

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 1 of 9]

Introduction

I will go through the verses of *Chapter Qāf* one by one and explain them according to the talseers¹ of the Qur'ān written by past scholars. Then, I am going to deal with that chapter from the point of view of our own time to see what we can gain from these Qur'ānic verses, and to see what the function is behind their revelation, and how they are pertinent to our life nowadays. The Prophet, peace be upon him, described it as a very powerful chapter in the Qur'an, and he used to repeat it on many occasions. It is dealing with death, with resurrection, and with questioning and accountability of man before his Creator.

The various chapters of the Qur'an were revealed either in Makkah or in Madinah. Chapter Qāf is a Makkan revelation. The revelations in Makkah are characterized by being geared towards the essentials of the faith, particularly the essential belief in the oneness of God, belief in resurrection after death, belief in the Day of Judgment, and belief in the accountability of man before God. The chapters that were revealed in Madinah are of a legislative type. They give us the

rules of conduct; they explain ways of worshipping.

The opening letter of the chapter is *qāf* (ق), one of the letters of the Arabic alphabet. There are 28 letters in the Arabic alphabet. However, this was not always the case. A long time ago, the Arabic alphabet had 29 letters. But with the passing of time one letter was deleted and now there are 28 letters. I am sure those who attended school back home in the olden times are familiar with a character, then known as "*laamalif*". *Laamalif* was, in fact, a combination of two characters – *laam* (ل) and *alif* (ا). So, if you come across anyone teaching Arabic, nowadays, using 29 letters, then you can be sure that he is a teacher from bygone days.

The letter "qāf" is a unique letter. You don't find it in any other language; it exists in languages which use the Arabic alphabet only, such as Urdu and Persian. When the word "Qur'an" (قُرْآن) is translated into English, some people spell it with a K, while others spell it with a Q. As a result, sometimes you have a translation of the Qur'ān in English, and you find the title "The Meaning of the Qur'ān" spelled in two

¹ Exegeses

different ways: *KÖran* or *QURan*.

Qāf is a perplexing character. Although qāf is commonly used and, although it is a full Arabic character, in our normal conversations, nowadays, some people pronounce the qāf as *alif*. For example, when talking, instead of *qaal* (said) we say *aal*, except if one is in Sultan Yaqoob² where they pronounce qāf as qāf and say “qaal” and “qulna”. But, in most of the other Arab countries, the qāf is changed into *alif*: they say, “This person *aal*. . .”³

In the Qur’ān you find chapters that start with:

Alif, Lām, Mēm (ا ل م) A, L, M⁴

Alif, Lām, Rau (ا ل ر) A, L, R⁵

Hā, Mēm (ح م) H, M⁶

Kāf, Hā, Yā, ‘Ayn, Sād (ك ه ي ع ص) K, H, Y, ‘, S⁷

When we read these letters that are present at the start of some Qur’anic chapters, normally, we ask what they mean. What is the meaning of qāf, for example? Or, what is the meaning of *nīn* (ن)?⁸ Or, what is the meaning of *Alif, Lām, Mēm*? Many of the ulama did not give any opinion saying that is something we don’t know, and it is better to keep away from it, because God only knows. Other ulama ventured an opinion.

The Qur’an was initially revealed to an Arab prophet, and was meant to be propagated to the Arab people who were exceptionally fluent in the Arabic language. The Qur’an is the miracle granted by Allah to Muhammad. The Arabs, at his time, had made a career of excelling in Arabic language fluency. They had, what they used to call, *sooq*. *Sooq* in our terminology means “a market” where you sell or buy goods. But *sooq* to the Arabs, at that time, meant a place where the people would gather and hold competitions in poetry and

speeches. In Islamic history, there are some famous *sooqs* known as *Sooq ‘Ukadh*, *Sooq Dhu-l-Majannah* and *Sooq Dhu-l-Majaaz*. These are places, in the Arabian Peninsula, where the Arabs used to meet on certain occasions to compete with each other. So, in the midst of such a situation, the Qur’an came as a linguistic miracle to challenge those Arabs. And since the pagan Arabs of that time denied the prophethood of Muhammad, and denied that the Qur’an is a revelation from God, the scholars explain the challenge from Allah to the Arabs thus: If you deny Muhammad, and insist that the Qur’an is *his* word, or that this Qur’an is written by a human being, then, you are human beings like him, you know the language very well, produce something similar to it; write such a word; write such a Qur’an which consists of these alphabetical letters which you know.

This challenge came in the Qur’ān in three degrees: the first challenge to them was to write something like the Qur’ān; when they failed, another verse came asking them to write something equal to ten chapters of it; when they failed at that, their task was reduced to writing even just one chapter like one of the smallest ones. When they failed for the third time, a revelation in the Qur’ān came to confirm their failure by proclaiming: “If all mankind and all the jinn would come together with a view to producing the like of this Qur’an they could not produce its like even though they were to exert all their strength in aiding one another.”⁹ So this is the highest type of challenge to those who deny that the Qur’ān is the revealed word of God.

Normally, we find that, in the Qur’ān, chapters are named after an incident occurring at the time of revelation. We have Chapter Al Baqarah, for example. Why is it named Al Baqarah? Because there is a whole story about a *baqarah* (a cow). When Moses, *‘alayhi-s-salaam*,¹⁰ said to the Jews: “God ordered you to slaughter a cow.” They said: “What is it? Tell us about it.” So Moses gave them some description. Then, they waited for a while and said: “Ask your God what is the color of the cow that He wants us to slaughter.” Moses said: “It is a yellow cow, very shiny in color that appears attractive to people who look at it.” Then the Jews or Israelites came back to Moses, for the third time, and said: “There are lots of similarities among the cows; tell your God to give us some more details.” So finally Moses came with some more

² A village in Lebanon to which a large number of the listening audience belong

³ “This person said”

⁴ Chapter 2

⁵ Chapter 10

⁶ Chapter 40

⁷ Chapter 19 [“Ayn” is represented in English with a single inverted comma facing forward, and “Sād” is written as an “S” with a dot underneath, because they do not have an equivalent in English.]

⁸ Chapter 68

⁹ 17:88

¹⁰ Upon him be peace

description and they finally agreed to slaughter the cow.

In our present time, what lessons can we learn from the above story? We can discern what we call “*at tasweef wa qatul-l waqt min qibal al-yahuud*” meaning: it is the habit of the Jews to do something to bide for time. When Moses came to them for the first time they said: “Hmm, tell us about that cow.” He came again and they asked about its color. When he came back with an answer, they asked for more information. The shuttle diplomacy! It is the dangerous kind which we see nowadays. That is the way the Jews act to gain time. With this Qur’ānic verse in mind, if one had followed the news of the peace conference¹¹ among the Arabs and the Jews taking place, one would have found the same scenario being played out today. It took them *two months* to agree just *where* to meet! If we understand our Qur’ān in the context of our present life, it will show us the way we should act in our lives in the 20th-century. But, our problem as Muslims is that we stick to the explanations of the Qur’ān from 300 and 500 hundred years ago, expounded by people who were thinking according to their understanding, their knowledge, their time and environment, and their circumstances. Today, we have to think more deeply into the Qur’an because we have more knowledge, our minds and our horizons are wider, and our ten-year-old kids are what we call computer-age children; they know more than when we were in the university. So, we have to take these things into consideration when we read and understand the Qur’ān.

What is *Qāf*? It is the first “word” in the chapter of that name and is followed by “*wal Qur’ān-il majeed*”. The word “Qur’ān” starts with the letter *qāf*, so, some ulama say the importance of the letter *qāf* is that it is also the first letter of the word “Qur’ān”. This is another opinion. With the invention of the computer, two more opinions have come about which might invite a Muslim to think. There is no need to take anything as definitive, but, at least, it will open one’s mind to think.

Today the Qur’ān is on computer and one can search for the number of times certain words occur all over the Qur’ān. Ask the computer how many *qāfs* there are in this chapter and you will find that the letter “*qāf*” is mentioned in it more than in any other chapter in the Qur’ān. To me personally, that is why it is called Chapter *Qāf*. That is my

personal *ijtehad*.¹² I could be right and I could be wrong, but that is how I look at it. There is nothing definitive regarding any of these explanations and one is inclined to think that, may be, all these explanations of the Qur’ān which are now current, may become, at a certain point in time, obsolete. And this proves that the Qur’ān poses a continuing challenge, until the end of time, because it came as a challenge. What concerns us here, as Muslims, is that we should not exceed our limits.

In our modern times, someone utilized the computer and came up with another opinion, and though he went far beyond the limits which he should have heeded, there is, still, something attractive in his research. This man is dead now, but the computer fascinated him to such an extent that he deviated from the limits when he should have stopped. This man concluded there are 57 *qāfs* in Chapter *Qāf*. He found, too, that in Chapter *Dhāriyāt*¹³ the number of *qāfs* is 57. He added the two figures which total 114, and this is equal to the number of chapters in the Qur’ān.

This man aligned himself with the group called *Bahā’ī*¹⁴ which was supporting him financially. The *Bahā’ī* have the belief that Muslims, Christians and Jews are one unit and that they are to live together in peace. So, the obligations of Islam are of no significance for them; what they are concerned with is peace. Their year is made up of 19 months, not 12, and their month is made up of 19 days. The number 19 is sacred to them, and their reason for 19 being sacrosanct, is found, according to them, in *Chapter al-Muddaththir* in which there is a description of *jahannam*¹⁵ saying “there are 19 angels over it.”¹⁶ This person who utilized the computer to search the Qur’an began to defer to *Bahā’ī* beliefs, and he considered the number 19 as sacred, too.

By playing with various numbers, he started to issue certain conclusions. For example, as mentioned before, he calculated that the number of *qāfs* in the two chapters of *Al Qāf* and *Ad-Dhāriyāt* add up to 114 and that this equals the total number of chapters in the Qur’ān. Then he said that if you divide the number 114 by 19, there will be no remainder. He then went on to analyze other suras in this way. For

¹¹ Madrid, in the fall of 1990

¹² A sincere effort to make an educated, enlightened and informed opinion explaining an issue related to Islam

¹³ Chapter 51

¹⁴ One who follows Bahāism

¹⁵ Hell

¹⁶ 74:30

example, *Chapter at-Tawbah* which ends by [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Indeed, there has come unto you, O mankind, a Messenger from among yourselves: heavily weighs upon him the thought that you might suffer in the life to come; full of concern for you is he and full of compassion and mercy towards the believers. But, if those who are bent on denying the truth turn away, say: ‘God is enough for me! There is no deity save Him. In Him have I placed my trust, for He is the Sustainer, in awesome almightiness enthroned’ [9:128-129]. He said that the number of verses in this chapter when divided by the number 19 will yield a remainder two, and, therefore, he concluded that these two verses are not from the Qur’ān and that they are inserted. Such conclusions discredited all his research.

He went on in that business even further and made predictions for the Day of Judgment based on his computer analysis. And, of course, this is contradictory to the Qur’ānic verses: “They ask you, Muhammad, about the Day of Judgment, say: ‘The knowledge of that is limited to the knowledge of God.’” And when the Angel Jibreel came to Muhammad and asked him: “When will the Day of Judgment come?” The Prophet said: “The one who is asked is of no more knowledge than the one who is asking.” Definitely no one knows about the coming of the Day of Judgment, but our brother, equipped with a computer, computed even a specific time for it.

The foregoing research, which he called mathematical research of the Qur’ān, at least, opens our minds to something which may perplex us more. But then, that is the job of the Qur’ān – to perplex you; it’s an everlasting challenge and we will never reach a definite answer with regard to it. As the Qur’ān put it, if the jinnkind and the humankind gather together and back one another, they will never be able to write such a Qur’ān. That is the challenge! So, the more perplexed we are, the more research we should be doing. As a consequence of our research, we should become more knowledgeable and this will prove the statement that the Qur’ān is applicable everywhere, and in all times. At least, that is what we can gain from that kind of research, but there is no need to reach conclusions with regard to it.

