

# Sura Al-Hujurāt

## The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 5]

### Introduction

Chapter Al-Hujurāt consists of 18 verses. But these verses encompass the entire life of a human being on this earth. It teaches Muslims what they should aspire to be, and what their duty is as Muslims in society, so that the community stays healthy and unified. This sura was revealed to teach us how to build a Muslim community and how to become, what the Prophet, peace be upon him, described as “One body – when one part of the body is sick the whole body is feverish and unable to sleep.”

If I were to give this chapter another name, other than the one given to it, I’d call it *Al-Adāb wa-solūk* (The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior), because its verses deal with organizing and systematizing the behavior of the Muslims. It teaches us how to raise a child, how to conduct ourselves in our daily lives, and how to shape our behavior in different circumstances: if you are in the presence of your parents you have to shape your behavior in a certain way, if you are in the presence of your peers you have to conduct yourself in another way, and if you are in the presence of the leadership you have to conduct your behavior in a specific way. Initially, the Prophet proclaimed his message among the Arab Bedouins. In the Arabic language, these Bedouins were described as “rough

and tough human beings”. So Islam came to teach them how to be polite, how to talk, how to behave towards the old, how to behave towards the leadership, and so on.

To introduce you to this chapter, I find it appropriate and necessary to start with another Qur’ānic verse in another chapter. That verse, whenever I read it, I stop and reflect on it as a man of a family, as a man of the community, as a man of society, and as a member of the international community. That Qur’ānic verse says don’t poke your nose into what is not your business. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Do not follow or pursue anything of which you have no knowledge, or of which you are not sure: verily, every act of hearing or of seeing or of feeling in the heart will be enquired into on the Day of Reckoning” [17:36].

God has given you three bounties – the faculties of hearing and sight and the capacity to comprehend and understand, and you are fully accountable before God for these faculties. In the light of this Qur’ānic verse, Muslim scholars divide human beings into two kinds. One kind believes and follows whatever he is told by someone else. He does not know if what he is told is correct or not; he does not think it over. He just follows what he has been told by others. An

example of this kind is the people who still believe in what is known as *ta'weez*<sup>1</sup> and that the *ta'weez*, which encloses a few Qur'ānic verses, will affect a cure. The second type of people uses the tools – the God-given faculties of sight, hearing, and reason – to arrive at the facts.

In the study of science, in order to reach a fact, scholars utilize experimentation. As a result of observing phenomena, before and after the experiment, they reach a conclusion. That conclusion is sometimes referred to in science as “a fact of scientific theory”. Just as science deals with materials and chemicals to deduce facts, human beings use a tool called logic. In Arabic, we call it *mantiq*. That *mantiq* or logic has *muqaddimaat*<sup>2</sup> and from these *muqaddimaat* you reach a conclusion.

In religion, also, we use logic. For example, the Qur'ān says: “Liquor (*khamr*) is an act of the devil; avoid it.” One may ask, “What is *khamr*?” Is it the whisky, or the vodka and all these other beverages of similar import which we have nowadays? Or is it something else? Here we use the tools of logic to reach a definition of “liquor” in religion. If you drink milk that is fermented and it alters your mind in the same way as liquor, then, we can classify that milk as “liquor”. How, logically, can we say that? Liquor causes drunkenness and everything that causes drunkenness is prohibited in Islam; therefore, fermented milk that causes drunkenness is prohibited. That is the type of logical thinking which we use in religion as well as in the theoretical sciences. This, then, is the second type of people who do not believe in just any talk, but utilize logic and experimentation to reach facts.

How do we utilize logic and experimentation to reach facts? Here the *ni'mah* – the bounties of God – will play their role. [Imam quotes] “And never pursue anything of which thou hast no knowledge: verily, thy hearing and sight and heart – all of them – will be called to account for it on the Day of Judgment.” These are the three faculties that God created in human beings to help them distinguish between right and wrong; to distinguish between what is beneficial and what is harmful. Then, by using his capacity to think, man weighs between the alternatives and reaches a conclusion or a decision as to what he is going to do.

Hearing – every animal possesses the faculty of hearing. A dog hears: when his master utters certain

commands, the dog walks or stops because he hears. Animals have the faculty of sight. They see and that is how they follow a certain road, but when it comes to the third faculty, they don't have it, so they cannot weigh between alternatives. They don't have the faculty of rational comprehension and that is the distinguishing mark between human beings and animals. Human beings are supposed to utilize that third faculty – the article of thinking – and they will be held accountable for it. These three faculties are very essential for education. Nowadays, in any classroom in the school or university, you will find teachers not only talking to the students but using videotapes, overhead projectors, movie projectors, because they would like to utilize as many tools as possible to reach the goal which is learning or education. A teacher who is just talking and explaining to the pupils is engaging the faculty of hearing only. But if he or she is using an overhead projector, or a movie film, then, he is engaging the faculties of hearing and seeing, and these two faculties impart and solidify the knowledge which is supposed to be comprehended by the faculty of understanding.

We find *innumerable* Qur'ānic verses ending with:

أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ ، أَفَلَا تَتَفَكَّرُونَ ، أَفَلَا تَعْقِلُونَ ،  
 إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِّقَوْمٍ يَعْقِلُونَ ، أَفَلَا تَسْمَعُونَ

– *varieties* of verses ending in that way: “Don't you *understand*?”, “Don't you *think*?”, “Don't you *reflect*?”, “Don't you *hear*?”, “In these are signs for those who *reflect*.” Hundreds of verses in the Qur'ān end that way to show the importance of these three faculties. At the same time, the Qur'ān points out that human beings are different in that some of them utilize these *ni'mah* or bounties which Allah has given them while others don't; they don't care. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“Dost thou, O Prophet, think that most of them listen and understand? Nay, they are like but cattle – nay, they are even less conscious of the right way” [25:44].

“... They have hearts with which they fail to grasp the truth, and eyes with which they fail to see, and ears with which they fail to hear. They are like cattle – nay, they are even less conscious of the right way: it is they, they who are truly heedless” [7:179].

That is the simile Allah has drawn for the people who are not utilizing the faculties that He has given them. They are worse than cattle because the cattle, at least, don't have that article of understanding.

<sup>1</sup> See sermon of Questions and Answers

<sup>2</sup> Evidence

How many people listen to rumors and propagate them, or tell lies until they start to believe them themselves? That is a special type of mentality. How many people follow their own imaginations and think that these imaginations are the truth? This is yet another type of mentality that the Qur'ān talks about in great detail. This type of mentality is referred to in Islamic terminology as *aqleeyatun khorafeeya* – a mythical mentality. This is a mentality not based on objective truth but based on subjective feelings. People exhibiting this type of mentality hide behind their emotional desires and follow the wrong, believing the falsehood as truth. These different mentalities and behaviors are what Chapter Hujurāt mostly deals with. We are going to analyze this chapter verse by verse and it will reveal to us the falsehoods hidden beneath various human mentalities.

A very basic principle in Islam which distinguishes Islam from other beliefs is that it is not what you pronounce, or say with your tongue that is all-important, but it is your deeds and actions *in the light of your intentions* that are all-important. This principle is enunciated in Chapter An-Najm which states that man will not take with him anything except what he has *done* during his life, while Chapter Isrā' says no one will bear the sins of another; everyone is responsible for oneself. So, Islam affirms actions and deeds, and it is not the sayings or utterances that carry weight.

One day an accused man was brought before Omar bin Khattab who counseled him to bring a witness to testify on his behalf. When the witness came before Omar, Omar asked him if he knew the accused man or not. He replied that he knew him very well. Omar asked, "Are you his neighbor who sees him going out and coming in? The man said he was not. You can know the true mettle of a person when you travel with him, so Omar asked, "Did you travel with him?" He said he had never traveled with him. So Omar asked him the third question: "Have you dealt with him financially?" And the answer was no. Then, Omar said:

"Leave me alone, you don't know anything about that man. Is it that you see him in the mosque bowing and prostrating?" The witness said: "That is it!"

Omar said: "Then, it means you don't know him."

When we see someone coming to the mosque and performing *ruku'a* and *sujood*, we say, *that* is a good Muslim because we judge by appearances; we don't concern ourselves with his behavior and ethics during the rest of the day. What Omar meant is that Islam is not just *ruku'a* and *sujood*, but Islam

is your actions and behavior in everyday life in the course of your contact with others, in your financial dealings with others, and, especially, in times of stress, as when one is traveling. Prayer, fasting, pilgrimage are just means towards the goal. The goal is your behavior and your relationships during your day-to-day life.

I have observed, in some mosques, certain people who visit the mosque once a month or so, but when they come, they make sure to come while the lecture is in progress; and they make sure that there is a piece of steel nailed to their shoes so that when they walk in, the people will hear the sound and look and see who it is. If, in spite of that, the people do not take notice, he will say: [Imam demonstrates by clearing his throat loudly. It is meant to convey:] "You people! Give attention here! I am coming for prayer!" Chapter Hujurāt deals with that type of person as well. There were people like that at the time of the Prophet, otherwise that Qur'ānic verse would not have been revealed which says: they are telling you, Muhammad, to be grateful that they have become Muslims. Tell them *they* have to be grateful to Allah who guided them to be Muslims, not for you to be grateful to them.

Some of the verses of Chapter Hujurāt have specific incidents connected with their revelation. The incidents which necessitated the revelation of the verses of Sura Hujurāt happened at the time of the Prophet, but they are applicable to us today. Although the Prophet is no longer among us, before he died he said: "I have left for you two things; if you will hold fast to them you will never go astray: the Qur'ān and my traditions." He left for us the rules according to which we have to shape our behavior. So if we follow these rules sincerely, it will cause our happiness in this life as well as in the world to come.

