other manner, for instance, they could make themselves busy with something else and pay no attention to them. But, the case is different with particular people who are followed in religious matters - for them, the only appropriate way is to rise and leave the gathering.

Going a little further in our understanding of the sentence: وَإِنَّمَا يُنْسِيَنَّكَ وَالشَّيْطَانُ (And if Satan makes you forget) mentioned above, let us consider its implications. If this is addressed to Muslims at large, it is clear that to forget is human - and if the address is to the Holy Prophet ﷺ, the question arises: If forgetfulness comes to affect a prophet and messenger of Allah as well, how can their teachings be trusted?

The answer is: It is possible that prophets عليهم السلام too forget something under particular circumstances where the divine wisdom decides to make it so happen to achieve a particular purpose, but they are immediately alerted by Allah Ta'ālā through Wahy which helps them not to let it last. Therefore, their teachings ultimately become free of any doubts of forgetfulness.

However, this sentence of the verse does tell us that should a person fall into an error inadvertently, that will stand forgiven. In a *Hadīth* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, it has been said:

رُفِعَ عَنْ أُمَّتِي الْخَطَأُ وَالنِّسْيَانُ وَمَا اسْتَكْرَهُوا عَلَيْهِ

Removed from my *Ummah* is (the sin of) error and forgetting

and that which one has been compelled to do.

In Aḥkām al-Qur'an, Imām al-Jaṣṣāṣ has said:

This verse tells that Muslims should abstain from every such gathering where things are being said against Allah Ta'ālā, His *Rasūl* صلى الله عليه وسلم and the Shari'ah of Islam and where it is not within one's power and control to stop or have it stopped, or, at the least, be able to say what is true and right. However, participating in such a gathering with the intention to reform and to carry the message of truth to them does not matter.

As for the statement: *فَلَا تَقْعُدْ بَعْدَ الذِّكْرِى مَعَ الْقَوْمِ الظَّالِمِينَ* which prohibits sitting with unjust people after the recollection, Imām al-Jassās has deduced the ruling that participating in the gathering of such unjust, irreligious and big-mouthed people is an absolute sin, whether or not, at that time, they are engaged in talking about what would be considered impermissible - because people of such nature could be expected to start their ridiculous rantings all of a sudden. This rule is deduced from this verse on the basis that sitting in the company of unjust people has been prohibited in this verse in an absolute sense. It does not have the condition that they be busy with their act of injustice at that time too.

The same subject has been taken up in another verse of the Holy Qur'an more explicitly where it is said: *وَلَا تَرْكَبُوا إِلَى الَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا فَمَا تَسْكُمُ النَّارُ* (And do not incline towards the wrong doers, lest the Fire should catch you ... 11:113).

When the verse cited above was revealed, the noble Companions submitted: *Yā Rasūl* Allah, if this absolute prohibition of going in their gatherings remained in force, we shall be deprived of offering Ṣalāh and Ṭawāf in *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* because these people keep sitting there all the time (before Hijrah and the Conquest of Makkah) doing nothing but fault-finding and ill-speaking. Thereupon, revealed was the next verse (69): *وَمَا عَلَى الَّذِينَ يَتَّقُونَ مِنْ حِسَابِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَلَكِنْ ذِكْرِي لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ* It means when people who observe restraint go to *al-Masjid al-Ḥarām* for their own rightful purpose, then, they are not responsible for the evil deeds of those wicked people present there. However, it does remain their duty that they should tell them what is right and true which may per-

haps help them take the right path.

In the third verse (70), nearly the same subject has been stressed upon in the following words: *وَذَرِ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا دِينَهُمْ لُعْبًا وَهَلْوًا* (And avoid those who have taken their faith as game and play ...). The word: *ذر* (*dhar*) here is a derivation from: *وذر* (*wadhara*) which means being displeased with something and leaving it. Thus, the verse can be taken either in the sense of leaving people who have turned the true religion, that is, Islam which has been sent for them, into a plaything and a laughing stock; or in the sense that they have left their real faith and taken to fun and play as their very own religion and purpose of life. The outcome of both meanings is nearly the same.

After that, it was said: *وَعَرَّضْنَاهُمُ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا* that is, the transitory life of the present world has deceived them. This is a true diagnosis of their real problem. They are so disobedient and wicked because they are bewitched by the glamour of their mortal life totally forgetting that they have another state of life ahead of them. If they had believed in the *‘Ākhirah* (Hereafter) and *Qiyāmah* (The Last Day), they would have never acted so recklessly.