The first verse of Chapter Qāf represents an oath. God is making the oath: “*Qāf. wal Qur’ān-il majeed’* (Qāf. I swear by the sublime Qur’ān!). And, normally, when God makes an oath by something, it must be a great thing! The

oath, therefore, indicates the greatness of this Book – the glorious Qur’ān – and, in turn, it indicates the greatness of the One who revealed it. That greatness is apparent, nowadays, in fresh ways. In the olden times, if you look into the tafseers of five and six hundred years ago, you find all the concentration is on the linguistic challenge of the Qur’ān. Today, science and technology are occupying the minds of the people, and we find, in our era, that there is another kind of challenge in the Qur’an as well: a scientific challenge.

While we find that the Jews and the Christians falsified science at certain times, because it did not match the Torah¹⁷ or the Injeel,¹⁸ as they understood them, we, the Muslims, agree with science in many cases. Knowledge does not belong to any religion or to any specific people. It does not belong to the West or to the East. Knowledge is the production of the human mind and we have to utilize it in the context of Islam, and we cannot do that until we utilize our brain and we utilize our Qur’an. Could any scholar, existing four or five hundred years ago, have understood the developmental stages of the child in the womb of his mother as they are detailed in the Qur’an in Chapter Al Mo’minūn? [Imam quotes the verses. The translation is:]

“Now, indeed, We create man out of the essence of clay, and then We cause him to remain as a drop of sperm in *qaraar makeen* (the womb), and then We create out of the drop of sperm a germ-cell (*‘alaqah*), and then We create out of the germ-cell an embryonic lump (*mudghah*), and then we create within the embryonic lump bones, and then We clothe the bones with flesh – and then We bring all this into being as a new creation: hallowed, therefore, is God, the best of artisans” [23:12-14].

See the stages described by the Qur’an? Two points are to be noted: 1.) No one, including Muhammad, knew about these stages in the development of the intrauterine embryo four or five hundred years ago. 2.) No one could fathom, because of their lack of knowledge five hundred years ago, the meaning of these verses, which describe the stages of embryonic development as stated in the Qur’ān. It could not make sense to those people. Embryology is a new science discovered after advances in anatomy, and, when coupled with the use of x-ray and ultrasound equipment, it became possible to understand these things, while all this is mentioned in the Qur’an *revealed*

¹⁷ The Old Testament

¹⁸ The Bible

more than 1400 years ago.

The Qur'an tells us that the first human being – Adam – was originally created from a piece of mud and water. That is the origin of man. The creation of subsequent generations of man is described in the Qur'an as originating from a sperm which is deposited in *qaraar makeen*. See the description of the Qur'an – *qaraar makeen* is descriptive of a place with certain qualities that suit the development of a new human embryo: *qaraar makeen* means “a place of rest firmly fixed” – the womb of the mother – built specially for this task. After the stage of sperm, God creates ‘*alaqah*. ‘*Alaqah* means “piece of blood” or “thick blood”, and the word ‘*alaqah*, in the Arabic language, implies that this thick clot of blood is not lying on the floor of the womb, but is hanging from the roof of the womb. So, the name is indicative of its location, as well. In the next stage, the thick clot of blood is converted into *mudghah*. *Mudghah* is taken from *ma yamdughuhu-l-insaanu*.¹⁹ In this third stage, it has become a little piece of flesh big enough for someone to swallow – a piece of flesh the size of a morsel (*mudghah*). And from that little morsel, God creates the bones and then clothes the bones with flesh. Then the final stage is *khalqan aakhar*: We made him a new human being; it means, the second, Unseen element, what we call the Soul, is finally inserted.

As Muslims, we are frequently asked the question, “What do you think of abortion?” On the basis of the above Qur'anic passage, the ulama²⁰ of Islam have different opinions with regard to abortion. As a general rule, abortion is prohibited because it amounts to killing a prospective human being. That is the general rule. Some ulama came with exceptions and said that if we are to select between the survival of the child and the mother, we have to sacrifice the child because the mother is the origin. And they put it in that form: “We cannot sacrifice the origin for the branch.” That is one opinion. Other ulama went a little bit further and said that if the Qur'an talks about “Then We made him a new human being – ثُمَّ أَنْشَأْنَاهُ خَلْقًا آخَرَ” it means, prior to that stage, the embryo is not a human being or *khalqan aakhar* or a complete creation; there is no Soul in it. Therefore, if a woman aborts at that stage, she didn't kill anyone because there is no

Soul. That is another opinion. However, this is the weak opinion among the Muslim ulama and it is not the opinion of the majority. When does the fetus reach that stage (*khalqan aakhar*)? Some of the ulama said four months or 120 days. When the child moves in the womb of the mother and she feels the movement, then the Soul has entered the body. Sometimes it makes sense to adopt the latter opinion, especially if there is a need. In that case, the abortion prior to 120 days will be legitimate.

If you take the above analysis and compare it to the analysis of several hundreds of years ago, then, we have to conclude that this Word, which is the Qur'an, must be the Word of The Aware, the One who is aware of everything. That is the challenge to the Arabs and, indeed, all mankind, that they cannot write such a Word because they don't know everything, while the One who has dictated this Word, through the Angel Jibreel to His messenger, is aware of everything. As a result, He put these scientific statements about human birth in the Qur'an whose veracity is only now being verified in our era. This is just one example, but, if we go through the Qur'an, we find scientific statements on a host of other topics. We have a book *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science*, here, in the library, by a French author. His name is Maurice Bucaille.²¹ That French man converted to Islam. His book is available in Arabic, in English, and in French. He collected and classified, under different headings, all the scientific statements occurring in the Qur'an, the Bible, and the Old Testament. He then scrutinized each statement in the full light of scientific knowledge as it exists today. While not a single statement in the Bible or the Torah withstood such scrutiny, not even one statement in the Qur'an was disproved.

Now, we go back to our topic which is the letter “qāf”, about which our tafseers say that either God only knows what is the meaning of the letter “qāf” at the beginning of this chapter, or it is a linguistic challenge. Today, we can say that the Qur'an is not only a linguistic challenge, but a challenge on the level of some basic sciences as well. And because of the unfathomable greatness of the Qur'an, God made an oath on it: “*Qāf wal Qur'ān-il majeed*.” Then, the following verses are evidence for why God is making that oath.

¹⁹ “The piece of bread which one chews and swallows”

²⁰ Scholars

²¹ Imam pronounces this in Arabic!

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 2 of 9]

Verses 1-5

Q*assam* and *jawabi qassam*. *Qassam* means “oath”, and *jawabi qassam* means “answer to an oath”.

In the first verse of Chapter Qāf, there is an oath; God makes an oath. So, what is that oath for? [Imam quotes verse 2 and explains:] The rejecters of the faith are wondering: it is a perplexing matter; it is an astounding matter; it is a surprising matter that God would send them a messenger who is a man from among them – a man from among them to warn them and guide them to the right way. This, they felt, is a strange thing.

The Qurayshites or the kuffar of Makkah were surprised, and wondered about two things; wondered how they could happen: the first is that God sent them a man like themselves for a messenger; the second is that since the body of a human being after death turns into dust, how could it be given life again on the Day of Judgment? What did the pagan Arabs expect? They expected that if God were to send a messenger to them, He should send an angel. Why did He send Muhammad who was a human being? So they were surprised, bewildered, and perplexed. But, of course, when a messenger comes from among the people, then he is like them and they can relate to his example; it sets them at ease. [The translation of verse 2 quoted earlier by Imam is:]

“But nay – they deem it strange that a warner should have come unto them from their own midst; and so these deniers of the truth are saying, ‘A strange thing is this!’” [50:2] Muhammad was the chosen one. *Yā'nī*, the prophet

Muhammad, *‘alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, himself used to say: “I am the response to the prayer of my father Ibrahīm, and I am the “glad tiding” that my brother Jesus reported.” What did he mean by this?

After Sayyidna Ibrahīm,²² peace be upon him, had built the Ka'bah with his son Ismail, he prayed: [Imam quotes in Arabic and stresses رَسُولًا مِنْهُمْ. The translation is:]

“O our Sustainer! Raise up from the midst of our offspring a messenger from *among themselves* who shall convey unto them Thy messages (آيَاتِكَ), and impart unto them revelation (الْكِتَابَ) as well as wisdom (وَالْحِكْمَةَ), and cause them to grow in purity: for, verily, Thou alone art mighty, truly wise.”²³ That was the prayer of Ibrahīm.

Jesus said to the Israelites: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And when Jesus, the son of Mary, said: ‘O children of Israel! Behold, I am a messenger of God unto you, sent to confirm the truth of whatever there still remains of the Torah, and to give you the glad tiding of a messenger who shall come after me, whose name shall be Ahmad.’”²⁴

²² The Prophet Abraham

²³ 2:129

²⁴ 61:6

Ahmad, Hamid, Mahmood, Muhammad, all these names are adapted from the same root – *Hamd* – and have the same meaning. *Hamd* means “praise”. When you say *Alhamdulillah* it means “praise be to God”. So Muhammad means “The Praised”, Mahmood means “The Praised”, Ahmad means “The Praised”. They are all linked to each other linguistically, because they are from the same root.

The word “Ahmad” caused a lot of trouble. In India, during the British Imperialism, there was a man by the name of Mirza Ghulam Ahmad. He picked this verse from the Qur’ān and started to propagate that he was Ahmad about whom Jesus gave the glad tiding. He claimed that the other man, universally accepted as “The Prophet” is named Muhammad, and that *he* is the Ahmad who is mentioned in the Qur’anic verse. Thus he started this new idea, and the people who believed and followed him call themselves, nowadays, Al-Ahmadia, or Al-Qadyā’nia because Mirza Ghulam Ahmad was from an area called Qadyā’n. Everyone from Pakistan and India are well aware of all that, while everyone from Arabia reads about it in numerous publications. The Qadyā’ni people have a presence in the United States, also. They have their own mosques, they have their own interpretation of the Qur’an, they have their own translation of the Qur’an into English to suit these explanations, and they are very rich. They are doing marvelously well. Those people actually believe that Mirza Ghulam Ahmad received revelation from God and that he is their prophet. If you examine their activities in the United States, they are like a beehive buzzing with activity, with every man and woman working hard. The best mosques built in the United States and Canada, after Toledo, are the Ahmadia mosques. They are united, they are one cohesive group, and they have a certain way which they rigorously follow. I have visited their mosque in Toronto. It’s fascinating. And what are we Muslims doing? All we are doing is just pronouncing with our tongues that they are *kuffar*.²⁵ Numerous books [about them] have been published by *Ra’bitta-ul-‘Alami Islami* in Saudi Arabia and most of these books are full of insults. We Muslims have a long tongue but very short hands: we insult readily but we don’t use our power and our strength. When Salman Rushdie brought out his book *The Satanic Verses* we issued “fatwa”²⁶ that his “head is halal”²⁷ because he is *kafir*.²⁸ That’s

all we did. But, if we were to level with him, we ought to have criticized the pen by the pen: he published a book, so we should publish ten books to answer every word he said. In this way, we can fight him and his views, effectively. But, instead, we just issue fatwas. Fatwas are cheap – just pronounce three, four words and say, “kill him, he is a worthless man, he is *kafir*”. And in the eyes of the West, it appears as if there is no freedom of expression among the Muslims. If we do not intend to rebut a written allegation, then, at least, we should keep our mouths shut. If we had kept our mouths shut, no one would have bought the book. But we propagated it to the extent that it became a bestseller all over the world.

We are doing the same thing now by publishing about the Qadyā’ni, because our publications are an insult. What we lack are the persuasive methods by which to appeal to the human mind and present our perspective and our views in this respect. The Qur’an taught us the method of how to propagate Islam. There are some people who propagate Islam by beating: beat him until he enters the mosque to pray, beat him until he fasts Ramadan, follow that woman until she puts the hijab on her head, or kick her out of the mosque, or just block her at the door there. I saw this happening two nights ago in some Muslim community. That’s our way of teaching Islam, while we put the Qur’an aside even though it *shows* us the method of preaching Islam. It shows us the method of attracting people or appealing to their minds: “Preach to the way of your God with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and even if you have to argue with them, argue in a most kindly manner” – in a polite way; don’t insult, don’t be aggressive. So, that is how Islam ought to be, but we are not following that way.

