

GUIDANCE
FROM THE
HOLY QUR'AN
Qur'anic Teachings

SYED ABUL HASAN ALI NADVI

Translated by
Abdul Raheem Kidwai



IQRA ACADEMY OF RESEARCH & PUBLICATION
MANGALORE 575002

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info@iqramangalore.com

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PREFACE

It is our great privilege to publish this valuable work on *Tafsir* by the renowned twentieth-century Islamic scholar, Shaykh Sayyid Abu'l- Hasan Ali Nadwi (d.1999). Although it is not a complete *tafsir*, it embodies Shaykh Nadwi's insightful comments on around ninety Qur'anic passages. His elucidation brings into sharper light the eternal guidance of the Qur'an on a wide range of issues relating to both individual and collective life – articles of faith, acts of worship and service to Allah, social relations, morals and manners, laws, religious duties, *Sirah*, materialism and lessons from the Qur'an.

Throughout his illustrious life Shaykh Nadwi strove for the cause of Islam. At numerous gatherings he delivered talks in order to put across the message of the Qur'an. The present work is a collection of these talks, which facilitates a better understanding of the Qur'an. Being thoroughly grounded in the immensely rich field of Islamic scholarship, and displaying a native-like command over Arabic, Shaykh Nadwi brings home valuable points in these talks which are aimed at preaching the meaning and message of the Qur'an. More remarkably, these talks are addressed to twenty-first century Muslims, guiding them to grasp and derive the wisdom embodied in the Qur'an. Indeed all the works and writings of Shaykh Nadwi went a long way in promoting the call of the Qur'an. The Islamic Foundation, therefore, felt privileged

to publish this English translation of Shaykh Nadwi's work, entitled *Qur'ani Ifadat* in the original Urdu.

I take this opportunity to thank Mawlana Sayyid Rabi[Nadwi, Rector, Nadwat al-Ulama', Lucknow, India for giving the Foundation the permission to produce this work in English. I am thankful also to my colleague, Professor Abdur Raheem Kidwai, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, India for translating Shaykh Nadwi's work into English. I must thank Mr. Nasir Cadir, Islamic Foundation, for his valuable help in the production of this work. May Allah accept this effort from Foundation in the cause of the Qur'an. (*Amin*).

Leicester, UK

Dr. M. Manazir Ahsan

1426H/2005

Director General

1. INTRODUCTION

All praise be to Allah. We celebrate His glory and seek His assistance. We place our trust in Him and seek His protection from the evil of our own self and from bad deeds. One who is guided by Allah cannot be led astray. One who is led astray by Him cannot find any guide. We testify that there is no god besides Allah, the True One. He is without any partner. We also affirm that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger. Allah's blessings be upon him, his family and his Companions. May Allah shower upon them immense rewards. I seek Allah's refuge against the accursed Satan. I begin in the Name of Allah, the Most Compassionate, the Most Merciful.

اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

“Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself who turns to Him in repentance and obedience.”
(As-Shura 42:13)

The marvels of the Qur'an are inexhaustible. It guides man at every step, catering for his needs and resolving his problems. I have personally experienced this on numerous occasions. While asked to deliver a talk, I could not often decide, even right up to the time I rose to speak, on the topic of my speech. However, as someone recited a Qur'anic passage to mark the commencement of my talk, I realised that the passage was addressed in particular to me, as a cure for me to choose my topic. It seemed as if the passage had been selected precisely for this purpose. I experienced this often during my travels abroad. For I could not make up my mind about the subject of my talk until literally the

last minute. In the hurly-burly of travel it is difficult to choose a topic to speak about, especially at those gatherings of which I had not been informed of in advance. On such occasions I prayed to Allah to guide me. In sum, without exercising my discretion, I was guided to take up the subject matter embedded in the Qur'anic passage recited by someone prior to my delivery.