We find that the Qur'ān contains commands both positive and negative, recommendations, prohibitions, parables, and so on. The Qur'ān also has stories. When you look into the dictionary, the word story means "a myth" – *khorafā*. But when you tie that word "story" with the word "Qur'ānic" and say "Qur'ānic story" it is no longer a myth; it is a fact. We have the story of Yusuf, the story of Nūh, the story of Ibrāhīm, of Sulayman,<sup>3</sup> and so on. These stories have a function: a function for us and a special function for Muhammad himself at the time of their revelation. The function of these stories for us is summed up in the Qur'ānic

<sup>3</sup> Joseph, Noah, Abraham, Solomon

verse which says, “In the stories of those messengers there is a sermon and a lesson for the *people who have a heart to think*.” They are not just fiction or philosophical discourses, but they confirm and solidify the revelations preceding the Qur’ān, and these stories contain details for everything related to our lives: they are a guidance and a mercy for those who believe.

Everyone who has memorized Chapter Al Fātihah considers himself an ‘*alim*’<sup>4</sup> nowadays, and he gives fatwas. Every verse of the Qur’ān revealed to the Prophet was revealed for a reason, but all these so-called ulama miss this point completely. Sometimes I read articles in magazines – Muslim magazines written by males and females – and the authors quote: “As Sura An-Noor said. . .” “As Sura al-Ahzab said. . .” They don’t know *why* – what was the *reason* for a revelation; everything was said for a reason. For example, a verse very often quoted by such “ulama” is the one from Al-Ahzab: [Imam quotes<sup>5</sup>:] “O Prophet! Tell thy wives and thy daughters, as well as all other believing women, that they should make their skirts longer or draw over themselves some of their outer garments when in public: this will be more conducive to their being recognized as decent women and not annoyed. But withal, God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace.” In this verse even the reason for its revelation is mentioned along with it.

It was the habit of the Arabs at that time to molest women walking in the street presuming that they were slave women. As a consequence, Muslim women would fall victim to this behavior. So the Qur’ānic verse came to say to the Prophet that they should have some outward distinguishing mark in order to make a clear distinction between those who are Muslim, and those who are not, so they will be protected from such molestation; they will be recognized as free women and no one will hurt them in the street. So this Qur’ānic verse was revealed for a specific reason, but, nowadays, based on the so-called ulama’s interpretation of this verse, we are told that unless the woman wears a tent over her body, she is not a good Muslim. Why? “Because Sura Al Ahzab says so and so and so”, but, just go back and seek what is the *reason* it said that!

Another example: Muhammad could not give fatwas himself; when someone came and asked him a question, he would not answer if he did not know, and he did not talk from his own. He was not ashamed even though he was the Prophet

and the Messenger of God to say that he did not know. The Qur’ān says, “Neither does he speak of his own desire: that which he conveys to you is but a divine inspiration with which he is being inspired.” A famous example in support of this is the story of a woman named Khawlah bint Taalabah who went to the Prophet one day and said, “Prophet, I was arguing with my husband today and he said to me ‘You are unlawful to me as my mother’<sup>6</sup> so am I divorced? Can I live with that man again?” Although this was quite a common practice among the Arabs<sup>7</sup> at that time, this was the first incident in the history of the new Muslim community. So the Prophet said to her, “I don’t know. Give me some time to see if some answer will come or not.” She waited. No answer. One month. No answer. Two months. No answer. Three months. No answer. She went to the Prophet and said, “What is the case?” He said he had not received revelation. So she started to pray, “O God, solve my problem; am I going to continue like that forever? I don’t know if I am married or divorced.” Finally, a sura known as Sura Al-Mujadalah was revealed to solve that problem. *Mujadalah* means “The woman who entered into a debate with the Prophet.” [Imam quotes:] “God has indeed heard the words of her who pleads with thee concerning her husband, and complains unto God. As for those of you who henceforth separate themselves from their wives by saying, ‘You are unlawful to me as my mother’, let them bear in mind that they can never be as their mothers: none are their mothers save those who gave them birth: and so, behold, they but utter a saying that runs counter to reason, and is therefore false. Hence, as for those who would separate themselves from their wives by saying ‘You are unlawful to me as my mother’, and thereafter would go back on what they have said, their atonement shall be the freeing of a slave before the couple may touch one another again. If he cannot afford that, let him feed 60 poor persons. If he cannot afford that financially, let him fast 60 *successive* days.” And, in case he misses one day, the counter restarts at zero. That is the penalty. See how the Qur’ān treats the lapses of the tongue? The man makes a statement and for that statement the penalty is so severe. This is so he learns to hold his tongue in the future. See the importance of controlling your tongue even in your

<sup>6</sup> 58:2

<sup>7</sup> The practice of “*zihār*” – a form of divorce – by which the men separated themselves from their wives by uttering the words “You are unlawful to me as my mother”

<sup>4</sup> Scholar

<sup>5</sup> 33:59

relationship with your wife? The Qur'ān says elsewhere that God has created everything in pairs: two ears, two eyes, two nostrils, two legs, two feet but *ONE* tongue. Imagine if God had created us with two tongues; the whole world would be destroyed! We read all these things in a cursory manner without giving much thought to them.

The people used to come and ask the Prophet a question and he would say: wait, I will tell you the answer later. There are hundreds of Qur'ānic verses saying to Muhammad: "They ask you, such-and-such. Tell them..." And he waited, sometimes for a very long time, until a revelation came directing him to give a fatwa. It means that Muhammad was scared to give fatwas.

Just a word to keep you updated with what Muslim religious leaders are all about since it has some connection with the verses which I am going to elaborate.

We are in the process now of finding an imam to lead the Toledo community but I would like the people not to think mistakenly that having a new imam means that I'll disappear. I'll not disappear; I'll be here. According to our custom, when it comes to selecting an imam, we always go to Al-Azhar University, in Egypt, with which we are familiar. But Al-Azhar is not the only Muslim school in the world. There is *Al Ja'ima Islamia* in Jordan, *Ali Garh Muslim University* in India, *Muslim International University* in Malaysia, *Al Qaraweyeen University* in Morocco, and then there is *Az-Zaitoona University* in Tunisia. All these universities are geared towards teaching religion as a special field. Nowadays, we have plenty of "imams" in America whose specialty is engineering, medicine, or real estate, but if they memorize some suras from the Qur'ān then they designate themselves as imams, whereas being an imam is a very specialized calling. Even at Al-Azhar, with which I am familiar, there are three colleges. There is a college of Islamic Law which prepares students to be judges of family law. So a judge presiding over cases of divorce, marriage, inheritance and everything related to family life would be a graduate from that specific college. In addition to family law, study of some tafseers<sup>8</sup> and ahadith<sup>9</sup> are required as additional courses. Then, there is the School of Arabic Language. This college prepares the students to analyze the language. Just like a doctor who dissects the body, a student of Arabic language dissects Arabic words and determines their origin, how they could be

modified to give alternate meanings, and so on. As a result, when you pick up an Arabic dictionary, you find one word may have 6,7,8,9, or even 10 meanings. The third school at Al Azhar is known as the College of Theology (Osūl-ud-dīn). That college prepares students to be specialists in tafseers and ahadith. And after one finishes his studies in that college, one can go on to become a little bit more specialized by obtaining his master's degree, which is of two kinds: Master's Degree in Education, where the student specializes in *teaching* tafseers and ahadith; and a Master's Degree in Preaching and Guidance, which is the job of an imam and the specialty of someone who will be an imam in a mosque. Anyone who has not graduated from the College of Theology (Osūl-ud-dīn) but has graduated from either of the other two colleges in Al-Azhar, and is acting as an imam in a mosque, will be practicing on the basis of the minor, not the major, of his specialization.

These three colleges are linked. In the College of Theology, they also study Islamic Law and Arabic language, so that when they study the Qur'ān and tafseers, they can analyze them linguistically. Why am I getting to all this? The reason is that a lot of our people, nowadays, if they can read the Qur'ān, start to interpret it in their own way and they think that they know. Languages are not easy. You have to know the grammar of the language; that is very important.

For example, in the case of proper nouns which are names, we know that this is female and this is male: if someone's name is Ahmad, we say this is a man; if Hameedah, we say she is a woman. What is the difference between the two? That final alphabet of Hameedah – the "taa'" is called, in the Arabic grammar, "taa' at-ta'neeth" or the "taa' of the female." But not all the languages are the same in respect of their grammar. The word "moon" is female in Urdu, and in Pushto *ya Amjad!*<sup>10</sup> Okay. In the Arabic language, moon – *al qamar* – is male. While *as-shams* – the sun – is the opposite: it is female in Arabic, while it is male in Urdu. Any ordinary, non-Arabic speaking man who reads the Qur'ān and interprets it may not analyze it correctly if he doesn't know these technicalities and grammar. For example, when non-Muslims, especially the students of the Bible, read a sura like Al-Hujurāt which states repeatedly: "*ya ayyuhalladhina aamanu*" (O you who believe) they interpret that as the Qur'ān – the Call – is directed to the males and not to the females, and the women are free to do what they want, because such Qur'ānic verses are addressing

<sup>8</sup> Qur'anic exegesis

<sup>9</sup> A report or account of what the Prophet said

<sup>10</sup> Amjad speaks, reads, and writes "Pushto" (Pukhtu)

males only! They say the Qur'ān is mostly addressed to the males; it is chauvinistic; the woman is something additional, and so on. According to them, if the Qur'an were addressing the females, it would say "*ya ayyuhallathi aamanā*". But the rule of the Arabic grammar is that *whenever* the talk is directed to males, it means males and females. That is a rule in the Arabic grammar. So, when the Qur'ān says *ya ayyuhalladhina aamanu* in order to give the proper sense and full meaning of the Arabic, you would have to translate it into English as "O you who believe, male and female. . ." If we don't know our grammar, we don't know how to answer these people.

