

# Comments on the Gulf War With Reference to Verses from Chapters Al-Anfāl and Āl-e-‘Imrān

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 2]

If you heard CNN lately, after the first 24 hours of war,<sup>1</sup> they announced that they have finished the Iraqi army. The president of Iraq, Saddam Hussain, appeared, at that time, on television, prayed two *rak'ats*<sup>2</sup> and said *Bi-smi-Allah-ir-Rahmān-ir-Rahīm* followed by the Qur'anic verse [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:] "We said: 'O fire! Be thou cool, and a source of inner peace for Ibrāhīm.'"<sup>3</sup> He did not read this verse at random. It has a meaning in Islam, and it has a bearing, also, on the present state of affairs, because the Prophet Ibrahim was from Iraq.

Not unlike Pharaoh, there was a king whose name was Namrūd – An-Namrūd<sup>4</sup> – who lived at the time of the Prophet Ibrahim and ruled the area which is present-day Iraq. President Saddam Hussain is quoting that verse because Ibrahim was a citizen of this area and God saved him from An-Namrud. Ibrahim was just one man and Namrud was a very

mighty king.

An-Namrud asked Ibrahim, "Who is your God?" Ibrahim said: "My God is the one who gives life and death."

Namrud said: "Then, what is the difference between Him and me? I can give life, and I can give death, exactly like your God. I could get two people, sentence them to death, then, forgive one of them and kill the other. So I give life and I give death. What's the difference between me and your God?"

According to the Qur'an, Ibrahim responded: "My God causes the sun to rise from the east. If you can make it rise from the west, then, you may be God." The Qur'an says –

فَبَهِتَ الَّذِي – he was "surprised" by this argument. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Said Abraham: 'Verily, God causes the sun to rise in the east; cause it, then, to rise in the west!' Thereupon he who was bent upon denying the truth remained dumbfounded: for God does not guide people who deliberately do wrong" [2:258].

In our contemporary society, also, we have people like Pharaoh and Namrud, and, with no exception, we find

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<sup>1</sup> The First Gulf War – 1991

<sup>2</sup> Non-obligatory ritual prayer called *nafl*

<sup>3</sup> Abraham. 21:69

<sup>4</sup> King Nimrod

them prevailing everywhere in the Muslim countries. How do we know this? Just read the newspaper in any Muslim country, or listen to the radio in any Muslim country, and the first bit of news, or the headlines on the first page of the newspaper, are about “The President”, or “His Majesty”, or “His Excellency”. The situation in the Muslim world is that, if anyone opens his mouth [to oppose the leader], he will be put in jail, or he will be killed, and yet, when those same leaders talk, they talk proudly about their “democracy”. Democracy is supposedly prevailing in the entire Muslim world. It is amazing that we did not hear in the local news, here, in the U.S., that 35 Egyptians were killed after *Jum’ah* prayer<sup>5</sup> in demonstrations the day before yesterday, and 6,000 were jailed – in a “democracy”!<sup>6</sup> That’s “democracy”! The public in Pakistan is exploding, Algeria is exploding, Iran is exploding, in every Muslim country the public is exploding<sup>7</sup> but the Pharaohs at the top – they are something else. When God created humanity, He sent messengers to guide them. Rib’ ibn ‘Amr<sup>8</sup> once said, “God sent us messengers to teach us how not to worship the people, but to worship the God of the people.” That was the task of all the prophets irrespective of what religion they brought. With this background, we come to discuss Chapter Al-Anfāl.

Sura Al-Anfāl is mainly about war. Studying its verses will result in educating Muslims about how war was conducted in the past; how the contemporaries of the Prophet, peace be upon him, acted; how they supported him; how they sacrificed their lives; how they sacrificed their wealth; how they achieved victory against their enemies who often greatly outnumbered them; and how they changed the laws on earth regarding prisoners of war. With the advent of Islam came new laws and regulations; new treatment for human beings who were treated like animals in the Golden Age of the Roman Empire. This chapter is going to tell us a lot about all that.