Let me now provide some background information about my study of the Qur'an. As a child, my education commenced with a study of the Qur'an. I was fortunate enough to study at the feet of Shaykh Khalil ibn Muhammad Yamani who was deeply immersed in the Qur'an. Not only was he a Qur'anic scholar, he was also devoted heart and soul to the Book. Whenever he recited the Qur'an, tears rolled down his cheeks. I was impressed most by his mode of recitation which was characterised by pathos. It reinforced the thrust of the Qur'anic passages recited by him. For at numerous places the Qur'an laments man's indifference to the divine message and its resultant loss.

As to the temper of the Qur'an, it is illustrated by the following incident involving the Prophet's closest Companion, Abu Bakr. When Abu Bakr was requested to lead the Prayer, in place of the Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him), the former's daughter and the Prophet's wife, A'ishah insisted that he should not be given this assignment in view of his tender heart and his tendency to cry profusely. He was so awe-struck by the Qur'an that he found it difficult to recite, so much so that those praying behind him could not listen to his recitation. Almost the same point about Abu Bakr's proneness to crying was made by the Makkan polytheists; though in a different context. Abu Bakr had a mosque constructed in front of his house. As he recited the Qur'an aloud in Prayers, Muslims assembled there, including women and children. His recitation marked by pathos had a deep impact on

its listeners. This, however, caused concern among the Quraysh, for it deeply affected the faith of Makkans. In turn, it would have struck a blow to their power and authority. The point being that the Qur'an must be recited with just such pathos and firm conviction as demonstrated by Abu Bakr.

To my good fortune, my first teacher was a tender-hearted person. We wished that he would recite for long periods of time, enabling us to listen to him. He also led the *Fajr* Prayer at the mosque in our locality. Rarely however could he complete a *surah*. For as he commenced reciting, he was overcome with tears and his voice choked. This happened almost every day. He taught me selected Qur'anic *surahs*, especially the ones focusing on the doctrine of monotheism. This commenced with his lessons on *Surah al-Zumar*. Later on, I was more preoccupied with my study of language and literature. However, he nonetheless drew me closer to the Qur'an.

After completing my education, I turned my attention again to a study of the Qur'an. I made a point of studying books in addition to the texts prescribed in *Madrasahs*. In pursuance of this objective, I went to Lahore and studied the whole of the Qur'an at the feet of Mawlana Ahmad Ali. His total devotion to the Qur'an impressed me most. Whatever he said and did was prompted by the Qur'an. This cast a spell on my heart. His piety, his ascetic way of life and his adherence to the *Sunnah* in every action impressed me much. I then spent some time at Dar al-Ulum, Deoband. During my stay there I sought an appointment with Mawlana Husayn Ahmad Madani so as to benefit from his elucidation of some difficult Qur'anic passages. These points were left unresolved in standard *tafsir*. Mawlana Madani was one of the distinguished *Ulama'* of the day. Apart from his expertise in *Hadith* studies and other disciplines, he had carried out an

intensive study of the Qur'an. His life style-reflected the fruits of his special study. I was fortunate that he granted me time on Fridays to discuss with him such Qur'anic verses as I found hard to fathom. The Mawlana was a frequent traveller and this was a period of hectic political activity. Yet I managed to draw, to some extent, upon his scholarship.

I have also had the privilege of discussing the meaning of some Qur'anic verses with Mawlana Sayyid Sulayman Nadwi. I listened to some of his talks on the Qur'an as well. To my mind Mawlana Nadwi was not equalled by anyone in his deep understanding of the Qur'an. This may come as a revelation to some, for the Mawlana's fame rests mainly on his singular contribution to history, theology and philosophy. However, in my opinion, he was one of the leading scholars of the Qur'an in the whole of the Indo-Pak subcontinent in terms of the depth and range of his study. What accounted, in the main, for this was his thorough familiarity with the Arabic language and its literature, as also rhetoric and Qur'anic studies. His companionship with Mawlana Hamid al-Din Farahi had further sharpened his insights into the Qur'an. I recall his perceptive exposition of *Surah al-Jumuah* when I was at Dar al-Musannifin, Azamgarh. I have yet to hear such a scholarly, articulate talk on the Qur'an. I wish it could have been recorded for posterity. I have however had little opportunity to draw upon the Sayyid's scholarship. When I was appointed a teacher at Dar al Ulum Nadwat al-Ulama', I was assigned the teaching of the Qur'an. At the Nadwa the standard teaching practice focuses on the text, and this text-based study was perhaps first introduced at the Nadwa. This practice was followed later in other institutions. In my opinion, this is the best approach. The text should be taken up first. No reference should be made at the initial stage to any *tafsir*. The teacher should be fully conversant with the text and share his observations with