Friday night, I was attending a fund-raising dinner for a Muslim community and I noticed that they were segregating the sexes, thereby splitting every couple. My host, who invited me, is a very close friend of mine. I arrived at his house the previous evening, and after having dinner together, I spent the night at their house. We went the next day in his van, with his wife and children, and when we entered the hall, the usher said: “Sister this way” pointing to the left and “Brother this way” pointing to the right. So I said to him “No, sisters and brothers will sit at this table.” This sounded strange to him. I told him that we were in the house together last night; and we ate dinner together at the same table last night; we came in one

²⁵ Unbelievers

²⁶ Religious verdict

²⁷ This means: “Putting him to death will not be a sin”

²⁸ Singular of *kuffar*

car, so why should he separate us here? But that is the mentality. In the mall, we don't put a curtain between the males and the females, but we put it in the mosque. When we eat in the dining room of the mosque, we have to separate the ladies from the men, but when we go to Beirut restaurant, we even sit beside the liquor, let alone women customers! After setting a precedent, I noticed that other men asked their wives to come and join them at their respective tables. This shows you our mentality.

Islam is applicable in every time and every place. Living in America is different than living in Egypt or Africa. Even in the Muslim majority countries of Africa, a woman's breasts are not covered, as you may know, if you have read the history of Africa. So, we have to utilize our brain and not just the books of tafseer. Only one book is truthful – The Book of God (The Qur'an). Any book after that, including mine, is questionable.

Syyedna Ibrahīm prayed to God to send them a messenger from among themselves to do three jobs: to recite for them God's *ayat* (signs); to teach them the Book and the wisdom, and to purify them. The response to his prayer was Muhammad, the Prophet, and his book, the Qur'an. But when Muhammad came, the kuffar were wondering why God sent a human being. The Qur'an states elsewhere that, even if God were to send an angel, the angel would have come in the form of a human being and that would have been even more perplexing for them: [Imam quotes:] "And even if We had appointed an angel as Our message-bearer, We would certainly have made him appear as a man – and thus We would only have confused them in the same way as they are now confusing themselves" [6:9].

So the oath or *qassam* is confirming the wonder and surprise of kuffar. And what made them wonder more is that Muhammad came to them and said they were worshipping idols which were of no benefit to them. They should worship God, the Creator, because after death, they are going to be resurrected; they will be revived and questioned about their deeds during life, and will be rewarded or punished. That increased their bewilderment and they said: "أَنْذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا – *What! After we have died and become mere dust?*" [50:3]

See the Qur'ānic language here? That is an example of the uniqueness of the Arabic language which we have to learn in depth in order to understand the Qur'an. The third

verse of Chapter Qāf is not a complete sentence but only a phrase or part of a sentence; there is an omission. But, in the grammar of Arabic language, they call this *mafهوم* or *kinayah* which means "something omitted, but the start of the sentence will indicate it."

In the third verse of this sura, even though there is an omission resulting in an incomplete sentence, it is understood that the kuffar are saying: "What! After we die and become mere dust, [shall we be resurrected again?]" It can be stated in another way: "Why – [how could we be resurrected] after we have died and become mere dust?"²⁹

“ذَلِكَ رَجْعٌ بَعِيدٌ – *this is impossible! Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!*” So the kuffar are saying that it is impossible that they will be resurrected, or be given life again, after becoming dust.

The answer comes to tell them about the wide knowledge of God, and how His knowledge encompasses everything in this universe. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“Well do We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with Us is a record unfailing, guarding the full account” [50:4].

God is informing them that He is aware of the minutest details of the stages of decomposition of the bodies inside the graves; He knows how their bodies will wither as the earth consumes them.

When the body decays, does it disappear completely all at once? No, because the body consists of several elements. The bones will take longer to decay. The flesh will disappear quickly. The veins may last longer than the flesh. The blood will coagulate within hours after death, and this is all a gradual decay of the body until it turns into dust. That is the end of the body. But man not only has a body but a soul, as well. When these two are united he is alive. When they separate from each other, we say there is a state of death. That's exactly like electricity in a wire: when they are together, we say this wire is live; when you pull the plug, we say the wire is dead. So the first step in the process of death is the separation of the soul from the body, followed by a gradual decrease or shrinking of the body. Each of these two elements, at the time of death, goes back to where it came from originally: the body goes to

²⁹ The interpolations indicate the missing parts of the sentence in Arabic, which are understood even though they are omitted.

the earth and becomes dust, and the soul goes to its Creator. That's the secret we don't know much about: [Imam quotes] "They ask you, O Muhammad, about the Soul, say: 'The knowledge of that is confined to God. Whatever portion of knowledge you have been given is very little as compared with the knowledge of God.'"

Here is a question that many Muslims ask: "Can we cremate the body? Is it halal?"³⁰ In the days of old, the ulama said "No." Why? "Because God is the only one who punishes by fire and if you cremate the body, you are punishing the dead person by fire." Personally, I maintain that you should not cremate the dead, because the dignity of the human being lies in being buried not burned.

Cremation is a matter of tradition. Cremation is taking place nowadays in the United States for two reasons. Firstly, they are imitating the Hindus. In India, you may notice that some people shave their heads except for a lock of hair at the top of the head. When you ask why, they say that is where they start the fire after the death of the person. Secondly, in the United States everything is based on materialism. Instead of buying a casket for \$1000 and a vault for \$500 and paying the funeral home to bury the body, and paying for transportation etc. thus spending five, or six, or seven thousand dollars on the burial, it is better to cremate the body and be done with it! So every decision here is based on material considerations. They think of it from a financial aspect. The Muslims are following a middle way. We don't cremate the dead because we consider the dignity of our deceased person, and burning something is not a dignified thing to do. From the material aspect, we try to make it as inexpensive as possible.

You know, some people, even among Muslims, a few years ago, used to buy the casket for six thousand or five thousand dollars, lined inside with cashmere and silk, and furnished with soft and nice pillows so the deceased will not feel the pinch of the casket! This is like the man who selected his gravesite on the corner, and said: "That is a very nice spot." Someone asked him: "Do you think that the deceased will be looking from the balcony?"³¹ So, as Muslims, we try to make it as cheap as possible because the money could be better utilized for the needs of the living. We take the road in

between. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

"Nay, but they who refused to believe in resurrection have been wont to give the lie to this truth whenever it was proffered to them; and so they are in a state of confusion" [50:5].

They did not believe the truth when it came to them as a result of which they are in a state of chaos.

How is it that "*Al Haqq*" or "The Truth" came to them and they didn't believe in it? The reason is that there is a sort of stubbornness, sometimes. Someone knows that this wall is white, but he would like to prove to you that it is black. Stubbornness! And the Qur'ān pointed that out to us: [Imam quotes] "They unto whom We have vouchsafed revelation aforetime know him (Muhammad) to be the Prophet of God as they know their own children: but, behold, some of them knowingly suppress the truth"³²; they are falsifying the truth in spite of their full knowledge that it is the truth. In another place, the Qur'ān talks about some of the People of the Book: "They did not differ among themselves except *after* true knowledge was revealed to them, and that dissension was just stubbornness between themselves."³³

So, up to this point the sura is explaining what the situation is on the ground, as it were. [Imam quotes verses 1-5. The translation is:]

"*Qāf*. By the glorious Qur'ān. But nay – they deem it strange that a Warner should have come unto them from their own midst; and so these deniers of the truth are saying, 'A strange thing is this! What! After we die and become mere dust, shall we be resurrected again? Such a return seems far-fetched indeed.'

"Well do We know how the earth consumes their bodies, for with Us is a record unfailing. Ay, but they who refuse to believe in resurrection have been wont to give the lie to this truth whenever it was proffered to them; and so they are in a state of confusion" [50:1-5].

Here the Qur'ān points out some signs to attract the attention of man by saying that if he would like to know the truth, there are many ways to know it: you don't need to know it from Muhammad; you don't need to know it from a messenger; you don't need to know it from any human being, because you can know it by yourself, if you really mean it, and if you have the will to know it. Just look around you.

³⁰ That which is permitted or allowed

³¹ This is an Egyptian joke. In Cairo the norm is to live in high-rise apartments furnished with balconies. An apartment on a corner location has a better view from its balcony.

³² 2:146

³³ 3:19

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 3 of 9]

Verse 6

Here the Qur'ān points out some signs to attract the attention of man by saying that if he would like to know the truth, there are many ways to know it. Just look around you. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“Do they not look at the sky above them – how We have built it and made it beautiful and free of all faults? And the earth – We have spread it wide, and set upon it mountains firm, and caused it to bring forth plants of all beautiful kinds, and thus offering an insight and a reminder unto every human being who willingly turns to God. And We send down from the skies water rich in blessings, and cause thereby gardens to grow, and fields of grain, and tall palm-trees with their thickly-clustered dates, as sustenance apportioned to men: and by all this We bring dead land to life: and even so will be man's coming-forth from death” [6-11].

These verses are directed to every human being – both Muslim and non-Muslim. These verses direct people who deny faith and the life after death to look into several phenomena from which they may learn something; forget about what Muhammad is saying, just look at the sky above

them! Verse six brings to our attention the sky – *samā'*, as it is called in the Qur'an – saying, didn't they look at the sky to see how We built it, how We decorated it, how they will never see any defect, or hole, or crack in it?

In this day and age, a verse like this makes us reflect on the state of scientific research in the field of astronomy with all its impressive discoveries of planets and the outer universe. This scientific research should be viewed by us not only as scientific, but should also serve as a re-enforcement to believe. When we look at something that we cannot reach, e.g. the sky, any knowledge which helps us to gain some understanding of it will also indicate to us that behind all such creations there must be a Creator. This then should convince us to believe in that Power.

The opportunity to observe the creation above us is available to every human being – just sit by yourself, day or night, and look up at the sky and see the greatness. Look at the sun during the day. The sun is considered, in Arabic terminology as “sky” (*samā'*). See how the sun, since its creation, is sending rays of light and warmth to the earth. Every source of heat or power eventually comes to an end. If

you fill your car with gas and drive a certain number of miles, the gas tank will be empty; if the electric power generator fails there will be no electricity in your house; but the light and the warmth of the sun are there for us every day. The sun has been shining for millions of years and, as the scientists say, the heat has not been reduced even by a degree. This means that there is a control behind it; there is an engineer who is taking care of it and keeping that energy running. This should prompt you to ask yourself “who and what type of engineer is behind it”, and the conclusion will be the Power of creation, whom we call Allah. Others may give Him another name, but, nevertheless, it is that same Power of creation. Your attention is directed to the knowledge of God and this will increase your belief.

Note how the Qur’ānic language talks to a human mind. “Did they consider how We *built* the sky?” *Built*. That specific word “built” has a meaning here. A building is something erected on pillars or posts. You pour concrete to build. But where is the concrete that holds the sky? How is it built? What is holding it up from underneath? Nothing is holding up the sky, and, there is nothing from which it is suspended. How is it floating in the universe? How is it orbiting? If it is floating then why does it not fall down?

And the verse specifically draws our attention to the fact that there is no defect in it: there are no holes or cracks in it. When you build a house and there is a hole or a leak, you say there is a defect in that building; it needs repair, but the sky is perfect from horizon to horizon, and it needs no repair till the Day of Judgment. So when the Qur’ān talks to the human mind it uses language which he understands. The verse does not say, “Did not they look at the sky how We *created* it?” it says, instead, “how We *built* it”. The use of the word “building” here is to attract the attention and to engage the human mind to try and visualize the Power behind such an edifice.

Now, when we read tafseers written several hundred years ago, they will not tell us about Newton’s theory of gravity, or orbits, and all that. Today, if a person does not believe, based on present scientific knowledge, what is written in those tafseers, he will not be pronounced a *kafir*. Rather, these scientific facts should increase our belief.