The meaning of the word “Islam” is “Submission to the Will of God”, or “Yielding to God”, or “Living in peace with God”. Islam means to yield to Allah and to nobody else,

and the task of all the prophets and messengers, from Adam through Muhammad, *‘alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, was to teach the people to submit to God *only*, and not to anybody else. History tells us that in the past, there have been human beings who elevated themselves to the level of God. An example is the Pharaoh in Egypt who said to his people, “I am your highest God.” These are a type of human beings who put themselves in the place of God.

The word “anfāl” is the plural of the word “nafl”. *Nafl* means additional prayer which is not obligatory. *Anfāl*, therefore, means “something additional”. What is that “additional thing” which *anfāl* is referring to? It is property or wealth. When translated into English *anfāl* means “war booty”. When an army conquers a country and occupies it, and plunders its wealth – like the 75 tons of gold Saddam Hussain took from the Kuwaiti Central Bank – that is war booty. The four billion dollars that was found in the palace of the Amir<sup>9</sup> – just for his pocket expenses – was war booty, and this is called *anfāl*.

At the advent of Islam, the Muslims acquired booty or *anfāl* as a result of a soldier killing an enemy soldier and thereby taking his valuables such as a gold ring, his gun, or something from his pocket. They thought this booty was theirs to keep because they were the ones who got it. But the Prophet’s army was divided into two sections – there was a division of labor. There were fighters and there were backers. The fighters were in the vanguard and got the booty. The backers were defending the rear of the army, so they did not get the opportunity to acquire any booty. This arrangement did not seem just, because, unless the backers defended the rear, the enemy could come from behind and attack. This pushed the Muslims to ask the Prophet about who should get the booty gained from the war. In response to this question the Qur’anic verse was revealed: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:] “They ask you about the spoils of war. Say: ‘All spoils of war belong to God and His Messenger’”, meaning that it is up to God to decide the matter, and the Messenger is to distribute it according to the order of God.

Everyone wants a share, and, as you know, the nature of human beings is that everyone wants more than the other, so this resulted in some arguments among them. So the sequel to this verse came to tell the Muslims that they should fear God,

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<sup>5</sup> Friday congregational prayer

<sup>6</sup> In the year 1991, as a result of demonstrations in Egypt against the United States to protest the war on Iraq

<sup>7</sup> In protest of the Gulf War

<sup>8</sup> A delegate sent by the Prophet to the Emperor of Persia

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<sup>9</sup> Of Kuwait

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remove the antagonism and argument among themselves, and “If you are true believers, then, you have to obey God and His Messenger”. The Muslims, at that time, were very close to Islam and that was enough to quell their antagonism. [Imam quotes Arabic] that is the first verse in that chapter. [The translation is:]

“All spoils of war belong to God and His Messenger. Remain, then, conscious of God, and keep alive the bonds of brotherhood among yourselves, and pay heed unto God and His Messenger if you are truly believers” [8: 1].

The verse emphasizes obeying God and His Messenger “*if you are truly believers*.” The next verse explains *who* the “true believers” are. *How* do you recognize a person to be a true believer? This is an example of how the Qur’an was revealed gradually and in response to a need in confronting situations as they arose, and thus the verses came in a series, complementing and explaining each other. The true believer is the one who has the following five qualities:

1. When God’s name is mentioned his heart will tremble; his emotions and innermost feelings for his Creator are stirred.
2. When he hears the verses of the Qur’an it increases his belief. This means that belief comes in degrees: some are strong in their belief, some are medium in their belief, and some are weak in their belief, while some have no belief at all.
3. In every affair of his daily life he depends upon God, although he works hard to achieve his goal. The Prophet Dāwūd<sup>10</sup> said, “Don’t let any of you just sit and pray that God will provide him. He should know that the sky will not shower gold or silver.” This means that you pray to God to grant what you want but you have to work to earn your living and to achieve your goal. So, the true believer is the one who depends upon God in everything; in other words he believes that “It is up to the Will of God”. This is the meaning of *insha’allah* – “It is up to the Will of God”. In our Muslim countries, nowadays, the people deliberately misuse “*insha’allah*”: when they don’t mean what they say, or don’t intend to do what they are saying, they add “*insha’allah*” and, in the end, they justify themselves by saying “it was not the Will of God”. For them it is just a figure of speech. That is how the