students. For several years I have had the privilege of teaching the Qur'an. I also taught *tafsir* as well. However, I was more inclined towards a text-based study. Of all the subjects entrusted to me for teaching, *tafsir* was the most significant. I have offered the above account in order to indicate that I have been a humble student of the Qur'an. Whatever little I know, I attribute to my study of the Qur'an. Those familiar with my writings know well that my discourse is always rooted in the Qur'an. For this has been my main source. My next favourite area of study is history. Let me, however, clarify that my study of history too, is guided and shaped by the Qur'an. I always interpret it with reference to the Holy Book.

2. THE MIRACLE OF THE QUR'AN

It is the Qur'an alone which enriches us. Let us present before you some gems gleaned from the treasure-house that is the Qur'an. Its wealth suffices for the whole of mankind. Only the Qur'an can enrich the super-rich, mighty rulers and flourishing business tycoons. It can change their fortunes. Rather, it can make them rich in the real and abiding sense of the term.

The Qur'an elevates one from an abysmal low to the ultimate zenith. By the same token, those who do not pay heed to it are disgraced by it, rubbing their noses in dust. For the Qur'an transformed the pauper Arab bedouins, without food and clothing to such an unprecedented height of worldly power and glory. Petty camel-drivers were exalted to the rank of kings and rulers of all parts of the world. Notorious for their lawlessness and misguidance, they were transformed into the leaders of mankind. They acted as mankind's saviours. Without the Qur'an, these Arab bedouins would have hardly survived on the world map. However, in the light of Qur'anic guidance they learnt to rule and govern the world. They even managed to trample under their feet the glory and grandeur of the Persian and Roman emperors of the day. They captured their palaces and empires in no time at all.

Credit for this goes to the Prophet Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him) who spent time meditating, wrapped in a sheet. It was he who raised and trained an altogether new community. His hard work helped nurture a band of dedicated followers who established their supremacy the world over.

Indeed, his Companions took over the reins of power from the mighty rulers of their day.

The Qur'an is capable of achieving such transformation. Those indifferent to it turn into utter losers. This is the constant divine law. If the Qur'an is not acted upon in the right spirit, its bearers are doomed for destruction. The laws enacted by Allah make no discrimination. It is common knowledge that laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. The same holds true of the Qur'an and divine laws are to be respected and applied uniformly. Those failing to obtain guidance from the Qur'an are destroyed in accordance with divine law.

3. STUDY OF THE QUR'AN AND ITS NORMS

اللَّهُ يَجْتَبِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي إِلَيْهِ مَنْ يُنِيبُ

“Allah chooses for Himself whom He wills and guides to Himself who turns to Him in repentance and obedience.” (As-Shura 42:13)

The verses quoted above make two significant points: Allah choosing someone and then guiding him. It is plainly stated that He chooses for Himself whom He wills. He can elevate anyone to this exalted rank and bless him with His guidance. Nonetheless, guidance is needed by the whole of mankind. Allah guides one who turns to Him in repentance and obedience. However, one must be a genuine seeker of guidance before one is bestowed with this. One who displays such humility, self-surrender and total obedience is guided by Allah to the Straight Way. The important prerequisite here is to turn to Allah wholly. Let us elaborate upon this point further.

The Qur'an stands out for both its instructions and its emphasis on preaching the truth. A believer is obliged to accept all the articles of faith, grasp these and draw these only from the Qur'an. The Qur'an, as we know, is in chaste Arabic. Allah has also declared that He has made its comprehension easy for those who take admonition. Man should thus take heed from it.