In this verse, the Holy Prophet *صلى الله عليه وسلم* and Muslims at large have been given two orders that they should not only avoid the people identified, but that they should also act positively and continue preaching through the Qur‘ān and keep putting the fear of Allah’s punishment in their hearts.

The detail of this punishment was pointed out at the end of the verse by saying that, should they continue doing what they were doing, they are bound to fall a victim to their own evil conduct. The word used at this place is: *فِي سُلْجَمٍ* which means to be detained or be entrapped.

Since man in this world is accustomed to rely on three kinds of sources to escape the punishment of his own error or injustice inflicted on someone. When convenient, he would use the power and influence of his party or group to stay safe against the consequences of his injustice. Then, should he become helpless, he would use recommendations from the influential people. When that too does not work, he would try to secure his freedom from punishment by spending money.

Allah Ta‘ālā says in this verse that His criminal cannot be saved

from punishment by any friend or relative, nor can an intercession by anyone succeed without the permission of Allah, nor can wealth of any kind be accepted - even if the criminal were to possess the wealth of the whole world and wished to give it all in exchange for his freedom from punishment, even then this *fidyah* will not be accepted from him.

Finally, at the close of the verse, it was said: *أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَهُمْ* *أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَهُمْ* *أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أُبْسِلُوا بِمَا كَسَبُوا لَهُمْ* that is, these are the people who have been detained in the punishment of their evil deeds. They will have boiling water to drink in the *Jahannam* about which it has been said in another verse that it will shatter their entrails apart (47:15) and that there will be painful punishments other than that of the boiling water in return for their disbelief and denial.

This verse also tells us that the very company of people who are heedless to the '*Ākhirah*' and are content with their life in the mortal world is fatal for everyone. Its ultimate consequence is that whoever sits in their company shall be subject to the same punishment in which they have been caught up.

The essential objective in these three verses (68-70) is to save Muslims from evil environment and bad company which can be as deadly as poison. Many clear, definite and conclusive statements (*Nuṣūṣ*) of the Qur'an and Ḥadīth as well as repeated observation and experience prove that the root of all evils and crimes in which human beings get involved is the evil society and environment in which they grow up. Once snared into it, one slides into evils against personal grain and conscience. Then, comes the stage when, once habituated, the sense of evil dies away - reaching the limit when one starts taking evil as good and good as evil. In a *Ḥadīth*, the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم is reported to have said: When a person gets involved in a sin for the first time, there appears a dot on his heart. This is like a black dot on a white dress which everyone dislikes and gets disturbed with. So, this person too feels the distaste in his heart. But when he, after having done the first one, goes on doing the second and the third sin - and does not repent from the past sin - black dots, one after the other, keep appearing on the heart, so much so that the radiant tablet of the heart turns jet black. The outcome is that this person is deprived of the very ability to distinguish between good and bad. The Holy Qur'an identifies it

with the word: “*ra’n*” (rust, stain) when it says: *كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا* (83:14), that is, there is rust on their hearts because of their evil deeds (which has taken away their ability to receive good).

When you come to think of it, wrong environment and bad company really hurt all human beings. They push people into the abyss. May Allah keep all of us protected from them. Therefore, everyone who is responsible for raising children must do their best to keep children safe from such society and environment.

As for the next three verses (71-73), they too deal with the refutation of *Shirk* (the attribution of partners to Allah) and the affirmation of *Tauhid* (the Oneness of Allah) and *’Akhira* (the Hereafter, the life to come) as fairly evident from the translation itself.

Verses 74 - 81

وَإِذْ قَالَ إِبْرَاهِيمُ لِأَبِيهِ أَرِئكَ
 وَقَوْمَكَ فِي ضَلَالٍ مُّبِينٍ ﴿٧٤﴾ وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ
 السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ ﴿٧٥﴾ فَلَمَّا جَنَّ
 عَلَيْهِ اللَّيْلُ رَأَى كَوْكَبًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّيَ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ قَالَ لَأَحِبُّ
 الْأَفْلِينَ ﴿٧٦﴾ فَلَمَّا رَأَى الْقَمَرَ بَازِعًا قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّيَ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَ
 قَالَ لَئِن لَّمْ يَهْدِنِي رَبِّي لَأَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٧٧﴾
 فَلَمَّا رَأَى الشَّمْسَ بَازِعَةً قَالَ هَذَا رَبِّيَ هَذَا أَكْبَرُ فَلَمَّا أَفَلَتْ
 قَالَ يَقَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِّمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٧٨﴾ إِنِّي وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ
 لِلدِّينِ فَطَرَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ حَنِيفًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ
 ﴿٧٩﴾ وَحَاجَّهُ قَوْمُهُ قَالَ أَتُحَاجُّونَنِي فِي اللَّهِ وَقَدْ هَدَانِ وَلَا
 أَخَافُ مَا تُشْرِكُونَ بِهِ إِلَّا أَن يُشَاءَ رَبِّي شَيْئًا وَسِعَ رَبِّي كُلَّ
 شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٨٠﴾ وَكَيْفَ أَخَافُ مَا أَشْرَكْتُمْ وَلَا
 تَخَافُونَ أَنَّكُمْ أَشْرَكْتُمْ بِاللَّهِ مَا لَمْ يُنَزَّلْ بِهِ عَلَيْكُمْ سُلْطٰنًا