Chapter Al-Hujurāt starts with: *Yā ayyuhalladhīna āmanū* – O you who believe. It starts with a call or a title, a description or a label, as it were. This call ("believers"/"you who believe") is known in Arabic as *nidaa'* and the "*Yā*" is called *Yā unnidaa'* in the Arabic grammar. In English, "*Yā*" is translated as "O".

Why is God talking to the believers here? The scholars of the Qur'ān say that, when some normal person is

your friend, and he is calling you with a nice name, one you like, you will be very pleased; if you are calling someone by an attribute or name which he likes that will draw him closer to you. Imagine your Creator addressing you "O you believer". It is very endearing! It attracts attention, making the people who are believers feel that they are different from those who don't believe. It is a call that opens your eyes and focuses your attention on knowing what is coming after it. What does Allah want from me? The following verses will then advise or report the message that God wants to convey to the believers.

This is an introduction to Chapter Al-Hujurāt which we are going to start, *insha'allah*, next week. That chapter will uncover for each of us our shortcomings. That is why we are going to deal with it in the coming weeks, word-by-word, line-by-line, and verse-by-verse; maybe we can learn something which we can apply to our lives. The good person is the one who will work to correct any shortcomings. If he does not, then he is not using the three faculties which God gave him.

## Sura Al-Hujurāt The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 5]

Verses 1-3

“O you who believe, do not put yourselves forward in the presence of God and His Messenger, but remain conscious of God (*Ittaqu-Allah*): for, verily, God is all-hearing, all-knowing (*Samee‘un ‘Aleem*)” [49: 1].

Whenever the Prophet reported something, it would have been revealed to him; he did not pronounce anything on his own. He never would *suggest* anything in response to questions that were put to him, but he would wait for a revelation to come. Islam started among the Bedouin Arabs who used to live a tough life and were totally devoid of politeness; they had no knowledge of how to behave in the presence of the Prophet, and, whenever something happened, they would make all kinds of suggestions to him: “O, if only there was a Qur’ān to say such-and-such, or to treat this-or-that; if this happens this way it will be better, or, if this happens that way it will be better; if that verse was revealed here, or if that verse was revealed there,” and so on. Their proposals and suggestions would contradict what the Prophet was saying. So the above verse was revealed to tell them not to suggest or propose anything on their own which was contradictory to

what God or His Messenger was saying. It tells them not to make suggestions while the Prophet is among them and while God is supplying him with revelations as answers to the questions emerging in that new society; it tells them to leave the matter for God and His Messenger. It came to teach them that what God has said and done, and what His Messenger has reported is a decree, and they should not propose anything which is opposite to it. It means “Be polite”.

But if we examine this verse closely, we find that it starts by what is known in the Arabic language as *nidaa’* – a call or a title: “*Yā ayyuhalladhīna āmanū*” (O you who believe). It is a title which is dear and attractive to those who fall in that category, and it encourages them to live up to that title. When they hear *Yā ayyuhalladhīna āmanū*, it reminds them of the time when they were worshipping the sun, the moon, the ancestors, the stones, and the idols, but now they have moved into a new category which is that of believers in the Oneness of God, and so God is calling them by their new title and saying to them, O you who believe, Muhammad is not suggesting anything of his own but he is receiving revelation and is commanded to report that revelation. He has been selected by

God to convey His message, and, therefore, it is not appropriate for you to suggest to him to make changes while he is among you, and while there is a link between the sky and the earth in the form of revelations.

*Ittaqu-Allah.* How is the word *itlaqu-Allah* in the Qur'ān translated into English? Most commonly, it is translated as "Fear God", so, when non-Muslim American people read the Qur'ān in English, they read "Fear God" and they say: "O these Muslims are something. They are always talking about God as being severe and scary. Everywhere the Qur'ān says *itlaqu-Allah- Fear God*, while we always talk about our God as Loving and Forgiving. God will forgive you. Jesus will save you. Let Jesus come in and you are saved."

Let us understand the meaning of *itlaqu-Allah*. The word *taqwa* is adapted from *itlaqu* (fear). The root verb is *waqaya* (to self-protect, to safeguard). The word *taqwa* is translated into English as "piety". The word "*taqi*" or "*muttaqi*" which means "righteous man" is adapted from the word *taqwa*. *Itlaqa* (feared) is the past tense, *yattaqi* (he fears) is the present tense, *muttaqi* (righteous man) is a present participle, and these are all adapted from the same term or concept. See the difference now? "Piety", "Fear God", "Righteous man" these are all descriptions derived from the same word; they represent an attempt at translation into English of this one word *itlaqu-Allah*.

The Qur'an is full of the admonition *itlaqu-Allah*, so, when the non-Muslim Americans read "Fear God" on every page of the Qur'an, they interpret this as God being very severe; "their" God is difficult, not like our God – loving and forgiving. Why do they think and interpret it that way? They have their excuse, too.

Our imams stand up in the mosques and say that the Prophet, peace be upon him, traveled to the heavens in the night of Isrā', and, while passing by hell, he saw women hanging from their hair. The origin of this particular and frequently narrated story is very weak. If this is a hadith, it is not correct, or, at least, weak. The Prophet, on seeing those women, asked Jibreel<sup>11</sup> about them. And Jibreel answered that these are the women who did not cover their hair in their earthly life. But why does this story not state quite simply that those women were burning in hell rather than stating that they were "hanging from their hair"? It is for the sake of dramatization, to employ scary techniques, while we forget or

rarely mention the multiple Qur'ānic verses which are very succinctly stated: how many times does the Qur'ān mention "*Inna-Llaha Ghafur-ur-Raheem*,"<sup>12</sup> "*Inna-Llaha Tawwabur-Raheem*?"<sup>13</sup> How many times? Hundreds of times! *Maghfira!*<sup>14</sup> Then, we have two verses in the Qur'ān which have nothing equal to them in any other faith. The verse which gives man the highest type of hope assures the Prophet: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Say: [Thus speaks God] 'O you servants of mine who have transgressed against your own selves! Despair not of God's mercy: behold, God forgives all sins [whenever the sinner repents and returns to Him] – for, verily, He alone is much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace!'"<sup>15</sup>

Consider this verse in the context of what we are talking about. Is that a scary God? Another verse, even more powerful than this one, states: God will not forgive *shirk* – making partner to Him – but he will forgive any sin below that.<sup>16</sup> Any sin below that is a subject of forgiveness. So, what type of forgiveness is that? It is an *all-encompassing* forgiveness. Yet, we are always using and emphasizing the scary techniques and expressions.

*Samee-'un 'Aleem.* There is some technicality in this part of the verse. When we study the tafseer, we pay special attention to the sequence of words in the Qur'ān, and question why a particular word is written before and not after, or, why not the opposite? Why does God say: *إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ* (Verily, God is all-hearing, all-knowing)? Why not "Verily, God is all-knowing, all-hearing"? There is nothing wrong with it linguistically. It means the same thing. But the Qur'ān states *Samee-'un 'Aleem*. 'Ilm is derived from the word *'aleem* and *'ilm* or knowledge will not be attained until you hear it. Hearing must precede knowledge. You know after you hear. When someone says, "O, Princess Diana got killed in a car crash," you had no knowledge before, but on hearing it, you attained the knowledge. Therefore, the Qur'ān states *Samee-'un 'Aleem*. These are the technicalities of understanding the Qur'ān. And if God hears everything, then He knows everything. This means that whatever God ordains has to be

<sup>12</sup> Indeed, God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, God is Oft-Relenting, Most Merciful

<sup>14</sup> Forgiveness!

<sup>15</sup> 39:53

<sup>16</sup> 4: 48

<sup>11</sup> The Angel Gabriel



the best because of His complete knowledge.

We were in a wedding last night and the father of the bride was arguing about a hadith: “No marriage without the approval of the *Wali*.” *Wali* normally will be the father or the mother. He interpreted this hadith to mean that he is supposed to answer on behalf of the girl when the marriage vows are being performed. This is, in fact, an opinion of one Muslim school of thought with regard to the interpretation of that hadith. Other Muslim schools of thought disagree and stipulate that a girl can marry herself if she likes, even without the approval of her father and mother. But, if we take this hadith as being a correct hadith, then, it means that the girl is underage, in which case this hadith will be applicable. This, however, is the case even in American law. If the girl is under 18, the signature of the father or mother is required to buy the marriage license because she is underage. But the father of the bride in the wedding last night interpreted this hadith in his own way: the girl should be sitting somewhere else and he should be pronouncing the vows on her behalf. Such are the misinterpretations we attribute to Islam; we say Islam is that way. Islam is not that way.

God is *‘Aleem*: He is aware, He knows what you are saying and what you are suggesting, what you are whispering and what you are saying openly. He knows what you reveal and what you conceal. The word *‘aleem* in the Arabic language carries a particular connotation. When we talk about *people*, we say, “This man is *‘alim*”,<sup>17</sup> but we never say, “This man is *‘aleem*.” *‘Aleem* is known in the science of *Balaghah*, or Arabic language fluency, as *Seeghat al-Mubaalaghah*: it is not applicable to a human being; it is applicable to God only. So *‘aleem* means He is aware of everything; His knowledge encompasses everything in this life.

[Imam quotes Arabic verse, then explains:] This Qur’ānic verse which came to show the Bedouins how to be polite is very much applicable in our time, also. The people, when they used to sit with the Prophet, would raise their voices and talk loudly, to the extent that they would drown the voice of the Prophet. The Qur’ān came to tell them not to raise their voices above the voice of the Prophet, and not to talk to him in the same manner in which they talked to one another, otherwise all their deeds would be valueless without them perceiving it. It means that God was instructing the believers that if they did not respect and obey the Prophet

implicitly, all their good deeds would be valueless without them perceiving it. The reason is that the Prophet was the leader – a guide who was educating them – and they had to respect him. For the same reason, we are taught, as children, that a teacher is to be respected. There is even an Arab poet who says, “Treat that teacher as if you are treating a messenger because he is building and developing your soul as well as your brain.” That is the message of Islam regarding the relationship between a teacher and a student.