It is easy to understand the Qur'an in terms of ascertaining the main beliefs it projects, the conditions for deriving its guidance and its concepts of monotheism and the Hereafter. It is not

therefore difficult to figure out the Qur'anic worldview. Nor is it a complicated issue as to how to attain deliverance in both worlds. The Qur'an is explicit and categorical on these issues. No one can claim that he could not learn about these basic truths after studying the Qur'an. Weighty arguments, delivered in unequivocal terms, on the doctrine of monotheism abound in the Qur'an. This fundamental truth is articulated effectively and energetically on numerous occasions. So someone studying the Qur'an seriously can never indulge in polytheism. One may stumble into error, commit sins, take to the path of apathy by way of not discharging one's religious duties and indulge in wicked deeds. Yet one cannot misconstrue the Qur'anic stance on monotheism. For its message is as clear as sunlight. Nor can one entertain any doubt about this issue.

The same holds true for the doctrine of Messengership, the duties of this office, the role and function of Messengers and their conduct. For the Qur'an makes it abundantly clear that they are pious men, having no truck with evil. The Qur'an contains their extensive accounts, dispelling all misperceptions about their status. *Surahs al-Araf, Hud and al-Shuara'* deal extensively with almost each and every Messenger of Allah. Each of them is introduced and historical evidence is provided about their impeccable credentials.

It is easy to consult the Qur'an for guidance. No one can contest this truth. However, as to its complex and specialised contents, one cannot claim finality about one's interpretation of these. It is a hazardous move to infer such a meaning from the Qur'an which is not endorsed by classical or contemporary *Ulama'*. Abu Bakr exclaimed: "O Allah! Which refuge can I have under the sky or to which retreat can I take shelter, if I make an unsubstantiated

claim about any verse of the Book of Allah?” This demonstrates that the Prophet’s Companions followed an extremely cautious approach with regard to Qur’anic interpretation. Whenever Umar explained some Qur’anic expression, he supplemented this with a remark, seeking Allah’s protection from any misconstruing. The Companions realized all too well that it was beyond any of them to master knowledge of the whole of the Qur’an. This was not an obligation placed on them anyway. In my humble opinion, one should grasp the essence, spirit and objective of the Qur’an. One’s attitude in so doing should be marked by the utmost respect and caution. Even if one cannot decipher all the Qur’an, yet he may benefit from studying along the proper lines. One blessed with the fear and consciousness of Allah is thus more likely to derive benefits from it. When the Qur’an is recited before God-fearing people, their response, as portrayed in the Qur’an, is as follows: “*Had We sent down this Qur’an on a mountain, you would surely have seen it humbling itself and rent asunder by the fear of Allah.*” (*al-Hashr 59:21*) On reading the Qur’an, a pious person is shaken to the core of his being, trembling in awe over the realisation that he has in front of him the Word of Allah. Such an attitude helps one derive guidance to the highest degree. One blessed with this response is likely to gain access to the Qur’an. It is stated in *Hadith* however that there will be some who recite the Qur’an ritually, yet gaining nothing thereby.

As to the contents of the Qur’an, as one of its humble students my contention is that it represents a boundless ocean. Even the greatest scholars of all time and place cannot fathom its depths. Nor can they move forward in their study without Allah’s help and inspiration.

Let this be realised clearly, that it is Allah Who enables one to benefit from it. Only such are benefitted who hold Allah and the Qur'an in awe, earnestly realizing their glory. Such are inspired to advance their knowledge. One should recite the Qur'an in one's *nafl* (additional) Prayers, imagining that it is being sent down upon one's own heart. Filled with this thought one should try to immerse oneself in the message of the Qur'an. Study of the Qur'an is beyond academic exercise. In this respect one should also refrain from seeking justification for one's presuppositions in study.