Muslims, in some Muslim countries, understand the term “*Wa ‘ala Rab-bihim yatawakkalūn*” which means, “I depend upon God, it is up to God. *Insha’allah* it will take place.” In reality they don’t mean it to take place. It reminds me of the Egyptian guy who was on his way to the market to buy a donkey. Along the way he found some farmers working in the fields. “*Assalam-u-Alaykum*”, “*Wa Alaykum Salaam wa Rahmatullah*.”<sup>11</sup>

“Where are you going, Muhammad?”

He replied: “I am going to the market to buy a donkey.”

The farmers said: “Say *‘insha’allah*’.”<sup>12</sup>

He replied: “Why should I say *insha’allah*? The money is in my pocket, the donkeys are in the market, why do I need *insha’allah*?”

So, he went to the market and a pickpocket met him at the entrance of the market and picked his pocket. He found the donkey, but when he reached in his pocket for his money he did not find it. He came back without the donkey. He passed by the same people.

“*Assalam-u-Alaykum*”, “*Wa Alaykum Salaam wa Rahmatullah*.”

“Why didn’t you get a donkey, Muhammad?”

He said: “*Insha’allah*, the money is lost.”

*Insha’allah* has even been proven scientifically: I may have the tools and the means but I may not be able to fulfill the goal that I have in mind. Anyone who has studied science knows the theory of probability. The theory of probability means that there is a one percent, or five percent, probability that something will, or will not happen, or, it will be wrong. So, when you say *insha’allah*, then, you mean that there is a 1-5% chance that it may not happen; I’ll do my best; I’ll work very hard to achieve that goal, but, if it is not achieved, then, that five percent probability will be playing its role. You may have heard on CNN, lately, about the Al-Hussein rocket. They say it has one percent probability to go wrong. What is the meaning of that? It means that, as human beings, we cannot say *for sure* a certain thing will take place, and this is what we mean when we say, “It is up to the Will of God”. The Qur’an said [Imam quotes:] “And never say about anything, ‘Behold, I shall do this tomorrow without adding, ‘if God wills’”.<sup>13</sup> The idea behind this Qur’anic verse is that a Muslim, at all times, is

<sup>11</sup> They greeted each other: “Peace be upon you.” “And upon you be peace and the mercy of God.”

<sup>12</sup> *Insha’allah* = If God so wills

<sup>13</sup> 18:23-24

<sup>10</sup> David

supposed to be linked with his Creator. Therefore, whenever you say “*insha’allah* I’ll do this or that tomorrow”, by this you are implying that every facet of your life is linked to your Creator. This guidance from God, namely, “And never say about anything, ‘Behold, I shall do this tomorrow without adding, ‘if God wills’” helps to keep a Muslim in contact with his Creator, remembering his Creator and this is the idea, too, of the ritualistic prayer. We pray five times a day. The prayers are spread throughout the day: before sunrise, at noon, afternoon, sunset, and before going to bed. Why are the prayers not offered at one time? We can pray the five prayers at once and get done with them. The reason is that the prayers are meant to keep us constantly in contact with God. You are even advised, in the Qur’an, to spend all your wakeful hours at night remembering your Creator. That is the advantage of Islam.

4. The fourth attribute of the true believer is “Those who establish prayer”, meaning those who establish prayer *on time*. And note how God made it easy for us, and not difficult, in that every prayer can be offered over a *range* of time.