Where are we nowadays? When a teacher enters his class, no one acknowledges his or her presence, just as if no one entered. In my time, we used to stand up and salute the teacher like they do in the army. Nowadays the teacher enters the class and the students are smoking and have their legs up on the desk. Why is education, here and in our own countries, going down the drain? Because there is freedom! We call it “freedom”. In my time – and if I find it today, I’ll kiss it – our *mu‘allim*<sup>18</sup> of the Qur’ān used to have a strap of leather attached to a wooden handle. If we made a mistake while reading the Qur’ān, he would hit us on the thigh. It would produce welts. We used to hate it at that time. But if I see that piece of leather, I’ll kiss it today, because those lashes made me what I am now. Today, the teacher cannot even *say* anything to the child. Why? Freedom! We are in a free country! And our own countries back home are “free” when it comes to the business of educating children, but not in other things. It is chaos, not freedom!

In Arab and Muslim cultures, if a child raises his voice above the voice of his father, we say the child needs a lesson in politeness. If you are sitting with your father, you should not talk so loudly that your voice will rise above the voice of your father. There must be some respect there. The Qur’ān affirms this in another chapter<sup>19</sup> where it states that, while addressing your parents, even at the time of anger, don’t even say “*ouf*” to them; don’t raise your voice or talk to them in harsh words. Talk to them kindly and politely.

After the conquest of Makkah, delegations used to come from near and far to meet with the Prophet and declare their Islam. One time Abu-Bakr and Omar were sitting with the Prophet, peace be upon him, and a delegation came from a tribe called *Bani Tameen*. After those people accepted Islam as their religion, Abu-Bakr suggested a certain man to be their

<sup>17</sup> Scholar

<sup>18</sup> Teacher

<sup>19</sup> 17:23

*Amir* or leader who would teach them the tenets of Islam. But Omar suggested another man, and, in the presence of the Prophet, Omar and Abu-Bakr started to argue, raising their voices, each one wanting his suggestion to prevail, to the extent that they started to accuse each other of opposition for the sake of opposition. The Qur'ānic verse came immediately to correct that situation saying: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“O you who believe! Do not raise your voices above the voice of the Prophet, and neither speak loudly to him, as you would speak loudly to one another, lest all your good deeds come to nought without your perceiving it” [49:2].

This verse is similar in content to two other verses in the Qur'ān. The first is in Chapter Luqmān when Luqmān advises his son to lower his voice for a loud voice is like the braying of a donkey, and it is most hateful. The second verse, which came to advise the wives of the Prophet, should open our eyes and our minds. The Qur'ān advised the wives of the Prophet to talk in a specific manner, especially with outsiders or strangers.

Nowadays, some “staunch” Muslims maintain that it is haram<sup>20</sup> for a woman to answer the telephone because maybe the caller is a man, and the voice of the woman is *awra*.<sup>21</sup> Other “staunch” Muslims say that a woman should send someone else to open the door for a male visitor. Why - because she is not supposed to meet a man even if she is properly attired. These are the opinions of the “staunch” Muslims of today. Yet, the Qur'ān says something else. The Qur'ān advised the wives of the Prophet in a verse that is so clear that there is no need even for an interpretation. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“O wives of the Prophet! You are not like any of the other women, provided that you remain truly conscious of God. Hence, be not over-soft in your speech, lest any whose heart is diseased should be moved to desire you: but, withal, speak in a kindly way” [33:32].

The Qur'ān did not say that as soon as a stranger comes, go away and hide in the house, or don't answer the telephone.

The Qur'an advised women to talk to strangers in a specific manner. These verses are interrelated and the advice is for both men and women.

Based upon the Qur'ānic verses which instruct the believers on how to treat the Prophet, peace be upon him, there are two schools of thought regarding yet another matter. In our prayer, when we read *At-Tahiyāt* and we come to *As-Salat-ul-Ibraahimiyah* – *allahumma sallay* followed by *allahumma barak* – one school of thought states that you have to say “*allahumma sallay 'ala Muhammad...*” because he is a man like you, whereas the other school of thought says no, you must say, “*allahumma sallay 'ala Sayyidna Muhammad'*” because you call your normal friends Muhammad, Ibrahim, and Ismail, so you should not call the Prophet in the same manner as you call your friends because his position as a leader of the Muslims deserves that you say *Sayyidna*.<sup>22</sup> As a result, you find people following these two schools: some people recite *Allahumma sallay 'ala Muhammad wa 'ala aalay Muhammad* while others recite it *allahumma sallay 'ala Sayyidna Muhammad wa 'ala aalay Sayyidna Muhammad*. It is left for the Muslim to say whatever he likes, or not to say it at all, because this is a *du'a* and it is additional and not an obligatory part of the prayer; if, when you finish reciting *Ashhadu Allah ilaha Illalah wa Ashhadu-unna Muhammad-un 'Abduhu wa Rasooluh*, you say *as-Salaam-u-'Alaykum wa Rahmatullah* to the right and *Salaam-u-'Alaykum wa Rahmatullah* to the left, your prayer is complete. That *du'a* is additional and is not part of *Attashahhud*. These are facts which we have to know as Muslims performing prayer.

After the revelation of that second verse, the people learned how to be polite, and they started to talk to the Prophet in a very courteous, normal voice. So another Qur'ānic verse came to encourage them: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Behold, they who lower their voices in the presence of God's messenger – it is they whose hearts God has tested and opened to consciousness of Himself; and theirs shall be forgiveness and a reward supreme” [49:3].

<sup>20</sup> That which is forbidden or sinful

<sup>21</sup> That part of a man or woman's body which should be kept covered at all times. Within the context, it would mean that “the woman's voice should not be heard by men who are not in the category of mahram for her.”

<sup>22</sup> A title of respect akin to Mister or Master in Western society

## Sura Al-Hujurāt

### The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 5]

Verses 4-11

**T**his chapter is called Al-Hujurāt which means “The Chapter of the Rooms”, because, attached to the mosque in Al-Madinah, at that time, were the rooms in which the Prophet and his wives used to live. One day, a delegation of seventy people came to meet the Prophet. They were Bedouins from the tribe of Bani Tameen, rough and tough, familiar with, and at home with living in tents not in houses, and with no concept of politeness. The two heads of the delegation came around to the rooms where the Prophet lived, and started to call the Prophet by his name, shouting, “Ya Muhammad, O Muhammad, come out to us, we want you”, in that manner. At this time, another Qur’anic verse was revealed addressing, first, the Prophet, personally, telling him that those who are calling him from behind the room have no brains with which to think; they are not thinking, that is why they are calling you in that manner. Secondly, the verse is advising the people on how they should behave. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Verily, O Prophet, as for those who call thee from without thy private apartments – most of them do not use their reason: for, if they had the patience to wait until thou come forth to them of thine own accord, it would be for their

own good. Still, however, God is much forgiving, a dispenser of grace” [49:4-5].

See the sweetness of the Qur’an when we know why a verse was revealed and the occasion that called forth the revelation.

Verse six of Al-Hujurāt crosses a line to talk about a different matter: a “disease” prevalent among human beings in general: one person says to another that he heard so-and-so is going to do this to him, or, someone is saying such-and-such things about him. This is known as gossiping. In other words when two people get together and pass on what they heard about another person this is known as gossiping. Gossip among Muslims, nowadays, sometimes takes place even in the prayer room. The Qur’an teaches Muslims how to deal with gossip. If someone reports a message, what should your reaction to that message be? What should you do? The reason for the revelation of verse number six is also known.

One day the Prophet, peace be upon him, sent a man to a tribe called *Bani Al-Mustalaq* to collect the zakah, and, since they were new converts to Islam, to see, also, whether they were still practicing the faith. As soon as the man arrived, the people rushed towards him. He thought that they were going to kill him! But, in fact, the people were very good Muslims

and they were eager to pay their zakah, bringing it willingly. But this man beat a hasty retreat, and, returning to the Prophet, said: “Those people have rejected Islam and do not want to pay zakah.” At that time, the Muslims, as usual, flared up. Some people said: prepare a big army, Prophet, for we have to teach those people a lesson; others said that they had committed “*riddah*” (apostasy) and so they deserved to be beheaded; while still others maintained that since they stopped paying zakah, it should be collected from them by force. But, before the Prophet acted on any of these suggestions, he sent for Khalid bin Waleed, a formidable general in the Muslim army, with scores of victories to his name, and advised him thus: “Khalid, before you take any action, be sure that this news which came to us is correct.” So Khalid went to Bani Al-Mustalaq and sent two of his scouts – the CIA of Khalid bin Waleed – at night, and instructed them to see what was going on inside the village where the tribe was living. So the two emissaries came back to Khalid and said: “We heard their *adhan*, we heard them praying, everything is normal. There is nothing.” So Khalid bin Waleed took his battalion and went back to the Prophet and informed him that the report he had received was false. [Imam quotes Arabic verse.] This verse was revealed in connection with the above incident. [The translation is:]

“O you who believe! If any iniquitous person comes to you with a slanderous tale, use your discernment, lest you hurt people unwittingly and afterwards be filled with remorse for what you have done” [49:6].

When someone comes to you with some news, first, before you judge that person, make sure there is truth to the news, because some people spread false rumors. Spreading rumors is also used by some as a form of warfare and this is called *harb-il-ishaa’ah*. It is done with the intention of destroying the morale of the enemy.

“يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِن جَاءَكُمْ

believe! *in jā a kum...*” *In jā a kum* means “if or when [a person] comes to you”. A lot of people, even the Arabs, who read this verse, do not understand the full import of it. When you put it on the table of anatomy and dissect the words, you begin to understand it more deeply. Why didn’t the Qur’an say “*idha jā a kum*” instead of saying “*in jā a kum*”? “*Idha jā a kum*” also means “if or when [a person] comes to you”. This is because the word “*in*” indicates, what we call in Arabic grammar, “*tashfeek*”, or doubt; it gives the indication that what

is being said is not a fact, or reality, but is doubtful or suspect. So the Qur’anic language expresses doubt or suspicion. It means you have to be in doubt when you hear a report from someone, especially an “iniquitous tale”, unless there is proof, otherwise you will hurt some people out of ignorance of the facts, and, in the end, you will regret your actions because you did not know the facts. This Qur’anic verse was directed specifically to the people at that time and was revealed in connection with the above incident, but it applies to us equally, nowadays.

There are ulama who dare not talk about hadith because it is such a hard science. If you examine the current books of hadith, you will find one hadith narrated in different books by two, three, or four different sources. So, there is some doubt as to their authenticity. There are other ahadith in these same books which the Prophet never uttered. These are called the *Israeli Hadith*. The veracity of the true hadith is very easy for us to determine when we use our brains, as it appeals to logic. Take, for example, the hadith “Actions are to be judged according to intention”. It is readily acceptable. But another hadith stating “I found, on the night of Isrā’, that women make up most of the population of hell” is easily seen to be suspect. There is a suspicion here because it is not easily acceptable by logical and objective thinking. Such ahadith which have been inserted in Islam, to spoil Islam, are quoted by many Muslims even nowadays, though the Prophet never said them. The people who quote them use them as a scare tactic. As a matter of fact, the science of hadith, being a very difficult subject, is taught in Al-Azhar over a period of four years. *Four years* just to learn which hadith is authentic, which is *daeef* (weak), and which is in between. But we, Muslims, when we find a book of hadith, we just follow it blindly and say, “The Prophet said...” and, in this way, we attribute to the Prophet many things he never said.

Verse number six is saying, O you who believe, if a man comes to you with news, you should confirm that the information is correct, otherwise you may do something to other people who are innocent and, as a result, you will repent it later. A relevant hadith narrated by Ibn Katheer states that the Prophet said: “To seek out and search for the correctness of a piece of news is an act of God, but to do likewise in the case of a wrong act committed by someone, according to received information, is an act of the devil.”

This verse came to teach Muslims not to be hasty, to take time to confirm news or rumors brought by a *fāsiq* –

إِنْ جَاءَكُمْ فَاسِقٌ بِنَبَأٍ . Look at that description! *Fāsiq*. *Fāsiq* means “blasphemous person” because a believer is expected never to bear false information. The verse says, O you who believe, if a *fāsiq* came to you with news. . . it doesn’t say if a believer – *mo’min* – came to you with news. . . . That is how the Qur’an described it because it is not expected that a true Muslim or a true believer will come with false news. We are to ascertain the truth, verify the information before saying anything or taking action, otherwise we might hurt innocent people and suffer remorse later. The Qur’an shows us how to treat gossip and rumors, thereby keeping Muslim societies, communities, and families intact.

The next verse draws the attention of the Prophet’s contemporaries to the *ni’mah*<sup>23</sup> of God bestowed on them: “Be aware that the Messenger of God is still living among you.” That is one of the bounties of God. The presence of the Prophet was a hotline, as it were, between the sky and the earth. It means that there was on-going revelation and that there was bound to be some uncovering of false news through revelation. This, indeed, actually happened. When the hypocrites came to the Prophet and said, “We declare that you are the Messenger of God”, God revealed a verse to Muhammad: “When the hypocrites come to you, Muhammad, they say, ‘We declare that you are the Messenger of God’; but God *knows* that thou art truly His messenger; and He bears witness that the hypocrites are indeed false in their declaration of faith.”<sup>24</sup>

The hypocrites were just saying a word with their tongues and not from their hearts. They were playing tricks on the Muslims. God uncovered the false statements and the lies of the hypocrites to the Prophet, peace be upon him. So, the Qur’an is reminding the Muslim contemporaries of the Prophet to be aware of the fact that the Prophet, peace be upon him, is still among them, that he is still receiving information directly from heaven, that they should be aware that there will be an uncovering of false information. The verse ends by telling the Muslims that if the Prophet were to listen to everything they said to him, they would be bound to perish and would be fully destroyed. Then, God continues to remind them of the other *ni’mah*: how He has made *īman*<sup>25</sup> lovable to

them, and has made *fusūq* and *kufi* hateful to them: only people who have been graced with such bounties from God follow the rules of God and the rules of *īman* and are the most successful people. [Imam quotes the verse in Arabic. The translation is:]

“And know that God’s messenger is among you. Were he to comply with your inclinations in each and every case, you would be bound to come to harm as a community. But as it is, God has caused your faith (*īman*) to be dear to you, and has given it beauty in your hearts, and has made hateful to you all denial of the truth (الْكُفْرُ), and all iniquity (وَالْفُسُوقَ), and all rebellion against what is good (وَالْعِصْيَانَ); such indeed are they who follow the right course through God’s bounty and favor; and God is all-knowing, truly wise (عَلِيمٌ حَكِيمٌ).<sup>26</sup>”

These are the bounties, the grace, and the favor of God and God is aware (*‘aleem-un-hakeem*) of those who will heed His commands by following His rules. All these rules which we are supposed to follow are a bounty from God.

The ulama explain that three degrees are mentioned: *kufi* is the rejection of faith, *fusūq* is interpreted by the ulama as the “cardinal sins”, and *‘isyān* is disobedience of God in the very, very little things.

Here it says God is *‘aleem-un-hakeem*, while in verse one it says God is *Samee-‘un Aleem*. If we compare the two, then we will notice three things: *Sami*,<sup>27</sup> *Aleem*,<sup>28</sup> and *Hakeem*:<sup>29</sup> if you hear, you gain knowledge, and the more knowledge you have, the more wisdom you have. And that always reminds me of the saying: “Open your ears – are you listening Mohammad Yusuf?<sup>30</sup> – open your ears, open your eyes, and close your mouth.” You will be in good shape if you follow this saying

[Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:] “Hence, if two groups of believers fall to fighting, make peace between them; but then, if one of the two groups goes on

<sup>23</sup> Bounty

<sup>24</sup> 63:1

<sup>25</sup> Faith

<sup>26</sup> 49:7-8

<sup>27</sup> All-hearing

<sup>28</sup> All-knowing

<sup>29</sup> Truly wise

<sup>30</sup> Imam’s close friend sitting in the audience

acting wrongfully towards the other, fight against the one that acts wrongfully until it reverts to God's commandment; and if they revert, make peace between them with justice, and deal equitably with them: for verily God loves those who act equitably. All believers are but brethren. Hence, whenever they are at odds, make peace between your two brethren, and remain conscious of God, so that you might be graced with His mercy" [49:9-10].

These two verses deal with a problem which we have witnessed in the past, which we are witnessing at present, and which has been a fundamental problem in our history. Since the death of the Prophet, the Muslims have started to disagree with each other. Disagree on what basis? On the basis of power! The chair! Have you ever heard of a Muslim leader, president, or king who has relinquished power without assassination or a coup? It will never happen! No one will resign – we like power. Once we sit on the chair [of authority], we are glued to it with "Krazy glue". No one can separate us from that chair. So, with the passing away of the Prophet, we find that trouble started between Ali and Mu'awiya, Sayyidna 'Usman and the people who were supporting Ali ibn abi Talib, Yazeed and Al Hussein – all these troubles started with the desire to hold on to power. *Yā'ni*,<sup>31</sup> the only truly golden age of the Muslim empire was during the life of the Prophet, to some extent in the time of AbuBakr, and to some extent in the time of Omar. It started to deteriorate after that until we lost the Caliph system 500 years ago. Since then, we are steadily going downhill. Why? All because of the love of power. And our characteristic, as Muslims, nowadays, is that when we are killing each other we are very strong. When we fight one another at the individual level we are very powerful; everyone wants his own way and we fight vehemently. When a Muslim country is fighting another Muslim country, both are using all kinds of weaponry and destroying their own homes, as the Qur'an said, "They destroy their houses with their own hands." But, when we are fighting our enemies, or an external power, we act very cowardly, suddenly transforming into very polite people, and, at the same time, yielding very quickly. Look at how many peace treaties the Muslims, all over the world, have accepted, while our enemies never intended to take them seriously or carry

them out; but, in spite of that, we accepted them, although we are, *Alhamdulillah*,<sup>32</sup> not few in number. One of every four human beings on earth is a Muslim. But we have lost our identity, our power, and our faith – we have lost everything in this life. This is our situation today. This verse teaches the Muslims how to solve this problem if it should arise.

It tells us if there are two groups of Muslims or believers fighting each other, the first thing to do is try to reconcile them, try to establish peace between them. If one of the two groups does not accept the peace – what the Qur'an calls *at-tā' ifat-ul-bāghiyah* (the group which is trespassing its limits and the rules of Islam) – then, fight that group. Enter the fighting on the side of the weaker party, or the party which is looking for peace, until the other party comes back to its senses and accepts the rules of God and the way of Islam. If the other group comes back to its senses and accepts the peace, accepts Islam as a way to judge them, then, establish reconciliation among them based upon justice, because God loves those who are trying to establish justice. But these days we are not doing that.

There is a war in Afghanistan – brothers killing brothers – we are not making any attempt at reconciling them, but, rather, everyone is supporting one faction against another: Saudi Arabia is supporting some group, Iran is supporting another group, Pakistan is supporting a third group, and so on, and let them kill one another – we have lots of them. But, if we look at the Qur'an of 1400 years ago, we will find how it tackled this problem, and how it advises us; and if we abide by the rules in this verse, our problems will be solved.

*Al Aws* and *Al Khazraj*, the two main tribes in Madinah, fought each other for generations before the advent of Islam, but were eventually united under the banner of Islam, and they became like brothers as a result of the power of their faith. The Qur'an reminds them of this: "Remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you: how, when you were enemies, He brought your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren. . ." <sup>33</sup> The end of this section of Sura Al-Hujurat shows us what the nature of the relationship between the believers is: "All the believers are brothers" – brothers in faith.