Moreover, one should acknowledge one's limitations in this study, and ascribe observations to this limited understanding. Never should one make tall claims about one's original thinking. Any claim for having discovered some new meaning must be shunned. For this amounts to discrediting the Qur'an, suggesting that its meaning could not be grasped for fourteen hundred years or more. The Qur'an asserts that it is in chaste Arabic, sent down by Allah so that man may reflect upon it. In view of this assertion it is odd for anyone to claim that he has discovered its meaning for the first time after many centuries have elapsed. Moreover, it implies that for all this time no one has been able to draw any benefit from it. While inaugurating a seminar at Aligarh Muslim University, I brought home the point that scholars generally present the fruits of their study in a very humble, modest way, underscoring the fact that they arrived at their conclusions in the light of years of long study. It does not befit a scholar to insist that his conclusion alone is the correct one, dismissing earlier studies. It is held that the Qur'an never will become outdated. Its marvels are inexhaustible. Were one to spend one's entire life, even if it be as long as that granted to the Prophet Noah (peace

and blessings be upon him), on reflecting on the meaning of the Qur'an, one will discover new layers of meaning every day. Given this, it is tendentious for anyone to claim originality in their interpretation.

One should carry out one's personal study of the Qur'an, with the realisation that it is the Book of eternal guidance, sent down by Allah. This personal note should be part of one's stance on the Qur'an. For it helps one derive more guidance. One should take it as a Book addressed to oneself in particular, holding out a mirror to one's own shortcomings and as diagnostic of one's own weaknesses.

Everyone can easily relate to the Qur'an. Nonetheless, this is possible only when one approaches it as a living Book meant for one's own reform. One should look for self-development in it before prescribing it to others. This was the way of the Messengers. First, they attained self-development and then admonished others. Some study the Qur'an so as to employ its arguments in humbling and discrediting others. The Prophet's Companions, however, studied it so as to mend their own ways. As soon as they grasped the thrust of a verse, they immediately acted upon it. They took months for example in completing their study of *Surah al-Baqarah*.

I have made the above points as a humble student. Let us strive as much as possible to turn to Allah in repentance and obedience. Allah may choose us if He so wills. We cannot take any step on this count. Nonetheless, it is up to us to learn, seek guidance and change our outlook on life as much as possible in the light of our study. The Qur'an is there to guide us. It will help us reach our destination. We should realise the need for Qur'anic guidance, of

turning to it and for our lack of resources. This constitutes the turning to Allah. Let us supplicate to Allah to infuse this realisation into us: *Show us the Straight Way, the way of those on whom You have bestowed Your grace, not the way of those who earned Your anger, nor of those who went astray. (al-Fatihah 1:6-7)*

4. QUR'ANIC GUIDANCE

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ إِنِّي جَاعِلٌ فِي الْأَرْضِ خَلِيفَةً ۗ قَالُوا أَتَجْعَلُ فِيهَا مَنْ يُفْسِدُ فِيهَا وَيَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗ قَالَ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ۝ وَعَلَّمَ آدَمَ الْأَسْمَاءَ كُلَّهَا ثُمَّ عَرَضَهُمْ عَلَى الْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ فَقَالَ أَنْبِئُونِي بِأَسْمَاءِ هٰؤُلَاءِ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صٰدِقِينَ ۝ قَالُوا سُبْحٰنَكَ لَا عِلْمَ لَنَا إِلَّا مَا عَلَّمْتَنَا ۗ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْعَلِيمُ الْحَكِيمُ ۝ قَالَ يَا آدَمُ أَنْبِئْهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۗ فَلَمَّآ أَنْبَأَهُمْ بِأَسْمَائِهِمْ ۗ قَالَ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَّكُمْ إِنِّي أَعْلَمُ غَيْبَ السَّمٰوٰتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۗ وَأَعْلَمُ مَا تُبْدُونَ وَمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْتُمُونَ ۝

And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place mankind on earth. They said: Will You place therein those who will make mischief therein and shed blood, while we glorify You with praise and thanks and sanctify You. Allah said: I know that which you do not know. And He taught Adam all the names, then He showed them to the angels and said: Tell Me the names of these, if you are truthful. They said: Glorified are You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is You, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise. Allah said: O Adam! Inform them of their names, and when he had informed them of their names, He said: Did I not tell you that I know the Unseen in the

*heavens and the earth, and I know what you reveal
and what you conceal? (al-Baqarah 2:30-33)*