What is the law of gravity? A law was created for each item created in the universe. The law of gravity is one of them and it applies in some areas, and does not apply in some other areas such as outer space after you cross the gravitational pull of the earth. Then, as you approach the moon, you will be subject to the gravity of the moon, and, as a result, will be able

to land on the moon. This law, known as the law of gravity in science, is called, in religious terminology, the Law of Obedience: the planets are obeying the orders of God and following certain laws so that life on earth will continue intact as long as the order is obeyed. And this is the meaning of the Qur’anic verse “The seven heavens extol His limitless glory, and the earth, and all that they contain; and there is not a single thing but extols His limitless glory and praise: but you, O men, fail to grasp the manner of their glorifying Him.”³⁴ You are glorifying the name of God by following His rules that came in the Qur’an; the planets are glorifying the name of God by being obedient to the laws that God made for them.

Reading the Qur’ān should not be just a matter of recitation; we have to study it, think about what it is saying, and critique those who explain it. Criticism, if it is constructive, is a sign of health, not of sickness. In our countries, where we were brought up, we never criticize ourselves – we are always on the top! We know everything! But we need to criticize ourselves. If we criticized ourselves, we would know our mistakes, and know how to correct them. In the same way, we need to criticize those who explained the Qur’ān before us, but not to put them down, because those people made up their minds by working as hard as they could, based on their understanding and knowledge at that time. Our role now is to criticize them constructively and offer new explanations based upon the current state of knowledge.

Fu,³⁵ those scholars of the past said the sky constitutes everything that is above you, and if you look up the word *samā’* in an Arabic dictionary, it says *samā’* means everything that is above you. Therefore, the moon is *samā’*, the sun is *samā’*, and every star is *samā’* by that definition. This brings us to another dilemma. “God created seven skies” as stated in the Qur’ān, while there are stars by the millions and billions. So how can we reconcile between the “seven skies” and these billions of stars, each of which could be called *samā’* or sky? Some people, nowadays, have started to talk about the “seven skies” as meaning the seven galaxies. A galaxy is a group of stars or planets each of which forms a layer in the universe. Maybe people coming after us will come up with some other explanation which is better than ours. That will prove again

³⁴ 17:44

³⁵ A connecting letter in Arabic language, that connects a previous idea with a following idea, and can be translated as “then” or “so” depending on the context

that the Qur'ān is applicable for every time and every place.

The ulama who graduate from Muslim theology schools are very, very limited in their knowledge when it comes to explaining verses like these. Such verses need people who are well-versed in areas like astronomy and physics to analyze them in the light of scientific knowledge of our time; these analyses can then be used by the Muslims in understanding the Qur'ān. Perhaps, another group of ulama will come later on to say they have more knowledge, and they will advance the understanding of the Qur'an more than we have in our time.

“Did they not look at the sky above them?” What do we understand when the Qur'ān says the “sky above them”? Nowadays, we know that if you are on another planet, the *EARTH* can be situated above you, and, therefore, the earth will be called “sky” from that relative position. In such circumstances, we have what we call *at-ta'weel fee mar al'yoon*.³⁶ As I have said before, we have yet to discover what sky or samā' means.³⁷

How has God “decorated the sky”? Its decoration during the day is its pure blue color. We understand that decoration can be accomplished through the use of color. To decorate your house means you paint it: one pink and one red and one blue – that is decoration. When you look at the sky, some days you see the sky is sapphire blue, some days it is light blue. When you fly in an aeroplane above the clouds, the sky will appear a very dark blue. On a cloudy day, the sky could be pure white. The shining sun brightens the colors even more and adds to the decoration. The sunset and the sunrise have their own beauty. At midnight, you see the decoration of the stars everywhere. Can you convince me that the night will be beautiful without stars? Stars of varying brightness here and there and the moon in the middle make the night sky beautiful. That scenery in itself is lovable. There are a few gray hairs amidst the black hair but they decorate my head as the stars decorate the night!³⁸

Nowadays, we hear things that will show us the disease afflicting the Muslims. We, the Muslims, initiated and developed the science of astronomy when the West was living

in the Dark Age. The first clock to measure time was made by Arabs. If you visit Al Azhar mosque, you will see an old clock there. That clock does not have moving parts, but the shadow cast by the light of the sun in particular areas of the face of the clock indicates the times for *Salat-ul-Zhur*, or *Salat-ul-'Asr*. That was a new invention by Muslims. The science of algebra is an Arab science – Muslim science – and the West learned it from us. The Arabic name for it is *al jabr*. They didn't even change its name, but they anglicized the Arabic word to “algebra”. How did algebra come into existence?

When you are faced with a problem you look for a solution. So, algebra came into existence as a result of the inheritance laws revealed in the Qur'an. If my father dies, leaving three daughters and four sons, sisters and brothers, father and mother, and he leaves 10 acres of land, then that land has to be divided among the heirs according to the rules of Islam as mentioned in Chapter An-Nisā. Some get one-eighth, others one-fourth, still others one-sixth of the total, and so on. If the piece of land in question was not a neat square or rectangle, but irregular, with a corner here and a corner there, the task of division became exceedingly problematic. So they invented what they called *ilm-ul-jabr* or the science of algebra. And through that science, they were able to divide that irregular piece of land into the right shares to be given to the heirs of the deceased. Nowadays, we have forgotten about our past.

Music, which some Muslims prohibit now, was originally called *al-musiqā* in Arabic because the Muslims invented it. That word *musiqā* has been anglicized to “music”. The West did not know anything about music until we taught them. Al Khalil ibn Ahmad invented and taught the written musical notes. Nowadays, we say it is “haram”.³⁹ All these sciences were invented by the Muslims, but we have forgotten that, and the West copied them from us, and some Westerners do not even acknowledge that the Muslims invented them.

Lately, when the Americans and Armstrong landed on the moon,⁴⁰ the people in the Muslim world were fascinated. About what? Newspapers, from Indonesia to Morocco, were writing about how Armstrong heard the *adhan*⁴¹ when he was on the moon, and that he had converted to Islam. And while the mass media in the Muslim world was

³⁶ *At-ta'weel* means “interpretation based on the available resources”. *Fee mar al'yoon* means “to the extent”, or, “as far as the eye of man can see”

³⁷ See sermon on Sura Mulk, Part 5

³⁸ No! Imam's hair was almost purely white at this time!

³⁹ That which is forbidden or sinful

⁴⁰ July 1969

⁴¹ The call to prayer

awed with that nonsense, some people – Muslims – approached Armstrong, here, in the United States, and asked him about it. He said, “I have never said anything of that sort and I am still a staunch Christian.” See how we invent stories, as if landing on the moon is something beyond our ken. Every bit of our Qur’an is urging us to go everywhere in the universe, but we don’t do it. We are waiting for others to do it and then, on top of that, sometimes, we even disbelieve them. For example, there are very, very big ulama in the Arab world who, until now, don’t believe that the Americans landed on the moon. These ulama say, “Don’t listen to those Americans; they are crazy; they are laughing at you.” When you tell these same ulama that the earth is a globe they respond: “Who said that? It is flat! You can drive the car on it. It is very flat. What! What are you talking about? Globe! What do you mean by that?” We still have ulama like that to this day! *Until this moment! Great ulama of Islam!* And there are people listening to them and

accepting whatever they say as fact! And yet, look into the Qur’an...I say *that* is the scientific challenge; that is the scientific challenge for the human mind irrespective of whether one is American, Arab, Muslim, Christian, or whatever. Why? Because, while science has no religion, every religion can have science. Science and knowledge on this earth have no nationality, or race, or religion. You learn from a Christian, a Jew, or a Buddhist, and it is not prohibited to do so. The Prophet, peace be upon him, said: “Seek knowledge even if you have to go to China.” And he said: “Seeking knowledge is incumbent upon every male and female from infancy until you are buried in the grave.” So every day of your life you are a student.

The next verse of chapter Qāf states: “وَالْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا” And We made the earth *flat* in your eyes...” We will discuss this next week.

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 4 of 9]

Verses 7-11

“وَالْأَرْضَ مَدَدْنَاهَا” (Wal ard-da madadna-ha) And

We made the earth flat in your eyes; We have flattened it . . .”

[50:7].

This is the verse by which the ulama are swearing that “the earth is flat.” Note that it *does appear* flat to us although it is like a globe. It appears flat to us because of its large radius, and because we are relatively so small. Imagine a very small ant crawling on a very big watermelon that is suspended: it is flat for the ant, and it can crawl around and around on it, and will never reach its end, because it is like a globe. And yet it is flat for the ant. It is the same with the earth, but these ulama interpret things according to their own understanding. And God, as you know, created us with different thinking, with different mental capacities, and with different brains. There is an Egyptian proverb which says that when God created wealth and distributed it, no one accepted his share. The one who has ten wants one hundred, the one who has thousands wants millions, and the one who has millions wants billions. Everyone wants more. But, when God created the brain and distributed it, everyone accepted his share without a fuss, and

everyone now thinks he is the only sane one, while the rest are crazy! Human minds are all different from one another, as the Qur’ān states. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And had thy Sustainer so willed, He could surely have made all mankind one single community: but He willed it otherwise, and so they continue to hold divergent views – all of them, save those who avail themselves of Thy Sustainer’s grace” [11:118-119].

God has not made all human beings to think alike. That is His Will. He has made them all to think differently. So, when the Qur’ān says *wal ard-da madadna-ha* some people explain it according to their thinking and say that “God flattened this earth” and so it is flat, and not a globe. But the verse means that, although it is a globe, God has made it to *appear* in our sight as flat so we can utilize it for planting, for agriculture, and for surface transportation.

وَالْقَيْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِي (and set upon it mountains firm). *Rawasi* means mountains. God created mountains on the earth to balance the earth. Elsewhere in the Qur’ān it is mentioned that God created the mountains to be a source of

enjoyment for man and for his animals. Why do the mountains exist in Colorado and not in this area (Ohio)? Why does the next range of mountains exist in Pennsylvania and on the way down to Florida? Why are the Middle East and the Sinai desert all flat? Why are the mountains between Afghanistan and Pakistan above 20,000 feet? All this is for a function. We are living on a ball which is spinning around on its own axis, and if that ball had no areas like the *rawasi* or mountains, it would spin too fast, and, maybe, cause our day to be just one hour. If one side of this ball were heavier than the other, it would spin irregularly. But the function of these mountains is to make the earth stable, and, in turn, ensure the stability of the 24-hour day. We never think of that. We take it for granted. [Imam quotes several verses with the word *rawasi* in them. The translation is:]

“And are they not aware that We have set up firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with them, and that We have appointed thereon broad paths, so that they might find their way...?” [21:31].

“And He has placed firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with you, and rivers and paths, so that you might find your way...” [16:15].

“Have We not made the earth as a wide expanse and the mountains as pegs?” [78:6-7].

“*مِنْ كُلِّ زَوْجٍ بَهِيجٍ* (Min kullay zawjin baheej – and caused it to grow every kind of beautiful plant in pairs).” *Baheej* means attractive; lovely to look at. A verse like this one needs a botanist to explain it. The flowers in our backyards come up and grow into different colors, and we just enjoy the flowers during the summer, and that is it. We don’t think how they came into being or what the role of the Creator is who created this universe and the plants that we love to look at. How are the plants paired, and what is the benefit of pairing, and the role played by each one of the pair? It means crops will not grow unless there is fertilization; there must be fertility in the female, and a capability and readiness in the male to fertilize it.

Everything in this universe is created in pairs: males and females (*zawj wa zawja*) for human beings; positive and negative for the magnet; females and males in plants. Before the flood of Nūh⁴² came to pass, God inspired Nūh to construct the Ark and to bring on board species in pairs:

[Imam quotes] “Place on board of this Ark one pair of each kind of animal of either sex, as well as thy family...”⁴³ Another Qur’ānic verse which corroborates this is in Chapter Yā-Sīn: [Imam quotes] “Limitless in His glory is He who created in pairs whatever the earth produces, and in men’s own selves, and in that of which as yet they have no knowledge.”⁴⁴ That idea of pairs is a scientific fact and by studying and researching it, you may come to know Allah.