These verses, if reflected upon deeply, will show us that our society which we call a democratic society – a society

<sup>31</sup> An Arabic expression which has no equivalent in English and means, loosely, "I mean" or, "you know" or, "in other words" depending on the context.

<sup>32</sup> Praise be to God

<sup>33</sup> 3:103

based upon freedom and justice and human rights – is, in reality, entirely based upon social injustices. A ready example is one that our guest cited today.<sup>34</sup> There are some people who are working hard to earn a living for themselves and their children, and taxes are deducted from their checks at the end of the pay period. Part of that tax is going to the welfare system. The welfare system is a very good thing for those who need it. But, what is happening, nowadays, is that the people are defrauding that system, as you heard the guest saying. Imagine, some innocent people have children who are bright, intelligent, qualified to attend a university and acquire an education, but they cannot afford the tuition fee. As a result, the child is between two alternatives: to quit his school and work, or to work part-time and to try, with difficulty, to finance his schooling, while his counterpart, an inmate in jail, because he committed a crime, is having the benefit of free education, free medication, free hospitalization; and all that from the tax money of the man who is working hard to bring up his child and he cannot afford either to hospitalize him or to educate him. These are the social injustices. It is very interesting, and it is no secret, nowadays, that some Muslims fall in this category, as well. I know of Muslims in the United States and Canada who divorce their wives on paper, then rent a room in the house of his wife, collect welfare in order to pay the rent and to pay his wife and children, while technically, they are husband and wife. This is happening among Muslims, and in Toledo, also. And that is what I call social injustice. I have met with someone in Canada whose monthly income, from under the table, is two thousand dollars a month, and he is on welfare and his wife is on welfare. I have a document in my office for a Muslim man, here<sup>35</sup>, making \$5000 a month, receiving welfare. And how many thousands and millions, all over the United States, fall into this category? While we are fascinated by slogans such as “freedom”, “democracy”, and all these glittering concepts, if you dig deep underneath, you will find it is all based upon social injustices. But we don’t feel them; we don’t think of them. Our Qur’an says, O you who believe, when you hear the adhan on Fridays, close your shops, go to the mosque, and perform your prayer. As soon as you

finish your prayer, disperse on earth and *seek* your living, *earn* your living. That is how Islam put it. It does not tell us that Friday is a holiday, so sleep at home. The Qur’an tells us to *work*. *Work seven days a week! Earn your living! Sweat!* So your money will be from halal.<sup>36</sup> But we read these verses in the Qur’an and we take them for granted.

Our brothers who have long beards up to their navels, and our sisters who have hijab down to the ground – that is not Islam – that is appearance, only – the true Islam is to work. The true Islam is to establish a good relationship with your friends, with your brother, with the society at large. Just look at what the Qur’an advises us to do in the case of two fighting groups even when one of the groups is Muslim and the other is *non-Muslim*: “But if they incline to peace, incline thou to it as well, and place thy trust in God: verily, He alone is all-hearing, all-knowing! And should they seek but to deceive thee by their show of peace – behold, God is enough for thee. He it is who has strengthened thee with His succor, and by giving thee believing followers.”<sup>37</sup> If we analyze all these other Qur’anic verses, and apply them in the context of Chapter Al-Hujurāt which teaches us how to be polite and how to behave in our daily lives in relationship to each other, then we will know exactly how to behave.

Now, the next verse talks about something in which we engage almost daily, and the Qur’an is warning us against that. [Imam quotes:] “O you who believe, let not some people (*qawm*) make fun of other people (*qawm*).” Note the word in this sentence is “*qawm*”. *Qawm* means “a group of people”; it could be males or females. But the verse continues to talk about the same prohibition for the second time, “Let not some women make fun of other women.” So, in this respect, it looks like women are included in *qawm*, and are then specially mentioned by gender a second time. And this indicates there must be a reason for that: women are fond of too much gossip; therefore, the Qur’an mentions them twice. The beautiful woman is making fun of the ugly one, the thin one is making fun of the fat one, and the tall one is making fun of the short one. And the same with the men: the rich one is making fun of the poor man, the one in power is making fun of the one who is led by him, and so on. The Qur’an came to teach the people politeness and good behavior, and to impress upon them that all these other values are of no significance:

<sup>34</sup> Periodically we had guest speakers who would talk to us during the Sunday sermon time. The guest told us about a person in jail who finished law school at the expense of the government and was eventually released

<sup>35</sup> Toledo area

<sup>36</sup> Earned by lawful means

<sup>37</sup> 8:61-62

high-class, low class, rich or poor, king or subject, beautiful or ugly, all these are values of this life and they have no significance. [Imam quotes :] “O you who believe! No men shall make fun of other men: it may be that those whom they make fun of are better than themselves; and no women shall make fun of other women: it may well be that those whom they make fun of are better than themselves...” It means that

the criterion before God is piety and good deeds; it is not how tall you are, how short you are, how rich or poor you are. This verse was revealed to teach the believers these values and it starts by “O you who believe...” That title is to attract them. If that is your description, if you feel that this title fits you, then, don't do these things.



## Sura Al-Hujurāt The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 5]

Verses 11-12

There are certain duties a father has towards his children. The Prophet, peace be upon him, mentioned specifically that one of these duties is, when a child is born, to select a good name for him or her, because there are a lot of names that have good meanings. In the Arab countries you find, sometimes, people selecting names to indicate power. For example, they will name their son Asad – Lion! Someone else names his son Nimr – Tiger! A third person names his son Saddam which indicates that he can crash everything – uses scud missiles! In addition, there are some other practices as well. For example, if a woman bears children who happen to die in infancy or when they are very young, the ignorant people advise her to give the next child a bad name, so the people will not have “*hasad*” towards him i.e. they will not envy him. So she calls him *Himaar*,<sup>38</sup> or *Jahsh*,<sup>39</sup> whereas, from the point of view of Islam, the Prophet, peace be upon him, made it incumbent upon the father to give his child a *beautiful* name – “a good name”. In this respect, sometimes, when there happens to be someone who was

given a bad name under the above-cited circumstances, some other people take that as a convenient opportunity to laugh and mock at them.

وَلَا تَتَابَزُوا بِاللُّقَابِ . The word *al-qaab*<sup>40</sup> has a different meaning in classical Arabic from the word *al-qaab* as we understand it in our spoken or colloquial language. There is some thing which is very well-known in Lebanon. When I went there and found out about it, I felt I learned too much. *Yā'nī*, our brothers in Lebanon give every village, there, a name – a nickname – which is a very bad one, and they say, that is their *laqab*. *It is not!* It is not considered *laqab*. For example, the people of the village of Al Karaoun are called *Dhrouf*. *Dhrouf* is the skin of an animal filled with air, like the bagpipes; this air is then suddenly released. The implication is that the people of Al Karaoun are full of hot air, very temperamental, make a big fuss over things and all of a sudden the enthusiasm disappears and nothing comes of it.<sup>41</sup> The

<sup>38</sup> Donkey

<sup>39</sup> Or, Baby Donkey

<sup>40</sup> *Al-qaab* is plural of *Al-laqab*

<sup>41</sup> This explanation was given to me by Mr. Yahya Shousher who is from Lebanon.

people of the village of Sultan Yaqoob are called camels – *Jamal*. The people of Baloul are called *Jahaash*:<sup>42</sup> they all grow up to be donkeys. Some others are called “cows” and “bears” and so on. This is all making fun of a certain group.

*Al-laqab* is given to you as a family name. When you are filling an application in English, it asks you for your “Last name”. If you are filling an Arabic application it asks you for “Al-laqab” which is the same as “Last name”, *yā’nī*, the family name. So that is the difference between the meanings of the term *laqab* when used in colloquial language, as opposed to the classical Arabic language. *Laqab* means “Family name”.

When you describe me and my village that way, I resent it. I may laugh, but inside, I feel bad, because you are insulting me, and you are insulting my village, and this affects the psychology of the people. You are establishing antagonism between yourself and your brother for no reason. So the Qur’an came to address this problem by telling us

وَلَا تَتَابَرُؤْا بِالْأَلْقَابِ . It means, don’t call your brother the name which he hates; don’t say, “He is from the family of *Al-Himaar*.”<sup>43</sup> It so happened that his grandfather, long ago, called that family “*a’ilat-al-himaar*” (Family of Donkeys). So the family name became “Donkey”. Now, someone comes to him while he is standing among lots of people and tells him, “Mr. Donkey, come on here.” That is the meaning of *تَتَابَرُؤْا بِالْأَلْقَابِ* –

it means, you are calling your brother by a name which he hates; he doesn’t like to be called by that name. Islam strongly prohibits this, and the verse proceeds to describe how hateful it is to do this by making an analogy: when you call someone by a bad name which he doesn’t like, it is exactly as if you are calling a *mo’min*<sup>44</sup> a *fasiq*.<sup>45</sup> Isn’t it hateful when you talk to your brother in that language?

Nowadays, after the people became aware of this and realized that there are good names and bad names, they started to change the bad names. I am sure our Lebanese brothers here know that some people changed “Hamara” to “Manara.” It is a bad name so they changed it.<sup>46</sup>

<sup>42</sup> Plural of *Jahsh* (baby donkeys)

<sup>43</sup> The Donkeys

<sup>44</sup> A true believer

<sup>45</sup> Blasphemer

<sup>46</sup> *Hamara* is the proper name of a village in Lebanon, but it rhymes very closely with the word “hamara” which means “female donkey.” *Manara* means “white house”

وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ : it means, “Don’t mock at yourself” or “Don’t insult yourself.”