I think our guests have arrived and I am going to interrupt the talk. I have promised Yahya Shousher<sup>14</sup> to introduce Marcy.<sup>15</sup> I think you know the history of Marcy

with regard to the war in the Middle East which is occupying the mind of everyone of us. She was one of those who sued President Bush in the Supreme Court to not initiate that war. It looks to me like her grandfather is an Arab, and not Polish! Of course we are appreciative of her attitude which is not a favor to us, but it is an attitude that seeks justice. I would like to call upon her to... [Some one from the audience prompts the Imam telling him that he forgot to mention her mother.] Yes, yes, Ms. Kaptur’s mother is here. I think she always follows her whenever there is *fatayar* and *kubbi*.<sup>16</sup> So I would like to call upon Marcy to give you her views, and tell us about the situation after the bombing which is going on like rain showers in the area now.

MARCY KAPTUR ADDRESSING THE AUDIENCE:

“Imam, and members of the mosque, I am very honored to be allowed to speak here today and I am really very humbled by this. I have great respect for the Imam, and I have said in many audiences that I have been in, that I consider him one of the five most erudite people that I have met in my district during my ten years in office. So I would much rather listen to you than for the people of the mosque to listen to me. I can only imagine what a difficult time this must be for you...”

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<sup>14</sup> A close friend. They traveled together to the Middle East to collect funds for the Islamic Center

<sup>15</sup> Ohio congresswoman, Marcy Kaptur, from the district of Toledo. Her ancestors are Polish.

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<sup>16</sup> Names of Lebanese foods. Only Imam, with the strength of his personality and strong sense of humor could get away with this remark which provoked loud laughter from the audience and the guests alike

## Comments on the Gulf War With Reference to Verses from Chapters Al-Anfāl and Āl-e-‘Imrān

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 2]

**T**he problem now, as I see it, is that, a few years ago, we<sup>17</sup> were fighting Israel to liberate Al-Aqsa Mosque, and, today, those same people<sup>18</sup> who were trying to liberate Al-Aqsa are fighting side-by-side with the Israelis.<sup>19</sup> So, how do you expect the Ummah of Islam to achieve victory *anywhere*? How can you say that we are one Ummah at the present time? But, maybe, they say, hardship creates new men. War creates new leaders. Maybe, what is happening today is for a reason – to make the people wake up, so Islam may flourish one day. The only problem with us Muslims is that we want everything in our life to happen right away; however, the ages of countries and nations are not measured by years but by generations. Look back on the history of this area. How many people have occupied Palestine before? In the end, all of them perished and the people – the original people – who lived in this area remained. The British occupied it, the Ottoman

Empire occupied it, the Crusaders occupied it, and the Israelis are occupying it now. Who knows? One day it will come back. Our main goal here is “Holding fast to the rope of God.”<sup>20</sup>

It is very, very interesting to note how our enemies understand us better than we understand them. If they ask us a question, we rush to answer as if all of us are politicians! In the field of religion, all of us are ulama: we give fatwas. In the field of business, all of us are businessmen. We don’t believe in specialization. We are the people of *everything*. That is why we fail. And we have no organization. In a small city like Toledo, in gatherings like weddings and funerals, I see Muslim people I have never seen before, despite the fact that I have lived in Toledo now for 10 years. If we live in isolation, how can we expect to build our own identity as Muslims in this area? How can a person who never entered the mosque say to his friends and co-workers, “I am a Muslim”? He doesn’t know the road to the mosque! And when he dies, his son will not know how and where to bury him. Then the son will be blamed. But the

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<sup>17</sup> The Arabs

<sup>18</sup> The Egyptians and the Saudis

<sup>19</sup> Saudi Arabia and Egypt fought alongside America and Israel against Iraq in the First Gulf War

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<sup>20</sup> 3:103.

blame is not on the son, the blame is on the father, because he did not show him the road to the mosque. We are taking it easy when it comes to religion. But religion is not easy. In fact, when you look into it, we come to this country and right away Muhammad will turn into Mike. *Changed!* Ahmad into Albert; Taha – Ricky. *Change the name!* Why? Because our American friends cannot pronounce our names; it's very hard. But they can pronounce Gorbachev and Sulikowsky! We change our citizenship. It's good. We change everything, but when it comes to religion, *NO, we are not ready to change that!* Why do we change everything but not our religion? Because that is something *inside us, in our blood*. It's very hard to change our *religion*, yet, coming to the mosque, or praying, or performing the rules of Islam is too hard.