I often read the above passage. It recounts the dialogue between Allah and the angels when Allah had decided to appoint Adam, man's progenitor, as His vicegerent on earth. Man was to be entrusted with authority over natural resources, utilising these in a constructive way so as to enjoy his life in a meaningful way. Man was also assigned the duty of maintaining his close link with his Creator, Allah, of forging cordial relations with his fellow human beings and drawing upon divine bounties in accordance with divine commands and teachings. Allah decided to appoint man, made of clay yet possessing celestial features, as His vicegerent. On coming to know this, the angels submitted: "*We glorify You with praise and thanks and sanctify You.*" In other words, they asked whether they were not fit for this assignment, particularly in view of their constant celebration of Allah's praise. Allah directed them however to observe the unfolding of events. This would persuade them of the rationale behind His selection of man as His vicegerent. Accordingly, both Adam and the angels were put to the test. Adam's nature was made receptive to learning and recognising names, realising their innate potential and power and drawing upon these for his own benefit. In short, he was enabled to maintain an easy, feasible link with material things and to utilize these for his advantage.

Adam was thus first instructed in the names of things. Then the same was presented before the angels. When Adam was asked to name things, he gave correct answers. When the same question was put to the angels, in accord with their essential nature they acknowledged their limitations conceding that their knowledge was restricted to what Allah had taught them. They were aware

only of their obligations. They openly said: “*Glorified are You, we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. It is You, the All-Knowing, the All-Wise.*” Thus Allah demonstrated that His choice of man as His vicegerent was perfectly justified.

The dialogue between Allah and the angels at the time of Adam’s creation is equally very perceptive. The Qur’an relates it thus: “*And when your Lord said to the angels: I am going to place mankind on earth.*” Another significant statement is: “*He taught Adam all the names.*” One thus learns that man has been granted certain knowledge which is essential for his survival in this material world. As Allah’s vicegerent he enjoys the power and authority to draw upon natural resources. He has not been accorded absolute, unlimited power. Rather, he derives authority as delegated to him. The Qur’an alludes to this truth at another place thus: “*Spend of that of which He has made you trustees.*” (*al-Hadid 57:7*)

In Qur’anic parlance vicegerency is a serious assignment. It entails justice, equity and love for fellow human beings. More importantly, it is linked inextricably with the concept of accountability. That man as vicegerent does not have total, unrestricted authority does not call for any elaboration. A vicegerent, by definition, is always submissive and obedient to his master, conscientious in performing the duties assigned to him and ever grateful to his lord and benefactor. He ascribes all that he has to his master. He never grows proud and haughty. Nor is he ever intoxicated by power.

The West has, however, disregarded this truth. As a result, the whole human history and man’s heritage of learning have been tainted. This was not the result of an individual’s folly or the

lapse of a particular group or generation. Rather, it has been a colossal error on the part of the entire academic world and its thinkers. They could have guided mankind to the right way. However, this was not to be and instead a great misfortune, vitiated by sheer negligence and ignorance has occurred. History has been gripped by this error. It has rather compounded ignorance and set in motion a chain of mistakes. It is rightly observed by a thinker that man is always prone to committing mistakes. The whole world is still suffering from the ill consequences of this fatal error. Mankind appears to have paid no heed to the truths enunciated by the Qur'an in its recounting of the dialogue between Allah and the angels, as Adam was bestowed with knowledge. This event does however contain a great lesson for those who act on reason.

The main thesis of the Qur'an is that man is Allah's vicegerent. He does not enjoy any original position. Rather, he has been sent down in order to accomplish Allah's mission. If man recognises this truth, he should first ascertain divine will, communicated to him by the Messengers and by the Scriptures granted to these Messengers. He should strive to imbibe divine attributes. Man should realise fully that Allah is the Lord of the worlds, Cherisher of all creatures, Most Compassionate, Most Merciful, Just, Most Forbearing, and Most Affectionate. Man should, therefore, use the faculties granted him for justice, compassion and love. However, if man abuses his knowledge for Satanic ends, this amounts to being treacherous towards the spirit and goal of Allah's vicegerency. It also represents infidelity towards his progenitor.