How does one insult oneself? The Qur’an views the believers as a single entity. If you are insulting one person, then, you are insulting yourself because you are a part of that entity. We even have an Arabic proverb for it. When two brothers are fighting and insulting each other, they say, “I am spitting on my lap, he is my brother.” In the same manner, the Qur’an considers all believers as brothers; they are one entity, so when you insult somebody, you are insulting yourself.

The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “It is a great sin to insult your parents.” So the Prophet was asked how a man could curse or insult his parents. He explained that, if you tell someone ‘You are the son of so...’ He will reply by saying ‘Your father and your mother are so...’ You insulted his father, and he, in turn, insulted your father *and* mother; you are the reason behind the other person insulting your father and mother. When a man insults the parents of somebody else, and that somebody else, in turn, insults his parents, then, it means he is the cause behind his parents’ insult and that is considered one of the great sins. This hadith has the same meaning as *وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ*.

[Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And neither shall you defame or be sarcastic to one another, nor shall you call each other by offensive nicknames. Evil is all imputation of iniquity after one has attained to faith; and they who become guilty thereof and do not repent – it is they who are evildoers” [49:11].

It is an invitation for *tawbah*;<sup>47</sup> it means the door of God is open. It is an invitation to come back to the right approach if you have been guilty of any of the foregoing. If you don’t return to the right approach, then, indeed, you are doing wrong and aggressing against yourself.

“I think this man is a bad man”, “I think that man is good”: this is called *ad-dhanb* in Arabic. In English it is called guessing or conjecture, speculation, presuming. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“O you who believe! Avoid *ad-dhanb*.”

The Qur’an explains it further by saying that “not all *ad-dhanb*, but, some of it, is a sin.” The Qur’an is advising Muslims to avoid too much of that type of thinking – guessing and thinking

<sup>47</sup> Repentance

bad about people – because there is a sin in that.

Have you ever picked up the telephone and talked to your brother or sister and said: “*Hmm*, what is the news in Toledo today? Tell me. Tell me something about what you know! What is happening in the mosque? Who argued with whom? Who is going to kill whom?” That is called *tajassus* in Arabic <sup>48</sup>

وَلَا تَجَسَّسُوا : Don't look for the defects and the

shortcomings of your brother or sister. *Never look for it!* Even if you know there is something bad cover up on them. This Qur'anic verse is coming in a form of order: “*La tajassasu – don't spy!*”

It is narrated that a man came to Omar bin Khattab one day to tell him that his neighbor was drinking. Omar said: “Advise him.” The man advised his neighbor but the neighbor did not listen, so the man came to Omar again and told him that his neighbor was still drinking and did not listen to his advice. Omar said: “Threaten him that you will report him to the police.” So the man presented his neighbor with that threat, but the neighbor still didn't listen. So he went to Omar again and asked, “Am I free now to go and report him to the police so they will lash him?” Then Omar said to him: “Cover up on him. (Imam quotes hadith in Arabic. The translation is:) Any Muslim who will cover up (*satr*) for another Muslim, God will make *satr* on him in this world and in the Hereafter.” This hadith, coupled with the Qur'anic verse *La tajassasu* shows the simplicity of Islam, and shows the Muslims what kind of attitude we are to have towards the weaknesses of others.

In our time, we have seen<sup>49</sup> that if a certain Muslim country declares Islam or Qur'an as their Constitution, then the first thing they do is close the bars! But what will that accomplish? People will manufacture the liquor at home and drink it. And, number two, they stone the adulterer. And note, normally the woman will be stoned but not the man.<sup>50</sup> This is taking place in some Muslim countries at present. In this regard, let us go back to the history of Islam and we will find that only two persons were stoned for adultery in the entire history of Islam. One was a woman, Al-Ghamidiyyah, and the other a man whose name is Ma'iz. These two underwent the punishment because they *admitted* to their

crime. Al-hudud, especially stoning and lashing, cannot be enforced unless you have witnesses, and the requirement for witnesses is very severe. In case of adultery, the requirement is four witnesses, as opposed to two normally required in other circumstances, and these four witnesses are not just to see a man and a woman in bed, but also to see them engaged in actual sex, as they say “like the pen in the inkpot.” See how Islam made it difficult?

Al-Ghamidiyyah came to the Prophet, pregnant as a result of adultery, and said to him:

“Prophet, I have committed adultery and I have to be punished. Punish me.”

See how the Prophet answered her: “Are you sure of what you are talking about? Maybe you were just with a man, sitting with each other.”

She said: “No we slept together.”

He said: “Maybe you slept but you didn't do anything.”

She said: “No, we did everything and I am even pregnant because of that.”

He said to her: “Then, go home until you deliver the child. We cannot kill two souls for the sake of one person.”

She went home. After delivering the child, she brought the infant on her shoulder and came to the Prophet and said: “Prophet, now the child is born and the penalty will kill me alone.” He said to her: “No. The child needs you; go and feed him of your milk until he will be able to eat.”

She went. Two years later, she brought the boy with a piece of bread in his hand, and she said:

“O Prophet that is the child now, capable of maintaining himself, so punish me.”

For *three years* the woman was asking for the punishment after admitting her sin. So, he had no choice and he carried out the law. Who started the stoning? Omar bin Khattab. He was a severe person. A drop of blood from the woman's body fell on his clothes. Omar said, “God curse you.” So the Prophet said to him, [Imam quotes Arabic:] “Omar! Don't curse her. This woman's repentance is so genuine that her repentance is enough to forgive the sins of the entire world.” These examples from Islamic history show us the simplicity of Islam and the mercy of Islam – the Qur'an says *La tajassasu* – don't spy on your brothers; don't spy on your sisters.

Pick up the telephone and say “This woman did this, this, this; she is going here, going there. This man is going here, going there”, and so on. The Qur'an says:

<sup>48</sup> Spying

<sup>49</sup> This is a reference to the Iranian revolution of Khomeini

<sup>50</sup> As happened in Somalia in the 1990's

وَلَا يَغْتَابُ بَعْضُكُم بَعْضًا : it means, don't gossip about them, don't talk behind the backs of the people, don't backbite each other. Then the Qur'an analogized backbiting and gossiping: "Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it." If you hate that, then, know that backbiting your brother or your sister is exactly like eating the flesh of your dead brother. *He is your brother. Meet with him and advise him.* Islam is to advise, not to spread rumors all over.

[The translation of the verse explained above is:] "○

you who believe! Avoid most guesswork about one another – for, behold, some of such guesswork is in itself a sin: and do not spy upon one another; and neither allow yourselves to speak ill of one another behind your backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, you would loathe it! And be conscious of God. Verily, God is an acceptor of repentance, a dispenser of grace – تَوَّابٌ رَّحِيمٌ.

I will continue next week with Verse #13 – a verse which propounds a unique principle of Islam, which we, as Muslims, have to be proud of.

## Sura Al-Hujurāt The Chapter of Conduct and Behavior

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 5 of 5]

Verses 13-18

All the Qur’anic verses which we have talked about during the last three weeks start by: “O you who believe.” Next comes a verse which is not addressed to the believers but to all mankind. It starts by “O mankind” instead of “O you who believe.” [Imam quotes:]

“O mankind, We created you from a male and a female” – your father Adam and your mother Eve. “We made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another, not to despise one another. Verily, the noblest and the most honored among you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him” [49:13].

That is a Qur’anic verse which has no equal in any other religion, and which will kill every current concept that we hear of in political science, whether it is democracy, freedom, or human rights. That is a verse addressing the whole of mankind and saying that they are the children of one man and one woman: no one is better than the other. The white is not better than the black, the male is not better than the female, the rich is not better than the poor, but all are equal because you are the children of one family, and the preference

of one over another has only *one criterion: at-taqwa*.<sup>51</sup> This verse, which we are going to talk about in detail, is a verse which, if we, the Muslims, know it, will give us the upper hand when we discuss issues popular in America these days.

Nowadays, people are talking about human rights, discrimination, and distinction between people on the basis of color, gender, race, nationality, and all that. The Qur’an, which is considered to be the Constitution of the Muslims, contains this chapter called Al-Hujurāt, and in verse number 13, you will find a very basic principle that will eliminate any possibility of that type of problem. The so-called free world today is making itself a great preacher or champion of human rights. And when we examine that preaching, we find it has no basis, and that it, still, is based upon discrimination. Let us examine events which have taken place around us in the last few months and years.

With the power which the United States wields, the U.S. army was able to go to Haiti, yank Jean-Bertrand Aristide from the chair, and put another one in his place under the guise that the people elected him. This indicates that they are trying

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<sup>51</sup> God-consciousness, piety and good deeds

to give freedom, democracy, and human rights by force. In Bosnia, people suffered for years and we know exactly what happened there; we have seen it on the television and in the newspapers, and for all we know, the term “human rights” does not exist in the so-called free world when it comes to Bosnia. In the case of Bosnia, the West is saying that it is very hard for them to have their armies facing the Serbs in Bosnia. But when Saddam Hussain, just for the sake of fun, sent a few thousand of his soldiers closer to the border of Kuwait, the American army was there within 24 hours. That shows us the true discrimination, and this verse in Chapter Hujurāt represents one of the greatest principles of Islam: it tells us that people, irrespective of their color, nationality, race, or language, are the children of one family – Adam and Eve – there is no discrimination. No one should be proud because his father is so-and-so, because the original father is the same, and the original mother is the same. And, because this verse is addressed to all mankind, it is, therefore, an invitation to every human being, irrespective of his faith: “We made you into nations and tribes to know each other..” The word “know” – *li-ta‘aarafu* – has two shades of meaning. The more common interpretation of *li-ta‘aarafu* is that God made the people into tribes and nations so that they may learn how to respect one another, and to love one another, rather than to despise one another.