I am sure a lot of you know that the corn stalk has both male and female ears on the same plant. How do they fertilize each other? What is the method? That method is also described in the Qur’ān. The wind blows the pollen from the top of the plant which contains the male stamens producing the pollen to fall on the female below, thus causing fertilization to take place. The Qur’ān says, “And We let loose the winds for the function of fertilization.”⁴⁵ Nobody knew the meaning of this verse until the botanist discovered wind pollination of plants.

Why are all these things mentioned? The sky and how it was built, the earth, the water coming from the sky in the form of rain, fertilization, the creation of all things in pairs, and so on? They are mentioned for a purpose: to give man an insight into the creation of God, as a reminder to man of the all-pervasive presence of God, and to increase man’s knowledge of the ability and power of God. For whom does all this serve as a reminder? It is for everyone who would like to come back to his Creator; for every human being who willingly turns unto God.

[Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And We send down from the skies water rich in blessings (*mubarakan*), and cause thereby gardens (*jannaat*) to grow, and fields of grain (*habbal haseed*)” [50:9].

If we look at this verse we find that there is an adjective in it which may open our eyes and make us think. *Mubarakan* means “blessed” and is the adjective used to describe the water. It means God let a “blessed rain” fall from the sky. Why does it say “blessed rain”? It means, therefore, that there is a rain which is blessed and a rain which is not blessed.

Now, when you read the ancient tafseers, you will find that none of them have tackled this topic in the way I am about to do; so, this is my interpretation which could be right,

⁴² Noah

⁴³ 23:27

⁴⁴ 36:36

⁴⁵ 15:22

or could be wrong, but, at least, this is my understanding of that verse in this year 1994. The people who read this verse in 1950 understood it in another way, and the people before that understood it in yet a different way. If you remember, from time to time, the media tells us about acid rain. That is rain – but can we call it a “blessed” rain? Ofcourse not. The destructive properties of that acid rain clearly indicate it is not blessed. It causes harm, so we cannot call it “blessed rain”. On the other hand, we have two types of water on the surface of the earth: fresh water existing in rivers, and salt water existing in the seas and oceans. Many of us came from farms and we know about *al-ard al-malihah* – the saline land – the land where plants will never grow because of its high salt content. If the salt water from the seas and oceans were to fall in the form of rain, it would kill all agriculture, and it could not, therefore, be called *ma’ mubarak* (blessed rain). So how does the blessed rain come from the sky? It is because of the existence and operation of the hydrological cycle, which is driven by the sun. The sun evaporates the salt water from the ocean and the water vapor forms clouds. The clouds are driven from one place to another by the winds and the clouds look like mountains [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And He it is who sends down from the skies, by degrees, mountain-masses of clouds charged with hail. . . .”

This is another example of a verse whose real meaning could not be known to anyone until after the invention of the aeroplane. When you are above the clouds, they appear exactly like mountains. When the clouds are driven by the winds to the right place, and the right altitude, they release fresh water in the form of rain, or other forms of precipitation. This rain then makes all those *jannaat* (gardens) grow. The reason the Qur’an calls it “blessed” is that originally the water comes from the salty seas – water which you can neither drink nor water your plants with. But rainwater, which originated from the salty ocean water, has become fresh after being evaporated, so it is “blessed” for us not only because it does not cause harm, but, on the contrary, has many benefits. The land benefits because the rainfall revives all the vegetation. If the plants are not regularly watered they will die, and if the plants die there will be hunger and famine affecting human beings and animals alike. So all this comes under the term *mubarak*.

“Jannaat” means orchards, fruits, and flowers. “Haseed” means plants which are harvested, like corn, wheat, barley, beans and other such grains. When you go three, four,

or five days without eating wheat in the form of bread, you feel the pinch of hunger even if you have been eating fruit all day. The *ma’ mubarak* makes the gardens and the fields of grain to grow. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

“And tall, stately palm trees (*wan-nakhla basiqaat*) with their thickly-clustered dates (*laha tal’un nadeed*)” [50:10].

Nadeed and *mumdood* have the same meaning in the Arabic language. It means organized in rows or in special ways that attract your eye. So, the tall palm trees *laha tal’un nadeed* have the dates organized in clusters and they look attractive. Dates could be included in *jannaat* because it is a fruit; it is sweet. So why are the palm trees and the dates, especially, mentioned separately? There must be some secret in that. I don’t know why, but we eat dates in Ramadan; we break our fast with dates. Why? I don’t know myself but we do it.

The secret of the palm tree may appear in some other Qur’ānic verses. These days we are in the Christmas season. Everywhere in the parking lots, you find a quarter of the lot allocated to the sale of Christmas trees. People are buying these Christmas trees, putting them in their houses, decorating them and putting gifts under the tree. If you ask the Christians why they are putting these trees in their homes, you will get different answers, even from the different churches. Some people say that it was a pagan tradition, a custom practiced in the past by the idolaters. Others say that the Romans invented the practice. A third will say it was a German tradition in the past. The origin, in fact, is in the Qur’ān. Jesus was not born in a cave as some people say; he was born under a tree. That tree was an evergreen tree and we call it *shajar un-nakhl* (the palm tree). The Qur’ān tells us about that in Chapter Maryam:⁴⁶ the pangs of delivery came to her under the palm tree and she was told to shake the trunk of the palm tree so ripe dates will fall upon her. Dates have the effect of satisfying one’s hunger and the first thing Maryam ate, after the delivery of Jesus, was dates from the palm tree. As a tradition, to this day, in some Arab countries, they feed dates to all the people around a woman who has just delivered. We need to have one of the doctors tell us if there is something special about dates.

There is another possibility why the palm tree is mentioned separately even though it could be considered under the term *jannaat*. Since fruits which are included under the term *jannaat* do not have the effect of satisfying hunger, but the dates, like the grains, do have the effect of satisfying hunger,

⁴⁶ Chapter # 19

then, maybe that is why the palm tree has been especially mentioned. There are secrets in these verses, but when we read the Qur'ān, we take everything we read for granted and we never think.

There is something related to Muhammad, peace be upon him, in connection with the dates. There is a hadith which says: "I love two things: dates and water." See – that was the food of the Prophet. Our brothers and sisters are eating *fatayars* and *zaathar* and *hummus*⁴⁷ and all that, downstairs, and they are not satisfied. They want some more.

What are all those *jannaat* and *habbal haseed* and tall palm trees for? [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"It is a provision for our bondsmen, a sustenance apportioned to men (*rizqan lil 'baad*); and by all this We bring dead land to life: and even so will be man's coming-forth from death (*ka dhalikal khurūj*)" [50:11].

It means that with water God revives a dead land and makes all these *jannaat* grow, and it is in the same manner that man will be revived after his death.

All of these verses have been revealed as an answer to the denial of the kuffar who rejected the faith when they said: "Are we going to be revived? Are we going to be resurrected after our bodies have decayed and turned into dust? Are we

going to be questioned? Is there life after this life?" These verses came to say, you people who deny the ability of God to revive the dead, look at what God can do! Look at the sky, look at the water, look at the earth, look at the mountains, and look at the plants how they grow; how God makes the land green and gives it life after it has lain dead during the winter. God is saying to them, by way of analogy, that He revives a dead land with water, and, in the same way, He is able to revive the dead from their graves for resurrection and questioning.

In Chapter Yā-Sīn there is a similar verse about the revival of the earth: "As a sign of Our power we have given life to the dead land, causing it to grow plants of which they eat." So, all these examples are scattered through the Qur'ān to answer that specific question of the kuffar:

أَنْذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا

And, you know, in English, when you repeat something even once in an article, it is redundant and makes for poor composition. But, in the Qur'ān, we see *tens* of verses talking about the same thing, and every time we hear them it is as if we have never heard something like that before. That is the challenge and the miracle of the Qur'ān.

⁴⁷ Lebanese foods

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 5 of 9]

Verses 12-14

The next three verses are not only a reminder for the people, but were also meant as an encouragement and reassurance for Muhammad himself at a time of despondency. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Long before those who now deny resurrection, did Noah’s people give the lie to this truth, and so did the folk of Ar-Rass, and the tribes of Thamūd and ‘Ād, and Pharaoh, and Lot’s brethren, and the dwellers of the wooded dales of Madyan, and the people of Tubba’: they all gave the lie to the messengers – and thereupon that whereof I had warned them came true” [50:12-14].

The Qurayshites of Makkah rejected the faith of Muhammad and scoffed at him, saying that his talk did not make sense; how could they have a life after death? The Qurayshites tortured him and his followers, throwing dirt in front of his house just to annoy him, and when he went to At-Taif, the people stoned him to drive him out of their city. The Prophet, peace be upon him, felt so hopeless that he prayed: “O God, I complain to you of the weakness of my power, and that I have no outlet for my problem, and that I have been of no value among my people.” That attitude on the part of the Arabs who tried to obstruct his preaching and propagation of the call with which he was entrusted caused Muhammad, like any human being, to feel discouraged and to fall into despair sometimes. Therefore, periodically, Qur’anic verses called *tasleeya* (consolation) in Arabic, were revealed.

The above verses came to say to him, Muhammad,

you are not the only one in that situation. Messengers before you have experienced the same circumstances, their people tortured them and their lives were endangered: the people of Nuh denied his faith, the *Ashab ar-Rass* denied the faith, the Thamūd rejected their Prophet Saleh, the people of ‘Ad, Pharaoh, *Ashaab al-Ayka*, and *Qawm-u-Tubba’* all treated their messengers in the same way. *Ayka* is a type of tree that existed at the time of the Prophet Shu’aib, so the people of Shu’aib are called *Ashaab al-Ayka* (the people of the wooded dales of Madyan). Tubba’ was a king in Yemen at one time, and he believed in God and preached to his people to believe the same way, but they denied the faith. The Qur’an narrates the stories of preceding messengers to Muhammad as a reassurance to him and to serve, at the same time, as an example and a reminder for the kuffar.

The narration starts with the Prophet Nūh. Nuh is the Prophet who continued to preach to his people for a period of 950 years according to a verse in Chapter Al-‘Ankabūt. Some listened, some denied. Even his own son denied the message and refused to believe his father, and, from this story of Nuh and his son, we learn something about the relationship between parent and child. When God intended to punish those *mukaddibeen* or rejecters of the faith, He ordered Nuh to build the Ark to prepare himself for the calamity. The Qur’an describes how the people would pass by and make fun of him while he was building the Ark. His reply was that while they made fun of him then, he would make fun of them in the

future, and time would tell. When the Ark was completed, the order came to him from God to take a pair of every living creature *and to take his family with him except those who denied his faith.* [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Thereupon We inspired him thus: ‘Build, under Our eyes and according to Our inspiration, the ark that shall save thee and those who follow thee. And when Our judgment comes to pass, and waters gush forth in torrents over the face of the earth, place on board of this ark one pair of each kind of animal of either sex, as well as thy family – excepting those on whom sentence already has been passed; and do not appeal to Me any more on behalf of those who are bent on evildoing – for, behold, they are destined to be drowned” [23:27].

One of those on whom the sentence was already passed was his son. When the flood came, his son climbed a mountain to try and stay out of the reach of the water. Nuh pleaded with him:

“Believe, and come here and get in the ark with us.”

The son replied: “I am going to the top of the high mountain and I will be far away from the water.”

His father said: “No one will be far away from the wrath of God today except the one on whom God will shower His mercy.”