فَأَيُّ الْفَرِيقَيْنِ أَحَقُّ بِالْأَمْنِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

And (remember) when Ibrāhīm said to his father, Āzar: “Do you (really) take idols as gods? I am afraid you and your people are in open error.” [74] And thus We showed Ibrāhīm the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, so that he may be firm in belief. [75]

So, when the night enveloped him, he saw a star. He said, “This is my Lord.” But, when it vanished, he said, “I do not like those who vanish.” [76] Later, when he saw the moon rising, he said, “This is my Lord.” But, when it vanished, he said, “If my Lord does not guide me, I shall be among those gone astray.” [77] Thereafter, when he saw the sun rising, he said, “This is my Lord. This is greater.” Again, when it vanished, he said, “O my people, I am free of whatever you associate with Allah. [78] I have, indeed, turned my face straight towards the One who created the heavens and the earth, and I am not one of those who associate partners with Allah.” [79]

And his people argued with him. He said, “Do you argue with me about Allah while He has already led me to the right path, and I do not fear what you associate with Him unless, of course, something is willed by my Lord? My Lord encompasses everything with His knowledge. Would you, then, take no lesson? [80] And how can I fear what you associate with Him, while you do not fear that you have associated with Allah something for which He has sent down no authority to you? Now, which of the two parties has more right to be in peace? (Tell me) if you know.” [81]

Commentary

Previous verses contained a description of the call given by the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم in which he addressed the disbelievers of Arabia and appealed to them that they should forsake the worship of idols and believe in a single object of worship: Allah.

The present verses support this call of truth in a particular way which could be naturally acceptable to the people of Arabia who have Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام as their patriarch and the whole Arabia

stood united in paying homage to him almost always. These verses refer to the debate against the worship of idols and stars led by him before his people and to whom he had then given a lesson as to what a true belief in the Oneness of Allah should be.

The first verse (74) opens with Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام telling his father, ‘Āzar that he had taken idols made with his own hands as his object of worship, and that he saw him and his entire people in manifest error.

It is commonly held that ‘Āzar is the name of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm’s father while most historians give his name as *Tarakh* and identify ‘Āzar as his title. Imām al-Rāzī and a group of early scholars hold that *Tarakh* was the name of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm’s father and ‘Āzar was the name of his uncle. After becoming a minister of Nimrūd, his uncle, ‘Āzar had become a polytheist. Since calling an uncle as father is common in Arab usage, ‘Āzar has been named here as Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm’s father. In Sharh al-Mawāhib, Zarqānī has reported several proofs to this effect.

Reform Begins at Home

‘Āzar, whether a father or uncle of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm, was a respectable elder of the family. Thus, it was from his home that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm gave the first call to truth - as was commanded the Holy Prophet ﷺ too: وَأَنْذِرْ عَشِيرَتَكَ الْأَقْرَبِينَ (26:214) that is, warn your near relatives (of the Divine punishment). It was in obedience to this command that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم had first gathered his own family to hear him when he stood at the hill of *Safā* to deliver his call of truth.

According to *Tafsīr* Al-Baḥr al-Muḥīṭ, from here we also learn that inviting a respected elder of the family, who may not be on the right path of faith, to the right path is not contrary to the norms of reverence. In fact, it is a matter of wishing well for him. In addition to that, this also tells us that starting the work of *da‘wah*, the mission of inviting people to the true faith and the seeking of reforms that lead to it, from one’s home, family and immediate circle, is a *Sunnah* (way) of the prophets عليهم السلام .

Two-Nation Theory: Believers are One People - Disbelievers, another.