Sometimes one is inspired by something and the meaning of a Qur’anic verse will become clearer. When you watch television, nowadays, you will frequently see that a man or a woman is perplexed because he/she is looking for the biological father. They were brought up by an adoptive family because their fathers or mothers just threw them in the street when they were infants, and later in life they developed the keen desire to know who their natural father is, where they came from, and what their origin is, because they would like to be related to a certain family tree. It is an innate desire in a human being to know his origin. So, the other meaning or interpretation of *li-ta‘aarafu* is that God made you into tribes and nations which will help you to know your lineage – who is your father, who is your grandfather, who is your great grandfather and so on; everybody will know to which family tree or tribe he belongs. The division into nations and tribes helps everyone to know his origin. When you read the tafseers, you’ll not find this explanation in many of them.

*Taqwa* which is the criterion for preference of a human being in the eyes of God is sometimes translated into

English as “Fear of God” or “Abiding by the rules of God” but, in fact, the meaning is wider than that. *Taqwa* encompasses the whole life of a human being: *every moment of his life*, an inner court is judging him continuously, which will make him behave in a certain way.

This verse is the word of God revealed to us *that this should be our rule*. This is a principle of Islam which we, as Muslims, have to be proud of, because no one can argue it, Muslim or non-Muslim.

An incident occurred at the time of the Prophet, which was similar to what we, sometimes, see happening even in our times. I have witnessed in some communities that a person will come to the mosque 20 minutes or half an hour late, and when he walks in, he makes sure to have a piece of steel nailed to the heel of his shoe, so everybody will turn to look at the person who is clip-clopping in to pray. If, in spite of his clicking heels, you don’t pay attention to him, he will start clearing his throat loudly so you *will* pay attention and know that he arrived, and is coming for prayer. Something similar happened at the time of the Prophet when a tribe called Banu Asad came to him and said: “Listen, Muhammad, when the people of Quraysh were fighting you, we accepted you, when they rejected your faith we followed you, and we accepted *īman* and we are *mo’mins*.” These Bedouins implied that they had done Mohammad a great favor and he should be grateful for what they had done. Therefore, the next verse of Chapter Hujurāt was revealed to explain to the Prophet the reality of that circumstance. [Imam quotes Arabic and explains:] Muhammad, the Arab Bedouins who are Banu Asad came to tell you that they are “believers” (*mo’mins*). Tell them: “You are not believers; you are just Muslims, because *īman* has not yet entered your hearts.” What we learn from that verse is that there is a difference between Islam and *īman*.

Islam is appearance: when someone has a long beard, or has *masbaha*,<sup>52</sup> and is saying *Subhanallah*,<sup>53</sup> then, we say, that person is Muslim. But you don’t know what is inside his heart, because what is inside his heart constitutes the difference between reality and appearance. That is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “God will not consider your shapes and looks, but he will consider your hearts and actions.” This hadith is based upon this verse. Islam is appearance: if you say *Ashhadu Allah ilaha Illalah Wa Ashhadu anna Muhammad ar-*

<sup>52</sup> Prayer beads

<sup>53</sup> Glory be to God

*Rasoolallah*<sup>54</sup> it means I have to treat you as a Muslim. But *īman* is more than that: you pronounce *Ashhadu Allah ilaha Illalah Ashhadu anna Muhammad ur Rasoolallah*, internalize it in your heart, then, after that you *act* accordingly; and it is something *inside* the heart that I cannot see; no human being can see it. There is only one Being who can see that, and that is why God commanded His Prophet to tell Banu Asad that they are not mo'mins but just Muslims, because *īman* did not enter their hearts yet, but if they will obey God and his Messenger He will not let the least of their good deeds go unrewarded.

There is something else here which we can read between the lines, also. These people of Banu Asad were not *munaḥiqīn*;<sup>55</sup> they truly meant business. They were Muslims. If they were hypocrites, the Qur'an would have uncovered them as it uncovered the others in Chapter Al-Munāfiqīn.<sup>56</sup> They were truly Muslims, but to move from the rank of Muslim to the rank of mo'min needs time, and the lack of understanding of this concept is the downfall of the Muslims of nowadays: we want the people to become not mo'min, but *mohsin*,<sup>57</sup> in ten minutes. It does not happen that way. When Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, came to the Arabs, he started by preaching *Al-Wahdaniyyah* – the oneness of God. That alone took him *years*. It took him years just to instill in the hearts of those people that God is one, because they were worshipping multiple gods – 360 idols – worshipping a different one every day. It took him years to transform the people from the state of *kufir*<sup>58</sup> to the state of Islam, and, finally, to the state of *īman*.

In the spectrum of belief, there is a degree even higher than *īman* called *ihsan*. The angel Jibreel<sup>59</sup>, *'alayhi-s-salam*, visited the Prophet one day in the form of a man attired like an Arab Bedouin. He sat in front of Muhammad, tapped him on his thighs with the palms of his hands, and said: "Muhammad, what is Islam?" The Prophet replied: "To say *La ilaha Illallah Muhammad ur Rasoolallah*."<sup>60</sup> Tapping him on his thighs again,

he asked: "And what is *īman*?" The Prophet replied: "To believe in God, His Messengers, His Books, to believe in the Day of Judgment, and to believe in the Destiny with its good and bad manifestations." Then he tapped him for the third time on his thighs, and asked: "What is *ihsan*?" The Prophet replied: "To worship God as if you see Him, and if you don't see Him, to have the awareness that He is seeing you." These are the degrees one above the other: Islam is the lowest category, *īman* is the middle degree, while *ihsan* is the highest degree of faith.

Nowadays, if someone converts to Islam, we right away tell them to stop liquor! Stop eating pork! Pray five times a day! Fast! Give zakat! Go to pilgrimage! And if he will not do all these in 24 hours, we don't consider him Muslim or, at least, a good Muslim. But this is contrary to the history of Islam. The history of Islam is that it took Muhammad, *'alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, *with* Divine support, 23 years to convince the people to be Muslim, then to be mo'min, and finally to become that Ummah which the Qur'an described as "You were the best nation created for mankind."

After pointing out the difference between Islam and *īman*, the Qur'an proceeds to describe some of the qualities of believers. Who are the true believers? [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Know that true believers are only those who have attained to faith in God and His Apostle *and (thumma)* have left all doubt behind. . ." [49:15].

The true believers are the ones who believe, in their hearts, in God and His Messenger. The word *thumma* in Arabic language is called *harf-ʿaf* – a joining letter. However, the joining letters in Arabic have some additional meanings as well. We can say "Muhammad *wa* Omar came" and the joining letter is "*wa*". We can say "Muhammad *fa* Omar came" and the joining letter is "*fa*", and we can say "Muhammad *thumma* Omar came" and the joining letter is "*thumma*". There is a difference in the meaning of these three statements. If you use "*wa*" you mean the two of them came together. If you use the word "*fa*" you mean that Muhammad came first, then Omar followed him. When you use the word "*thumma*" it means that Muhammad came, and after a lapse of time – six hours, half a day or one day – Omar came. So when we translate a Qur'anic verse like that (#15) where the word *thumma* occurs, it means there is a lapse of time. It means that the true believers are those who believe in God and His Messenger, and even quite some time

<sup>54</sup> I bear witness that there is no God but one God, and I bear witness that Muhammad is His messenger

<sup>55</sup> Hypocrites

<sup>56</sup> Chapter 63

<sup>57</sup> A mo'min is one who has *īman*, while a *mohsin* is one who practices *ihsan* which is a category of faith that is even higher than *īman*

<sup>58</sup> Denial of God; while "Islam" is surrender to God, and *īman* is sincere belief inside one's heart.

<sup>59</sup> Gabriel

<sup>60</sup> "There is no god but one God, and Muhammad is His

messenger"

after that, they do not have any doubts about the oneness of God or the prophethood of Muhammad. It means that they are permanent in their belief. This will indicate that not everyone reading the Qur'an necessarily understands it.

The remainder of verse 15 tells us that such believers manifest their faith by certain actions. The *iman* which is inside their hearts is manifested in:

جَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ

*jahadu bi*: they struggle with

*amwaali-him*: their wealth

*wa anfusi-him*: their lives/themselves

*fee sabeelillah*: for the cause of God.

You notice something here? *Amwaali-him* is mentioned before *anfusi-him*. It means that, sometimes, the wealth is dearer to you than yourself. And, sometimes, the wealth is preferable even to the children. Another Qur'anic verse states: Your wealth and your children are an examination – a test (*fitnah*).<sup>61</sup> Here, wealth is mentioned before the children, whereas in the verse of Chapter Hujurāt, the wealth is mentioned before the *Nafs* (the self). Sometimes one dies for the sake of his money as if his money is more important than himself; because of that excessive love for wealth, the Qur'an put it in the first degree of jihad:

وَجَاهِدُوا بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ

which means, the true believers are those who exert efforts, or

fight, in the cause of God with their wealth and with their own persons and their lives. [Imam quotes:]

“Know that true believers are only those who have attained to faith in God and His Messenger and have left all doubt behind, and who strive hard in God's cause with their possessions and their lives: it is they, they who are the truthful people – the true believers” [49:15].

The next verse addresses the tribesmen of Bani Asad again, telling them that God is aware and has full knowledge of everything that is in the heavens and the earth, while they are coming to inform Him and His Prophet of the true nature of their faith. Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Say: ‘Do you, perchance, want to inform God of the nature of your faith – although God knows all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth? Indeed, God has full knowledge of everything.’ Many people think that they have bestowed a favor upon thee, O Prophet, by having embraced Islam. Say thou: ‘Deem not your Islam a favor unto me: Nay, but it is God who has conferred a favor upon you by guiding you to the faith, if ye be true and sincere. Verily, God knows the hidden reality of the heavens and the earth; He knows the Unseen, and He is aware of what we reveal and what we conceal’” [49:16-18].

Most of the verses of Chapter Al-Hujurāt, as we have seen, are geared to teaching the believers manners and behavior, and how to conduct themselves in their daily lives.

<sup>61</sup> 8:28