During times of hardship, you can distinguish between people; in other words, hardship brings out the true mettle of a person.

There was an interesting bit of news the day before yesterday, on Channel 11, about a Kuwaiti student<sup>21</sup> whose wife gave birth to twins. One was a boy, the other a girl. The girl died and was brought to our mosque for *janaza*<sup>22</sup> prayers after which we buried her. It was in the newspaper yesterday, and on television the day before yesterday, that the boy is named George Bush.<sup>23</sup> It is very nice that we have, at least, the first *Arab* George Bush! *Maybe he will be the president of Palestine after Yasir Arafat!*

It is unfortunate that the girl died because the newspaper wrote that the father was planning to name the girl Margaret Thatcher.<sup>24</sup> Her name was registered, when I buried her, as Fatima. Imagine the difference between Fatima and Margaret Thatcher! It's a big difference. This brings me to tell you something as a community.

Sometimes, people whom we have never seen in the mosque, here, come to the mosque when someone in their family dies. Otherwise they don't know us. Our policy, here, is that, as a mosque, normally, we don't charge anything for a burial, while the funeral home and the cemetery send their bills in the name of the Islamic Center, thereby saving the family the tax on the services of the cemetery and the funeral

home. If I were to say to someone, "Sorry, we have never seen you; we don't know you [we are not going to conduct the funeral]", the whole community will turn against me and say that a Muslim died and the Imam refused to bury him or her. You will blame me for that. So, when little Margaret Thatcher died, and I was contacted, I was very nice to them because of their situation.<sup>25</sup> I said, yes, we are ready. Contact that particular funeral home; tell them the Imam referred us. Bring the body to the mosque, we'll pray the funeral prayer and do everything. We purchased the cemetery lot with Islamic Center funds, we paid the cemetery for digging the grave, and we paid the funeral home for its service, in the hope that, maybe, they will repay us that little amount for the burial of baby Thatcher considering that the Kuwaitis are paying billions to the Americans and the British.<sup>26</sup> Until now, we have not received even one penny. I have contacted the father several times, but he always promises to pay tomorrow, and "tomorrow" never comes. So, I contacted the Kuwaiti embassy the day before yesterday. They informed me that they work from 2 to 5 PM only. I thought to myself... I left a message for the person responsible and explained the situation, stating that we need reimbursement of the money spent by the Islamic Center. I am still waiting; I did not hear from him on Friday. I will wait until Monday and if I don't hear from him, then, I'll contact the Iraqi embassy to pay for lot #19.<sup>27</sup> It is the responsibility of one of the two embassies. If the Kuwaiti embassy will not pay, then the Iraqi embassy should pay.<sup>28</sup> Alright, then, under such circumstances, I have to come back to you and ask that you donate for Margaret Thatcher's burial, and don't blame me in the future when someone brings a body to the mosque and I insist on payment in advance! Or else, they can take it to a church. That will be my policy. I am saying this, especially, to tell you we have had similar cases before, and we had trouble getting reimbursed, because we did not know the people. But, at least, this is a case in point now. *Our financial situation does not allow us to render any assistance at this time*. But, sometimes, we play nice and get emotional about

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<sup>21</sup> Enrolled in the University of Toledo

<sup>22</sup> Funeral

<sup>23</sup> After the current president of America

<sup>24</sup> After the current prime minister of Britain

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<sup>25</sup> Imam is referring to the hardship of the Gulf War in regard to this Kuwaiti family

<sup>26</sup> To fight the war against Iraq and to "liberate them"

<sup>27</sup> The number of the grave site in the cemetery

<sup>28</sup> A lot of loud murmuring from some sections of the audience, disapproving what Imam is saying

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Islam, and Muslims, and . . . However, I don't think a Muslim will call his son George Bush! It has not happened yet!