5. MESSENGERS AS GUIDES

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ
هَدَانَا اللَّهُ لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ ط.... ﴿٣٠﴾

They will say: All praise and thanks are Allah's, Who has guided us to this, and never could we have found guidance, were it not that Allah had guided us! Indeed the Messengers of our Lord did come with the truth. (Al-Araf 7:43)

The Qur'an reports above the response of those admitted to Paradise. They will express their praise of Him for having admitted them to Paradise which Allah stated as an important truth. They could not attain this coveted place by dint of their own intelligence, academic accomplishment or personal effort. It was Allah's mercy and guidance that led them to their destination. As stated above, their intellectual abilities alone did not guide them. Nor were they helped by experience. Any spiritual exercises on their part, perhaps involving extreme self-abnegation did not drive them either. Any philosophical thought or intellectual movement did not steer them. Without Allah's help they could not enter Paradise.

A further truth is also clarified whereby Allah does not descend to the earth to guide each and every human being. Nor does He take anyone's hand in His in order to show him the way to Paradise. Instead, He has devised certain ways for man's guidance. Of these the most prominent is His arrangement of sending down His

Messengers who come with the truth. They transmit to mankind Allah's message which constitutes the way to attain deliverance. They guide man to his ultimate destination. It is they who lead those who are astray to the way of truth and thus they perform a valuable service to mankind. Had they not come with the truth, man would have been lost in error. He would have certainly landed in a place other than Paradise.

Man should not lose sight of this important truth. Intellectuals, philosophers, politicians and the worldly wise cannot perform this onerous duty. Only the Messengers of Allah help mankind in this respect. No one other than them can be of any support in this particular domain. Once man embraces the truth preached by them, he is in a position to appreciate the ultimate reality and properly utilise divine bounties and faculties. Rather, he is able then to guide others to the truth. Those engaged in preaching the call to the truth and in interpreting faith should constantly bear this fact in mind, *viz.* that their main source is the message presented by the Prophets. Without these Messengers no one could have access to the truth.

Allah's Messengers came to the earth at regular intervals. In their respective time and space they guided those lost in error and ignorance, constituting millions of human beings. They helped the ignorant embrace faith which, in turn, entitled them to enter Paradise. It was through their agency that mankind learnt about the gnosis of Allah, the purpose behind creation and the right way to lead life. They alone showed the way to approaching Allah. Their guidance is safe against error, ignorance or misinterpretation. There is no deliverance other than that identified by them. Reason is not of much help in this regard. Sharp intelligence too, does not work in this case. Worldly

knowledge, skills, balanced thinking, wit and wisdom cannot deliver the goods either. This truth is articulated in the passage quoted above by the dwellers of Paradise. It amounts to stating the obvious that they are truthful people. Based on their first-hand experience and without indulging in any exaggeration they proclaim that without Allah's guidance they could never have reached anywhere near Paradise. They are seen openly and emphatically acknowledging the role of Messengers in their success. For they exclaim: *"Indeed the Messengers of our Lord did come with the truth."*

The advent of Messengers enables man to attain the privilege of Allah's gnosis. More importantly, it helps man figure out His will and commands. Accordingly, man adheres to divine commands in order to earn Allah's pleasure. Ultimately this wins him entry into Paradise. *Surah al-Saffat* lays bare the error of polytheists and their false notions. It denies the baseless things attributed by polytheists to Allah. For these do not befit this glory. The *Surah* concludes thus: *Glorified is your Lord, the Lord of honour and power. He is free from what they attribute to Him. And peace be upon the Messengers. And all praise and thanks are Allah's, the Lord of all that exists. (al-Saffat 37:180-182)*

Together, the above three verses make a significant point. As Allah refuted the false notions of polytheists, He entrusted the Messengers with the job of presenting a sound concept of Him. They revealed His attributes. As a result, Allah sent down on them His blessings and praised them for their excellent conduct. For it is they who properly introduced the Creator to His creatures. Their advent thus constitutes an immense blessing for mankind. It is part of Allah's grand plan and it is prompted by His mercy and providence. This point is, therefore, concluded on

a note celebrating Allah's praise. The only way to deliverance consists in adhering to the Messengers' way. Until the Last Day the message of the final Prophet, Muhammad (peace and blessings be upon him), is valid. Man's success is contingent on his following his teachings, in observing his *Sunnah* and in emulating his excellent example.