The flood waters rose and Nuh felt that his son was dying. Look at the protest of Nūh! [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“And Noah called out to his Sustainer, and said: ‘O God, verily, my son was of my family; and, verily, Thy promise always comes true, and Thou art the most just of all judges.’⁴⁸ What was the answer of God? [Imam quotes] “God answered: ‘O Nuh! Behold, he was not of thy family; for, verily, he was unrighteous in his conduct. And thou shalt not ask of Me anything whereof thou canst not have any knowledge: thus, behold, do I admonish thee lest thou become one of those who are unaware [of what is right].’⁴⁹

Here, in America, sometimes, when one of our children leaves the faith of Islam, we are in the same predicament as Nuh, and in his story is a lesson that we can apply to ourselves. Lately, some people have been asking me questions about their children who are deviating from the faith and the fathers feel helpless and don’t know what to do. In this country, you cannot do anything. About the only thing you can

do is tell them that you will not consider them your son or daughter anymore. You disown them. And if one utters this word to anybody, right away they retort: “But he is my son or (daughter) – how I can disown him?” That is our attitude as fathers. But if we learn from the Qur’an, we see that Islam is above even blood relationships. That is how Islam abolished every type of discrimination on the basis of sex, color, creed, nationality, race, language, and anything else you can think of, and all Muslims or believers have been put in one pot known as Islam; Islam is above all these elements. And this is coming in the form of advice given to Nuh directly by God. *If we apply that verse – the advice given to Nuh directly by God – in our own life, we should be confident that we are not doing something out of the ordinary because our criterion is supposed to be Islam and that is it.*

And in the end the flood came and Nuh was saved along with the believers, and the rest perished. God is informing the Quraysh that the people of Nuh before them denied the same message and they ought to know what happened to them.

There is a very interesting story that comes to mind from the time of the Prophet. When Muhammad, peace be upon him, fought the first battle in Islam, the Battle of Badr, and the Muslims captured some of the idolaters as prisoners, he assembled a *majlis-i-shūrā*.⁵⁰ It was not like a *majlis-i-shūrā* of our time: when you go to any Muslim community, nowadays, they claim to make their decisions with the help of a *majlis-i-shura*, but, in reality, it is a full dictatorship. But the *shūrā* at the time of the Prophet was characterized by democracy. Take, for example, Salman Farsi who suggested to the Prophet in *Ghazwat-til Ahzab* [The Battle of the Trench] to make the ditch and the Prophet took his advice in this exceedingly urgent matter although such an idea was unknown to the Arabs at that time.

The captives of wars predating Islam were considered slaves according to the prevailing laws on earth at that time. The captives became the property of the victors: they could sell them, kill them, or do whatever they wanted with them – even treat them like animals. So, when Islam came and they captured people in the Battle of Badr, the Prophet called for a *majlis-i-shura* to decide what should be done with the prisoners. Abu Bakr said to him: “Prophet, those are our people, forgive them. Maybe God will guide them to the right

⁴⁸ 11:45

⁴⁹ 11:46

⁵⁰ A general body meeting, or general assembly, to decide a matter

way. Set them free. Who knows, maybe they will taste the sweetness of Islam and they will become Muslims.” Then, Omar bin Khattab raised his finger in the *shūrā* majlis and said, “Prophet! Let me cut their necks by my sword and finalize them, because those are the leaders of the *kuffār* and we have to finish them off!” Note the difference in the treatment proposed by the two. It was at this juncture that the Prophet uttered his famous saying. Looking at Abu Bakr he said: “Abu Bakr, you remind me of the grandfather Ibrahim; while his people were harsh on him, he prayed to God saying, “Those who will follow me will be part of me, and those who will deny my faith... You are the most Forgiving, You are ever ready to forgive, forgive them.” But you, Omar, you remind me of the Prophet Nuh when he prayed: “O God! Leave not on earth any of those who deny the truth: for, behold, if Thou dost leave them, they will always try to lead astray those who worship Thee, and will give birth to nothing but wickedness and stubborn ingratitude [more *kuffār*].”⁵¹

The word “*rass*” means wealth. The people of *Ar-Rass*: who were those people? Nobody knows. Look at any tafseer and it simply labels them as “People of Wealth”. There are no details in the Qur’ān and we have no other knowledge of who they were, or where they lived.

The people of Thamūd were the people to whom the Prophet Saleh was sent. They perished because they denied the faith, and the Qur’ān mentions that they perished by a lightning bolt.

The people of ‘Ad: those people were very, very well-versed in the art of architecture. Reference to ‘Ad is also made in chapter Al-Fajr. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“The people of Iram, the many-pillared, the like of whom has never been reared in all the land.”⁵²

If we examine this closely, we find a similarity for it in our days. The area of Iram, presently known as Al-Ahqāf, is located between Yemen and the Sultanate of Oman. Lately, there was a TV program showing that archaeologists have discovered some type of underground posts which indicates that there was a city, in prehistoric times, in this area. The people of ‘Ad had built structures unlike any known to the people at that time, and they had reached the pinnacle of their power. They

were blinded by that power and became so arrogant that they said: “Who can defeat us? We are the most powerful people on earth.” The Qur’an answers: “Why – were they, then, not aware that God, who created them, had a power greater than theirs? But they went on rejecting Our signs and thereupon We let loose upon them a windstorm (*sarsaran*)⁵³ raging through days of misfortune, so as to give them, in the life of this world, a foretaste of suffering through humiliation: but their suffering in the life to come will be far more humiliating, and they will have none to succor them.” The Qur’ān describes this in Chapter Fussilat and another Qur’ānic verse, elsewhere, informs us that the storm continued seven nights and eight days until it destroyed everything they had. They refused to acknowledge the prophet sent to them and denied the faith, and they, too, perished when God sent His “soldiers” (the wind) against them.

Power blinds people, and for the sake of power, people sacrifice everything. Today, in America, we have a similar situation, and there is a lot of arrogance here. We say we are the only superpower on earth. Russia is finished! So, we are the sole superpower. And, as a result, we are corrupting every corner of the world. In Haiti, we have one kind of policy, while in Bosnia we have another. There is no standardization of our attitude; we follow what is expedient. And, from time to time, we are confronted by the “soldiers of God”: in California, the earthquake; in Florida, the hurricane; in Texas, the rain and the flood. And those are just very, very little things to prepare us for what is coming. And what is coming will engulf even Ohio, so be prepared.

When human beings reach the stage when they think they are invincible, at that time the Supreme Power will interfere. And that is exactly what happened with Pharaoh, also. Pharaoh – he was my grandfather, by the way.⁵⁴

If anyone has read the history of Egypt, he will know that the Pharaoh mentioned in the Qur’ān is referred to in Egyptology as *Fir‘awn Musa*. His name was Minfitah – King Minfitah – and he was the son of Ramses II. If you go to Cairo you will see, in the square in front of the railway station, the statue of Ramses II. Minfitah was the son of Ramses II and he is referred to as the Pharaoh of Moses. The story which the Qur’ān narrates is the story of King Minfitah.

⁵¹ 71:26-27

⁵² 89:7-8

⁵³ Which implies a severe windstorm accompanied by darkness

⁵⁴ Imam Khattab was from Egypt and would jokingly refer to the ancient kings and queens as his grandfathers and grandmothers

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 6 of 9]

Verse 14 Continued

Pharaoh's power induced him to proclaim one day: "O people, I know of no god other than me. I am your supreme god." See what absolute power will do? Then, he called upon Hāmān, his Prime Minister and said to him: "Ya Hāmān, make me a ladder or something, to go up to the sky to see that God of Moses because I think Moses is nothing but a liar." That is the result of absolute power: it causes supreme arrogance in man.

On the other hand, note what Islam recommends, and how God wants such a man to be approached. God ordered His messengers to go to Pharaoh because he had trespassed his limits, but "to talk to him in a very soft and nice language"; not to approach him with a stick, or a whip, nor to insult him, like we do nowadays when we preach Islam. We have people who actually "quote" the Prophet as saying: "I have been ordered by God to fight the people until they say *La ilaha Illallah*."⁵⁵ If they will say it, then, their blood is saved." When that "hadith" is quoted, I am at a loss to reconcile it with the Qur'ānic verse which says: "Let there be no compulsion in

religion." This, in fact, is the sort of thing that makes Islam look dull in the eyes of non-Muslims, and even some Muslims. The Qur'ān is advising Moses and Haroon to talk to Pharaoh – a man committing the highest type of sin – in a "soft and nice language", because, maybe that might influence him and open his heart to Islam. So the command of God in regard to the practice of *da'wa* is "to talk in a soft, beautiful language".

Nowadays we don't talk that soft and beautiful language. When we have a chance to show the correct way to someone, we say: "You *kafir*! Do it this way!" The result is we have no *da'wa*, and no results. We'll never influence anyone because we are not following the method. And we find that there is no difference in the recommendation given to Moses and that given to Muhammad. The command to Muhammad is: [Imam quotes] "Call thou all mankind unto thy Sustainer's path with wisdom and goodly exhortation, and argue with them in the most kindly manner."

We have to take a lesson from this story; it should teach us something that we can utilize in our lives: it shows us that you cannot propagate Islam by stick or by gun. We witness that, in some Muslim countries, people who don't fast

⁵⁵ There is no god but one God

the month of Ramadan are jailed. If someone is seen smoking a cigarette in the street, he is put in jail. Others who are walking in the street at the time of prayer are driven to the mosque by force. And the people, when they are driven by force, will not be praying or fasting from their hearts. Nothing related to religion can be imposed by force, but it should be by persuasion. If you want someone to believe in a certain faith, you have to talk to his mind, not even to his heart, because talking to the heart could be based upon emotions that may fade away. But talking to the mind will establish the logic on which basis that person will believe, and, as a result, will change his attitude. In the same manner, when you talk to your child, talk to his mind so as to *convince* him. In many situations, especially in this country, you cannot simply say the “Qur’ān or hadith says. . .” because that does not penetrate into the heads of some people unless you use logic and the realities of life to convince that person of the meaning of the Qur’ān or the hadith.

Pharaoh was a very tough man and the verse indicates that Moses was afraid to go by himself to Pharaoh, so he requested God to support him by designating for him a supporter and he suggested Haroon, his brother, to be his partner in that mission. But even the two of them together were still scared to go to Pharaoh. So the answer of God came: “Don’t be afraid, I am with you hearing and seeing.” Musa and Haroon came to Pharaoh and tried to reason with him, but Pharaoh did not listen; the logic did not enter his head; rather, it increased his stubbornness. So what was the end? The end was that Moses and the Israelites were saved and Pharaoh and his soldiers were drowned.

All these stories were revealed to the Prophet to tell him not to despair, not to take it hard, because the people of Nūh denied his faith, the people of Thamūd denied the faith of their prophet, Saleh, the people of Pharaoh denied the message of Moses, *Ashaab al-Ayka* denied Shu’aib, the people of Yemen denied the call of their king Tubba’; all these denied the Message before your people.

Lastly, that verse of Chapter Qāf mentions “Lūt’s brethren” as having denied the truth, also. Why does the Qur’ān call them “the brothers of Lūt”? The reason is that Lūt married from among them. Lūt was originally from Iraq but had migrated to the area of Sodom [present day Dead Sea area] and he had married from that village, so they had become his brothers-in-law. The people of Lūt were addicted to what we, nowadays, call homosexuality. The term homosexuality is a

new term; in the English language it used to be called sodomy, derived from the name of the city where Lūt lived. The people of Sodom were steeped in homosexuality to such an extent that when the angels came to the house of Lūt, as messengers of God, to warn him of the impending doom, they came in the form of handsome young men, and when the men of the village found out, they rushed to Lūt’s house. Lūt knew what they were doing and what they were after. The Qur’ān describes this: “And when Our messengers came unto Lūt he felt a constriction in his chest seeing that it was beyond his power to shield them; and he exclaimed: ‘This is a distressful day for me.’”⁵⁶ What did Lūt say to them when they came to his door? [Imam quotes] “O my people, take instead these daughters of mine: they are purer for you than men. Be then conscious of God, and disgrace me not by assaulting my guests. Is there not among you even one right-minded man who thinks? Would that I had the strength to defeat you, or that I could lean upon some mightier support.”