Consider the hardship that we are experiencing nowadays. Normally, we talk about ourselves as Arab, or Lebanese, or Egyptian, or Pakistani. Today, no one has that distinction. All of us, and I mean *all of us*, in the eyes of the American public, are Iraqi nowadays. When people are acting against us as Muslims, they don't differentiate between Pakistani, Afghanistani, or Arab. So we have to consolidate our unity. It is enough that they played havoc with us for ten years, putting us in conflict with each other.<sup>29</sup> We are living in America and we are coexisting with people of other faiths. We sit with the Christians and the Jews. We try to be their friends in spite of the very big and wide gap between them and ourselves in belief, but we accept and we follow what the Prophet said, and what the Qur'an said:

“لَكُمْ دِينَكُمْ وَلِي دِينِ” – you have your own religion and I have mine.” But, somehow, the Muslims cannot coexist with each other. If I see someone standing up in prayer like that, I say he is not a Muslim; if I see someone putting his hand like that while praying, I say this is wrong and we end up arguing with each other and getting into conflict with each other. We don't learn how to coexist with *each other*. For example, I have heard this hundreds of times now: “Since when has Saddam Hussein been a Muslim.” And I say, I have never heard that the man is *not* Muslim. I have seen him, at least on the television screen, praying. I don't know what is in his heart. I cannot judge anyone who says *La-ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah* as non-Muslim. I cannot judge this because the Judge is there.<sup>30</sup> If I see you pray, or if I hear you say *La-ilaha illallah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah* then I say this guy is a Muslim and I don't care what is after that because *iman* is in the heart and I cannot see inside the heart. I frequently wake up 12 midnight or 1 o'clock and think: what is happening in Iraq? Civilian people are bombed. How are those people procuring food to eat? How are the children fed? How are they taking that bombing which sometimes is round-the-clock? I ask myself these questions. I have never been to Iraq and I have never met the Iraqis. Then why do I have these feelings towards them? That is what we call, in Islamic terminology,

the Muslim brotherhood. So let us come back now to Chapter Al-Anfāl and the attributes of the true believers. The fifth attribute of the true believers is that they spend on others out of what God has given them. Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“Believers are only they whose hearts tremble with awe whenever God is mentioned, and whose faith is strengthened whenever His messages are conveyed unto them, and who in their Sustainer place their trust – those who are constant in prayer and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance” [8:2-3].

In the Battle of Badr, which was the first battle in the history of Islam, a revelation came to the Prophet: “If you have twenty patient soldiers they will be able to defeat 200.”<sup>31</sup> So, there is a condition here **عَشْرُونَ صَابِرُونَ** : if they are

*patient*, they will defeat *ten times* as many. On the other hand, the Qur'an gives us another example where there was a lack of patience. In the Battle of Hunayn, the Muslims numbered 10,000 – a very great number.<sup>32</sup> On the march, someone said, “Do you think we are going to win the battle today?” And the reply was, “Yes, we are a very large army so we are going to defeat them for sure.” What happened? The Muslims were defeated. The Qur'an described it: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Indeed, God has succored you on many battlefields, when your numbers were few; and He did so, too, on the Day of Hunayn, when you took pride in your great numbers and they proved of no avail whatever to you – for the earth, despite all its vastness, became too narrow for you and you turned back, retreating” [9:25].

So that is the difference between the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Hunayn. The Battle of Badr was characterized by patience, the Battle of Hunayn was characterized by numbers, and sometimes numbers alone can be useless unless there is patience.

The Qur'an was originally revealed in the desert of Arabia, so the Qur'an attracts our attention to a certain fact, posing it as a question: Don't they think of the camel how it

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<sup>29</sup> Imam is referring to the 10-year war between Iran and Iraq

<sup>30</sup> Pointing upwards

<sup>31</sup> 8:65

<sup>32</sup> In the Battle of Badr, the Muslims numbered only 313 soldiers while the pagans numbered 1000

was created?<sup>33</sup> Why do you have to think deeply about the camel? Because the camel is more complicated than the Scud and Patriot missiles.<sup>34</sup> It has more technology than those two weapons – that camel. The camel is characterized by patience: it goes through the desert for days with no food or water and he is able to take it. So, when the Qur’an directs us to think of the camel, it wants us to learn how to be patient from the camel, and patience is a magical word, especially in war.