It will be noted that Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام has elected not to

identify his family and his people with himself in this verse when he said to his father that ‘his’ people were in error. This indicates the great sacrifice Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm offered in the way of Allah by cutting off his bonds with his disbelieving brotherhood. Thus, by his deed, he demonstrated that Muslim nationality is founded through the bonds of Islam. When nationalities based on concepts of race or homeland clash against it, all these deserve to be forsaken.

By mentioning this event relating to Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام, the Holy Qur‘ān has asked all communities to come after him that they too should follow in his footsteps. It was said: *فَدَكَانَتْ لَكُمْ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ فِي إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَالَّذِينَ* مَعَهُ إِذْ قَالُوا لِقَوْمِهِمْ إِنَّا بُرَآءُ مِنْكُمْ وَمِمَّا تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ It means: Definitely good and worthy of being emulated and followed by the Muslim community is the way and conduct of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام and of those with him who frankly told their lineal, racial and geographical brotherhood that they were wary of them and their false objects of worship and that the wall of discord between them shall remain standing until such time that they do become believers and submit to none but Allah.

This tells us that the two-nation theory which brought Pakistan into existence - was first proclaimed by Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام. The *Ummah* of the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم, and other communities, followed this guidance and moved ahead. Among Muslims, Islam as the identity of their nationhood became well-recognized. During his journey undertaken to perform his Last Hajj, the Holy Prophet ﷺ met a caravan on the way. He asked them: ‘Which nationality do you come from?’ They replied: ‘نَحْنُ قَوْمٌ مُسْلِمُونَ’ (al-Bukhari) (We are [a] nation [of] Muslims). Here, in accordance with the early practice in Arabia, they did not name a tribe or a lineally identified family, instead, called themselves: ‘*muslimūn*’ (Muslims) - and by doing so, they declared what was their real nationality, a nationality which will hold good in all time frames right to the end of time well through the trials of the *Ākhirah*. At this particular place when Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام addressed his father, he proclaimed his distaste for the doings of ‘his’ people - attributing the people he came from to his father - but, at the place where he had to proclaim his principled disassociation from the same people, he addressed them as his, as appears in the next verse: *يَقَوْمِ إِنِّي بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تُشْرِكُونَ* (O my people, I am free of what you associate with Al-

lah). The hint given here is: ‘Though, you are my people in terms of race and homeland, but your deeds of disbelief and polytheism have compelled me to cut off my relations with your brotherhood.’

The brotherhood of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm and his father were involved in a two-fold *Shirk*: They worshipped idols as well as stars. So, Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام debated both issues with his father and with his people.

First, it was idol worship. He said that it was error, and straying. Then, in the next verses, he pointed out to stars as unworthy of worship. And a little earlier in verse 75, it is in the form of an introduction that Allah Ta‘ālā mentions a particular elegance and insight of Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm عليه السلام by saying: *وَكَذَلِكَ بَرَأْنَا إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونُ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ* that is, ‘We made Ibrāhīm عليه السلام see what We have created in the heavens and the earth in a way which would unravel the reality of all these created objects manifestly so that he may become firm in his belief.’ What came to pass after that has taken the shape of a wondrous dialogue that appears in later verses (which shows a certain quality even in the translated form of the meanings of the totally untranslatable beauty, diction and elan of the original) and it would be useful to dwell upon the manner in which it emerges stage by stage.

Using Wisdom and Strategy in *Tabligh* and *Da‘wah* is the Way of Prophets

Let us begin with verse 76 which opens with the words: *فَلَمَّا جَاءَ عَمْرِيئَةَ الْبَيْتِ* فَلَمَّا جَاءَ عَمْرِيئَةَ الْبَيْتِ So, when the night enveloped him, he saw a star. Then, beaming at his people, he said: This is my Lord. The sense in which he said it was: Is it not, as you think and believe, my Lord and your Lord, the *Rabb* of both of us who nurtures, nourishes and sustains us? In a little while you will find out how real that is. Then, after some time, the star vanished. This gave Sayyidnā Ibrāhīm a good occasion to drive his argument home against his disbelieving people. He said: *لَا أُحِبُّ الْأَعْيُنَ* (I do not like those who vanish). The word: *أَفْلِينَ* (‘*āfulīn*’) is from: *أَفْل* (‘*āfulīn*’) which means to set.

The sense is that things which set or vanish do not deserve being held dear - and when something is to be given the status of an object of worship has to be, quite obviously, most worthy of love and reverence. Maulanā Rūmī, in one of his couplets, has directly referred to this