At this point, the guests spoke: “O Lūt! Behold, we are the messengers of thy Sustainer! Never shall thy enemies be able to reach us.” They told him to take the believers and leave the city at night. They informed him that his wife would suffer the same fate as the rest of the people. Why? Because his wife was not a believer in him, and she was the one who told the village people about their handsome guests. The angels said, “Morning is the appointed time and the morning is very close.” That was the zero hour! Then the Qur’ān says “We turned those sinful towns upside down, and rained down upon them stone-hard blows of chastisement pre-ordained, one upon another.” The people of Lut perished completely. But, nowadays, they [the homosexuals] demonstrate in front of the White House and they are granted human rights; everyone is taking someone on his arm and enjoying life and spreading AIDS, and we, the taxpayers, are financing that! That is a social injustice.

What is attractive in this verse [50:14] is its final part which reads **كُلُّ كَذَّبَ الرَّسُلِ** – *kullun kadhhaba-ar-rusul*. It does not say *kullun kadhhaba rasul-lahū*. *Kullun kadhhaba rasul-lahū* means, “Every one of those denied the message of their respective Messenger, but the verse didn’t say that, the verse said: *kullun kadhhaba-ar-rusul* which means, “Every one of those denied the message of all Messengers. This emphasizes the

⁵⁶ 11:77

meaning that the message was *one*: ‘Ād, Thamūd, Pharaoh, Quraysh, all of them received the same message. The substance of the message and the method of delivery of that message were one and the same.

What was that message? It was Islam. Mistakenly, nowadays, we think that we are Muslims, and the Christians and the Jews are not Muslims. In fact, *every believer could be muslim* because the message of Muhammad is the message of Jesus, is the message of Moses, is the message of Ibrahim, is the message of Lut, all the way up to Adam. There is no difference! Let us analyze this statement in the context of the Qur’ān.

The word “Christianity” is a new term and is not mentioned even in the Bible. If you read the four Bibles, you will never encounter the word “Christianity”. “Christianity” is called, in the Qur’ān, Islam. The Qur’ān quotes Jesus as saying: “Who will be my supporters to the way of God?” His disciples answered: “We are your supporters to the way of God; we believe in God, and bear witness that we are *muslims*.”

Let us analyze what Jesus said. In the Arab world, the “Christians” are called *nasāra*. *Nasāra* is an adjective, and not a noun, nor is it the name of a faith. It is a description for the quality of a people and is derived from the verb *na-sa-ra* which means, “to support”. The people who followed Jesus and supported him were called *nasāra*, meaning “the supporters of Jesus”. But the Qur’ān calls these *nasāra* “*muslimūn*”⁵⁷:

“We are your supporters (أَنْصَارُ)

“And bear witness (وَأَشْهَدُ)

“That we are *muslims* — بِأَنَا مُسْلِمُونَ.

So, the people who followed Jesus are called *nasāra* but the name of the faith of Jesus is known, in the Qur’ān, as Islam.

Moses was supposed to be a Jew, as some would have us understand it nowadays, while Pharaoh, who was against Moses, when he was about to drown, is quoted in the Qur’ān as saying: “Now I believe in the God of Moses and Israel, and I declare myself *ana minal muslimeen*.”⁵⁸ He did not say, “I declare myself a Jew.” So where did the terms Jew and Judaism come from? These terms have nothing to do with religion; these

terms connote race. Judah is one of the children of the Prophet Yaqaob⁵⁹, who was the father of Yusuf,⁶⁰ *‘alayhi-s-salaam*, and because the Jews claim that they are the descendants of Judah, they call themselves Jews, and their faith Judaism. So the term “Judaism” which currently denotes a religion, has nothing to do with religion but is related to race.

The message of Moses is referred to in the Qur’ān as Islam, and his followers are called *muslims*.⁶¹ This indicates the Unity of God’s message. All these names and different faiths and different denominations which have proliferated are all inventions of man, and are not related to God in any way. God’s Message is called Islam, and Islam is not limited to us, Muslims, but it is the Message of God to every believer who believes in the Oneness of God.

Other Prophets mentioned in the Qur’ān are also quoted to have said the same thing. For example, when Nuh, peace be upon him, was going to the Ark he said to his people: “and depend upon God if you are Muslims.”⁶²

In the case of Sayyidna Sulayman,⁶³ when he was informed by the hoopoe about the Queen of Sheba, who lived in Yemen, that she had a fantastic throne, but that she and her people worshipped the sun, he invited her to his palace. But before she arrived, he ordered her throne to be brought to his palace. The Qur’ān relates that when she arrived, Sulayman asked her: “Is that your throne?” She said: “It looks like it.” At that Sulayman said:

وَأَوْتَيْنَا الْعِلْمَ مِنْ قَبْلِهَا وَكُنَّا مُسْلِمِينَ

We have been given divine knowledge before her and we were *muslimeen*.” And when the queen entered the court of Solomon’s palace where the floor was made of crystal clear glass, she mistakenly thought that it was an expanse of flowing water. She pulled her robe up so as not to get it wet. Then Sulayman informed her that it was not water but smoothly paved glass. When she became aware of the extraordinary beauty which was something out of this world, then, at that moment of her spiritual awakening, the Queen of Sheba said: “O God, I was sinning against myself by worshipping aught but

⁵⁹ Jacob, also known as Israel

⁶⁰ The Prophet Joseph

⁶¹ 10:90

⁶² I could not find a reference for this in the Qur’ān

⁶³ The Prophet Solomon

⁵⁷ *Muslimūn/Muslimeen* is the plural of *Muslim* (Those who submit or surrender their will to the will of God).

⁵⁸ 10:90: “I am of those who are *muslimeen*”

Thee but now I declare myself a *muslim*, with Sulayman.”⁶⁴

The Qur’ān mentions the village where Sayyidna Lūt⁶⁵ used to live: “For apart from one single house We did not find any *muslim* there.”⁶⁶ This means that the religion of Lūt was Islam.

Even about Ibrahīm,⁶⁷ who is the father of all the Christians and the Jews and the Muslims, the Qur’ān says: “Ibrahīm was not a Christian or a Jew, but was a devoted *muslim*; he was not one of the idolaters.”⁶⁸

Therefore, in the Qur’ān, you find that all the messages which came through the succession of prophets are named Islam. There is no such word as Christianity; there is no such word as Judaism; these are just inventions of man at different times in his history. This means that God’s message is one. All the messengers chosen by God came from the same family. The Qur’ān mentions this⁶⁹ and names twelve of the prophets. God has revealed His message as a series, and every prophet represents one link in that chain of revelation. The message that came through Muhammad was the final part of the series and Muhammad was the last link in the chain of prophets.

Why, then, do we call ourselves Muslims? And why is the word “Islam” applied to that specific part of the heavenly message which came through Muhammad? That is because the final Qur’ānic verse revealed to Muhammad during his last pilgrimage, 80 days before his death, was: “Today have I perfected your religious law for you, and have bestowed upon you the full measure of My blessings, and accepted Islam to be your faith **دِينًا لَكُمْ** **الْإِسْلَامَ** **دِينًا**.” So the message is Islam: it started with Adam and ended with Muhammad. And we, according to our Qur’an, have never heard that Muhammad is in contradiction with Jesus; to the opposite – Muhammad ordered his followers to believe in all those who came before him. He said that they are true messengers of

God. The same with Jesus: he never said Moses was wrong; Moses never said Ibrahīm was wrong; Ibrahīm never said Nuh was wrong. Every one of those messengers praised the one who preceded him, and exhorted his people to believe in the same message. Therefore, although Islam is the name given to the message that came through Muhammad, in fact, all believers in God could be called *muslim* because that is how the Qur’ān refers to every believer. Moreover, there is a hadith: “*man qala la ilaha Illallah dakhala jannah*.” Muhammad uttered that hadith in front of one of his followers whose name is Abu Dharr Al-Ghisaari. The exact translation of this hadith is:

Man - Anyone

Qala - who says

La ilaha Illallah - there is no god but One God

Dakhala l- will go to, or enter;

Jannah - Heaven.

The basic creed of a Muslim is to say *La ilaha Illallah Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah* which means, “There is no god but One God and Muhammad is His Prophet.” But Muhammad himself has said that anyone who will say “*La ilaha Illallah*” will go to heaven even without “*Muhammad-ur Rasoolullah*”. So, Abu Dharr opposed this idea and said to the Prophet: “Even if he commits adultery, and even if he steals *ya Rasoolullah?*” The Prophet answered: “Yes, even in spite of your will.” That’s how the hadith was narrated. And this is supported by the Qur’ānic verse that God will never forgive anyone who will make a partner to him but any sin below that is a subject of forgiveness.

So, when the verse of chapter Qāf says:

كُلُّ كَذَّبَ الرُّسُلَ فَحَقَّ وَعِيدِ *it means that when*

someone denies the message of one prophet he is denying the message of all the prophets, because the message is one and the same, and is referred to as “accepted Islam to be your faith”.

⁶⁴ 27:44

⁶⁵ The Prophet Lot

⁶⁶ 51:36

⁶⁷ The Prophet Abraham

⁶⁸ 3:67

⁶⁹ 4:163-165

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 7 of 9]

Verses 15-18

In the last few weeks, I have talked about *al mukaddibeen* – those who denied the message of their prophets. [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:]

“Long before those who now deny resurrection [the Quraysh] did Noah’s people give the lie to this truth, and so did the folk of Ar-Rass, and the tribes of Thamūd and ‘Ād, and Pharaoh, and Lut’s brethren, and the dwellers of the wooded dales of Madyan, and the people of Tubba’: they all gave the lie to the messengers – and thereupon that whereof I had warned them came true” [50:12-14].

The revelation of those stories had a twofold function: essentially a sort of *tasliyat*-*r-Rasūl*,⁷⁰ *‘alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, as much as to say to him, take it easy; all the prophets who came before you faced the same problems with their people. Secondly, these stories are meant to encourage the Prophets’ contemporaries, and the people of all later generations, until the Day of Judgment, to reflect upon them and learn a lesson from them.

So, the question asked by *al mukaddibeen* is: “What! After we die and become mere dust, shall we be resurrected

again?” “ذَلِكَ رَجْعٌ بَعِيدٌ” – *this is impossible! Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!*” So the kuffar are saying that it is impossible that they will be resurrected, or be given life again after becoming dust. [Imam quotes Arabic and explains:] the Qur’an says to them that God created these human beings for the first time from nothing: was that difficult for God? In the same way, God is able to revive these bodies and give them life again after they die.

In the estimation of human beings, if one does something for the first time one is able to do it for the second time even more easily, right? So, what about God? The Qur’an is saying that the universe and human beings were brought into existence for the first time; did human beings see that there was any trouble in establishing that creation? [Imam quotes] “Could We, then, be thought of as being worn out by the first creation? Nay – but some people are still lost in doubt about the possibility of a new creation” [50:15].

The next verse is one where there is difference of opinion among the ulama.⁷¹ [Imam quotes Arabic. The

⁷⁰ To comfort and encourage the Prophet in times of anguish

⁷¹ Scholars

translation is:]

“Now, verily it is We who have created man (*khalaq nal insaana*), and We know even what his innermost Soul whispers to him: for We are closer to him (*nahnu aqrabu*) than his neck-vein (*ilayhi min hablil wareed*)” [50:16].

It means that He knows what we reveal and what we conceal. *Nahnu aqrabu* means “We are closer”. The word *qareeb* (from *aqrab*) means “closer” and we normally say “this is *qareeb* (closer) than this; this is *ba‘eed* (further) from this.” The ulama debated that verse and said it does not mean that God’s closeness or nearness is related to a place, or to space, but it is related to *al-‘ilm* or the Knowledge. In other words, “We are closer to him than his neck-vein” means God knows more about man than he knows about himself.