The topic which we are going to talk about today concerns the two items in which belief is centered. These two items are mentioned in two successive verses in chapter Āl-e-‘Imrān. The first item is the “fear of God.” [Imam quotes:] “O you who believe, fear God, the fear which is due to Him, and don’t die unless you are Muslim.”<sup>35</sup>

Sometimes, when we talk about the “fear of God” to non-Muslims, they say, “But God is Merciful and He is Compassionate so why are you always focusing on ‘fear’ of God?” But the “fear” we are talking about means “*observing*”. When you are driving your car and you want to exceed the speed limit, you look into the rear view mirror to see if there is a policeman behind you or not. That is a sort of fear; you are fearful of the police. It means you are observing if there is police around you or not. So when the Qur’ānic verse says, “O you who believe, fear God”, it means “be mindful of Him, be conscious of Him”. Whenever you are doing something, or saying something, you must remember that you are being watched, the Non-sleeping Eye is observing you, and this is supposed to urge you to behave and conduct yourself in a certain way.

This “fear” has degrees. People fear people; we experience this in our homelands. Here, in America, we say we are in a free country so we talk and criticize, but in our homelands, sometimes, you cannot even talk to your wife, because, maybe, she is employed to spy on you.<sup>36</sup> In such a

situation fear is *created* and the fear of the human being sometimes exceeds the fear of God. There is a Qur’ānic verse in chapter An-Nisā which says, “But as soon as fighting in God’s cause is ordained for them, lo, some of them stand in fear of men as one should stand in fear of God – or in even greater fear – . . .”<sup>37</sup> So fear comes in many forms and many degrees, and the fear of God is supposed to be the highest type, as the Qur’ān says, “Fear God, the fear which is due to Him.”

“And don’t die unless you are Muslim.” This does not mean that you have “Muslim Sunni” or “Muslim Shi’i” written in your identification card. “Don’t die unless you are Muslim” means that you have observed, during life, the rules of God; you have put them in practice, you have enacted them in your behavior *all your life*, so, when you die, you die with peace; you feel that you have something you can benefit from after your death.

Then, the next verse talks about the second item in which belief is centered and that is unity. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And hold fast, all together, by the rope which God (stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves (*wa la tafarriqu*); and remember with gratitude God’s favor on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace ye became brethren. . .” [3:103. Yusuf Ali].

There must be a common goal which will make the Muslims a single entity. What is that common goal? It is “holding fast to the rope of God” – *i’tisām*; “rope of God” meaning the Revelation, His Book, Al-Qur’ān: that is the common goal and aim of all Muslims. If you hold fast to the rope of God, *that* will make you a single entity or one Ummah. *Wa la tafarriqu* means don’t separate among yourselves; don’t be divided.

When we look at our lives today we find that unity does not exist. Some of us are holding fast to Americanism and some are holding fast to Soviet Unionism and some are holding fast to certain rulers here or there, but the goal which is supposed to unify the Muslims does not exist. That is why we are suffering nowadays. I am sure that every one of you, before coming here, was listening to the CNN reporters saying that the Allied forces entered Kuwait, and some reports say

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<sup>33</sup> 88:17

<sup>34</sup> The scud missiles were fired by Iraq into Israel, and the Patriot missiles were fired by America and its allies into Iraq

<sup>35</sup> 3:102

<sup>36</sup> This sermon was delivered in the year 1991. At the time of this writing – 2006 – America as a “free country” does not exist and has, in fact, declined to the same type of “police state” as some of the Muslim countries where one cannot even talk to one’s wife for fear of being reported. America passed the Patriot Laws and authorized the Homeland Security Department to spy

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on people by tapping their telephones and monitoring their emails.