6. THE MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ نَسُوا اللَّهَ فَأَنْسَاهُمْ أَنْفُسَهُمْ ۗ.....^④

And be not like those who forgot Allah, and He caused them to forget their own selves. (al-Hashr 59:19)

Man is by nature self-centred. His own interests preoccupy him. His love for others is prompted by selfish ends. Therefore, he loves those who love him. He is not drawn to those who hate him, even though he may be a paragon of virtue. Self-love activates man to undertake numerous pursuits. All his actions are centred on this. Man may forget everything but his self-interests are always close to heart. He may disregard even his wife, children, family members and relatives at the expense of ensuring his own welfare.

This is often observed in an hour of crisis. It is an everyday occurrence, for it is rooted deep in human nature. One who contends against this observation is most likely to be refuted by everyone. For it is quite an event, to find someone practising self-abnegation while working for the welfare of others. The one who disregards his own interests for the sake of others inevitably becomes the centre of attention. At times, he may risk his own life to rescue others. Let us therefore discuss this phenomenon at some length.

The Qur'an proclaims that those forgetful of Allah are liable to forget their own selves. Once man banishes God from his life, his orientation is disturbed. He is wholly given over to worldliness.

He is seen hankering after material objects, oblivious to higher truths. Material things become an end in themselves. Lost in this maze, he forgets his own self. This obviously results in a crisis, bringing an end to such a person's feelings and emotions. No longer does he regret the loss incurred by him. Rather the malaise is on account of a shift in focus, as man replaces God with his own self. The more he turns away from God, the greater is the risk of self-destruction.

In our times the thrust of this Qur'anic passage has become much more pronounced, in comparison to earlier times. For man is now totally self-centred. He is given to newer and more means of entertainment and luxury. Self-centredness has assumed the form of a whole philosophy of life, one that is publicised on a very wide scale. It is common knowledge that whereas man is much concerned over each and every issue, he pays scant attention to his ultimate end. He hardly seems to care about his final destination. His enjoyment of life is little, though he spends all his time on worldly pursuits. He is reduced to a cog in a wheel. He leads his life like a robot, shorn of real feelings and emotions.

His life has become too mechanical, with his basic needs thus being met. He is bound ruthlessly to social customs, obliged to lead a certain standard of life, as he works for others. All his time and energy are for others. His movements are governed by others as well. What he lacks is real joy, nutritious food, healthy surroundings, spiritual solace, peace of mind, and such love and joy which may satisfy him. He has little time and energy to reflect on the higher issues of life. His mechanical life enervates him so much, sapping his heart and mind, that he is not even aware of his loss. He does not even have control over himself and his surroundings.

The divine punishment for banishing God from both our private and public lives is terrible. What a great pity then that vast empires populated by millions of men and women are guilty of this heinous crime. There is a sense of general apathy everywhere. No one seems concerned about such open rebellion of God. There is no sense of loss over the material way of life, which turns us blind to noble objectives. Nor is there any real wealth or comfort. On the one hand, there is an abundance of food items and medicines and on the other, no one enjoys good health. Fast modes of transport are meant for comfort. Yet speed now has become a goal unto itself. There are problems of all sorts, both natural and man-made. Whilst it is easy to travel, man has lost his sense of direction. In the past, it was hazardous to undertake a journey but today the risks of travelling have been reduced considerably. However, the objective of travel has become meaningless. Where once it was hard for one town to communicate with another, now there are swift means of communicating.

Nonetheless, human relationships have become devoid of love and affection. Selfish motives dictate every move. While it was once quite a task to gather news, now, people are tired of false and tendentious information. Such abuse of the means of communication has reduced technological equipment to a nuisance, rather a curse. Life has lost its meaning, purpose and direction.

The Qur'anic view is that this malaise stems from our forgetting God. Our only way out therefore consists in seeking God. Faith, obedience, submission are the only solution. Mankind should shun rebellion and revolt, disobedience and indifference to God. The sooner mankind turns to Allah, the better it will be.

QUR'ANIC TEACHINGS