<sup>37</sup> 4:77

Comments on the Gulf War with Reference to Verses from Chapters Al-Anfāl and Al-e-  
'Imrān

that the Egyptian and Saudi armies occupied the city of Kuwait already. There is something fearful in this. When the Qur'ān said to us "Hold fast to the rope of God" it meant to give us a common goal, a single Law, one Constitution which we, the Muslims, should abide by in our lives.

A few years ago, Israelis coming from everywhere on earth occupied the Palestinian land. When they settled, they started to talk about the Temple of Solomon and how those stupid Muslims destroyed the temple and built their Dome of the Rock Mosque in its stead. They talked of destroying the Dome of the Rock and rebuilding the Temple of Solomon in its place. Meanwhile, Muslim leaders in the area busied themselves by appointing each other as heads of different committees for Al-Aqsa Mosque and other sacred places, but in spite of all that, during the last 42 years, we don't know where we are. Why? Because of that second item which is supposed to be practiced in the life of Muslims – *i'tisām* – it's not there. There is no *i'tisām*; there is no holding together to the rope of God as He recommended. That is missing. Nowadays, some people say, but we are in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, how can you apply that Qur'ān to your life? It is a very old thing; it is very hard to apply it nowadays. But the rest of the verse says: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"And remember the blessings which God has bestowed upon you before [1400 years ago]: how, when you were enemies, He tied your hearts together, so that through His blessing you became brethren. . ." [3:103].

See, the Qur'ān did not say, "unified you", it says "*He tied your hearts*" because there will be no power to cut *that* relationship. You could write a contract that we, the leader of Egypt and the leader of Syria, agree to make the United Arab Republic and we sign a paper; then, one year later a revolution occurs and the two go their separate ways again. It is separable. But when the Qur'ān talked about unity, it talks about the unity of hearts – nothing will separate them – "He tied your hearts together and you have become one brotherhood based upon His Grace." That brotherhood happened to be in Madinah. The two tribes of Aws and Khazraj in Madinah were in continuous war against each other all their life. When Muhammad went to Madinah and preached Islam to them, and Islam entered their hearts, these two tribes became one brotherhood. And when the immigrants came from Makkah to Madinah they were received as brothers; the residents of Madinah shared

their wealth half/half with those who left behind their wealth in Makkah, just because they were believers: that is the true brotherhood. That is a sort of brotherhood that you will never find unless "you hold fast to the rope of God" sincerely. It never happened before in the history of humanity.

Everything we do in Islam is a form of unity, but our problem, nay, a disaster is that we are not doing it. We are not abiding by our Law. We all say *Ashhadu Allah ilaha illal-Lah* declaring the unity of God. Wherever we go, five times a day we direct our faces to one spot – the Ka'bah – when we pray. That is a unity – the unity of direction. We pray behind one imam. If he makes a mistake we even follow him in that – a signal of the particular importance of unity. We fast together and we all observe the same type of fast from dawn to sunset – unity. When we pay zakah that is a unity of hearts because you are sharing part of your wealth with your needy brothers – it is a unity. When we go for Hajj, black and white, red and yellow, male and female are standing up on the Mount of 'Arafāt. Males and females are mixed there. That is unity. So, when you analyze Islam, you find that everything in Islam is preaching unity while we are the most corrupted and disunited people on earth at this time. There is no unity among us nowadays. It is not there. That is why we are suffering. Truly, our hearts are bleeding when we see war in Lebanon, when we see war in Iraq, when we see war in Kashmir, when we see war in the Philippines and in Sri Lanka. But, who knows, maybe that is all what we deserve. Until we get to a point when we know that we have only one thing – Islam – to unify us and to make us one nation, then, at that time, we have the right to sing – sing the Divine song:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَى  
وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ  
اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

[The translation of that verse is: "O men! Behold, We have created you all out of a male and a female, and have made you into nations and tribes, so that you might come to know one another. Verily, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most deeply conscious of Him. Behold, God is all-knowing, all-aware."]<sup>38</sup>

<sup>38</sup> 49:13