“We created man (*khalaq nal insaana*).” There is a difference between “created” and “invented”. Invention is the assembling of material that is already in existence. For example, when one chemical is added to another chemical and it changes into something new. That is called invention. The word *khalaqa* (created) is deeper than this. It means something came into existence from nothing. When God says, “Verily We have created man”, we can yet say that this is a sort of invention, also, because another Qur’anic verse says, “We have created man from a piece of clay.” But there are two considerations here: the clay was created by God in the first place, and, secondly, and more importantly, the “creation”, in fact, does not result simply from molding that piece of clay, but becomes so only with the insertion, at a specific stage, of a second element – the Soul – of which we don’t have any knowledge. It is this element – the Soul – that puzzles human beings and will continue to do so until the end of this life. We don’t know anything about the Soul; no one can research it; no one knows where it is located in the body – it is in every cell of the body. According to our understanding as human beings, the Soul (*Ruh*) of every human being is of the Spirit of God because the Qur’an says “وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ” – and breathed into him something of His Spirit.” The word “Rūh”, even in the original Arabic, has two different connotations depending upon the context in which it is used.

The Angel Jibreel,⁷² whom the Christians call the Holy Spirit, is referred to in the Qur’an as *Ar-Ruh*. When the Qur’an talks about the revelation of the Qur’an itself it says,

“The *Rūh* came with the Qur’an and engraved it on your heart.” So the word “*Ruh*” in this verse means the Angel Jibreel. The other meaning of the word “*Ruh*” is the spirit, which is transferred into an infant at a certain stage of pregnancy to make the fetus into a complete human being. These stages are spelled in the Qur’an in a very, very precise way: 1. “We have created man from a piece of clay” referring to the creation of the first man – Adam. Then, referring to the creation of subsequent generations of human beings after Adam, the verse says: 2. We made them from a drop of sperm deposited in *qaraar makeen*. 3. From the sperm, then, God creates ‘*alaqah* – a piece of thick blood. 4. The stage after that is described as the conversion of the thick clot of blood into *mudghah* which is a piece of flesh the size of a morsel. 5. Then, this *mudghah* is transformed into the skeleton of a human being. 6. Then these bones are clothed with flesh. 7. Then it reaches the final stage: *thumma unsha’naho khalqan aakhar* – it has become a new creation in that the soul has entered that fetus. When you analyze this description of the Qur’an, and compare it with a current text of embryology, it doesn’t need a scientist to see that Muhammad could not utter these words, 1400 years ago, from his own knowledge, since we are only just discovering these things in the 20th century. It means, logically, that Muhammad was uttering words revealed to him by God, because no one knew these things at that time, except God, who revealed them to Muhammad.

This verse has an impact on the issue of abortion in Islam. In our countries, you find that when you mention the word “abortion”, right away some people will quote the Qur’anic verse “Do not kill your children for fear of poverty. It is We who provide sustenance for them as well as for you. Verily, the killing of them is a great sin,”⁷³ but that is because they appreciate some verses on their face value. When you go deep into the description of the stages of creation, you find, as some ulama who are studying this subject say, that abortion is not killing until the final stage which is described as *thumma unsha’naho khalqan aakhar* (then We created them into a new human being). According to this school of thought, as long as the pregnancy is in the stages of “sperm, ‘*alaqah*, *mudghah*, bones, and bones clothed with flesh” it is not “*khalkan aakhar*”; it is not a full human being. And, as a result, they say that until that point any abortion is permissible. This is approximately 120 days after conception. The other school of thought says,

⁷² Gabriel

⁷³ 17:31

“No abortion, period. It is prohibited as of the first minute, since there is the prospect that a human being will be born.” This shows how a verse like that can provoke divergent views in different people.

The next verse – number 17 – has been interpreted in various ways: Ibn Katheer talked about it in a certain way, while At-Tabari talked about it in some other way, and so on. [Imam quotes the verse and explains:] “*Yatalaqqā⁷⁴ al-mutalaqqiyān⁷⁵*” – in the context of this verse it is understood as “*Yatalaqqā al-mutalaqqiyān* – one on the right and one on the left.”

Most of the tafseers⁷⁶ say that *al-mutalaqqiyān* means two angels, one sitting on the right shoulder, and one sitting on the left shoulder, recording the deeds of the person. The one on the right is writing the good deeds (*hasanaath*), while the one on the left is writing the bad deeds (*sayyi'aat*). And this is why, in some areas of the Muslim world, if you put on your left shoe first, you will be in violation because “the left is indicative of the sinful things”. Lately, based upon this type of thinking, there was a little revolution in Pakistan, in some areas of the Frontier, where the ulama⁷⁷ took over. The Islamic party won the election⁷⁸ and upon taking control said: “We have to carry out the *Shari'ah*⁷⁹ because this is a Muslim country”. You know the cars in Pakistan drive on the left, like in England, not on the right, like in the US, here. We, here, are more Muslim! The first law the ulama issued was that driving a car on the left is haram,⁸⁰ so, anybody found driving on the left was to be fined or jailed or, maybe, even have his head chopped off!

The people who read about the law in the newspaper, and those who heard about it and could understand the implication, switched to the right side on the roads, but those who could not [and most people there are illiterate], continued to drive on the left, and so they had several head-on crashes that day. Hospitals were full in one day. The ulama realized that their edict was wrong so they dismantled the law after one week! The people who were aware of the new law the week

before, but had not heard that it had been repealed, continued to drive on the right, and, consequently, had numerous head-on collisions the next day! That is how the Muslim mentality works. We pick on insignificant things and begin to enforce it as “Islam”. This is the reason we Muslims fail, because we don't plan, and if we want *Shari'ah*, we want it in 24 hours! Islam is not like that.

Muhammad, ‘*alayhi-s-salato wa-s-salaam*, supported by Divine power, established the *Shari'ah* in 23 years, step by step. Do you know, some people, to this day, say that Islam does not prohibit slavery because there is nothing in the Qur'an explicitly prohibiting slavery. The reason the Qur'an did not issue a categorical injunction such as “Slavery is prohibited immediately” is because the economy of the entire known world, at that time, was based upon the institution of slavery. Therefore, Islam took a gradual approach to the abolition of slavery, because, if it were to be dismantled in 24 hours, it would have resulted in the dismantling of the State and the whole fabric of society; there would have been chaos all around.

Nowadays, we want Islam to become our Constitution and that would be fantastic if it could happen. It indicates that there is nostalgia for a revival of the olden times when the people were secure; they lived in a sort of universal brotherhood where there was no greed, no cheating, and no lying. It would be fantastic if we could reach that stage. But such a state does not come about in one day or one night. It requires education of the populace so that a whole generation can be prepared for it. Nothing related to religion can be instituted by force. It has to come through education. The advantage of Islam is that it emanates from the heart and that is how Islam – all of it, the total Islam – should be.

You know, starting with me, when we file our tax returns by the April deadline, we look for every which way we can to minimize the tax owed, but when it comes to zakah payments *YOU* make them voluntarily and without fuss. And notice, here, in this mosque, they are coming by mail. All that came by mail.⁸¹ Why – because it is coming from the heart. What can we do with the person who will not pay? We cannot force him. So, if we are to make *Shari'ah* the law, we have to plan for it. It is as if when some country is desirous to have train service, then, it has to build the railroad first. You cannot

⁷⁴ Literal translation: “To receive and record”

⁷⁵ Literal translation: “The two receivers”

⁷⁶ Qur'anic exegesis

⁷⁷ In this special context the “ulama” are a class of men who are more likely uneducated, and who are self-appointed religious leaders

⁷⁸ In Dir district

⁷⁹ Islamic Divine law

⁸⁰ That which is forbidden or sinful

⁸¹ Imam is pointing to the chart of a financial barometer on the wall showing the mercury at the \$160,000.00 level

have trains without a railroad. And this takes years.

So, when our friends say that an angel is sitting here and writing *hasanaath*, and an angel is sitting here and writing *sayyi'aat*, all these are just interpretations, because, if we look at this verse in the context of the preceding verse, we find that this explanation is questionable. The preceding verse says, "Verily, it is We who have created man, and We know what his innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his neck-vein." Why does God need the angels to write if God knows everything? What will the angels be writing for? In fact, Al-Allusi, in his commentary on the Qur'an says that God does not need the angels to write, but it is expressed in this way because this is a language that human beings can understand, and the purpose is to sensitize them that a person is responsible for every action and every word. Yet, one of the *mofassireen*⁸² went even further and said that every human being has *four* angels looking after him: two are responsible for him during the day and two are responsible for him during the night. That is fantastic! But a person is sleeping at night, so what could he be doing? And what about the angels of the day – are they tired, or are they sick? *As Muslims we need to review our understanding of Islam. What we need is to interpret, and translate, and explain our Qur'an in the language which suits the human mind of the 20th-century, without getting out of the framework of Islam.* No one denies that prayer is obligatory; no one denies that fasting is an obligation because these make up the framework, but when it comes to these additional and small things, we need not elaborate upon them and put them in a form which sometimes makes people laugh at us. We have to understand the Qur'an in terms of current knowledge and ideas, especially since we are living in a highly technological environment. If your talk does not make sense to people they will not believe it. You have to utilize commonsense and logic within the framework of Islam because the Qur'an is applicable in all times and in all places. It means that we can apply it and explain it in the terms of our present century and in terms of the place where we are residing.

"*Yatalaqqā al-mutalaqqiyāan one on the right and one on the left...*" It refers to the good and the evil desires inside every human being; it means that everyone is accountable, not only for his actions and not only for what he *says*, but his intentions, too. Intentions emanate from the heart and no one knows what is in the heart except the Creator of that heart. In other

words, every word that man utters, every intention that he conceives in his heart is being observed by God, and, moreover, his own conscience acts like a continuous internal court judging him. This explanation for *yatalaqqā al-mutalaqqiyāan* makes more sense, to some people, than what we read in our old tafseers about the angels of the right and the angels of the left. This idea of the right and the left is emphasized to such an extent by some people that, in some mosques, even in America, I have seen signs saying: "Please enter with your right foot, please leave with your left foot." In the area where the shoes are removed, there are signs saying, "Start by putting on your right shoe first." We are busy harping on angels writing the *hasanaat* and angels writing *as-sayyi'aat*, the right is good and the left is bad, making big issues of little things. And when non-Muslim Americans enter our mosques and encounter such things, they must think what stupid people we are because of this nonsensical talk.

Intention! Man will be rewarded and punished according to his *intentions*. That is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, said: "Actions are to be judged according to intention." And the intention – no one knows about it but God. All these things of starting with your right foot first, putting hijab, and growing your beard are all appearances and do not enter into the calculations of Judgment Day. What affects the balance is what is inside you. A lot of people pay charity but their intention has nothing to do with charity; their intention is to show-off: I am generous; I am rich. There are some people who pray but only to be seen and their intention is not to fulfill their obligation, but to show people that they are praying. There are any number of such things that people do, but with ulterior motives. Ultimately, therefore, it depends upon the heart and your intention and that is why the Prophet, peace be upon him, said in another hadith: "There is a little piece of flesh inside the body which, if it is good, the whole body will be good, and if it is bad, the whole body will be bad." He meant the heart. In our present state of knowledge, we believe that our brain is the seat of deliberate reflection and thinking. But, in fact, we find that the Qur'an always refers to the *heart* as the organ of conscious reflection: "Don't they have hearts to reflect with?"

Now, some people might conclude that the Qur'an is mistaken because the brain is the seat of rational thinking, not the heart. Normally, however, we know that the Qur'an cannot be understood properly if taken literally, and we know, too, that it uses metaphorical language frequently. When the

⁸² Exegetes

Sura Qāf. Verses 15-18

Qur'an states "Don't they have hearts to reflect with?" it is using metaphorical language. But, still, it makes one wonder: what about the people who are "brain-dead"? They cannot think rationally with their brains although they are technically alive. Maybe, they are able to reflect with their hearts, but, we don't know; and we cannot know, since God is the only one who knows what you think in your heart. However, as I have said before, the question "Is the seat of rational thinking in the head or in the heart?" is still not settled and is hotly debated in theological circles.

[The translation of the verses explained above is:] "Now, verily, it is We who have created man, and We know what his innermost self whispers within him: for We are closer to him than his neck-vein. And so, whenever the two demands of his nature – the two fundamental motive forces of good and evil – come face to face, contending from the right and from the left, not even a word can he utter but there is a watcher with him, ever-present" [50:16-18].

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 8 of 9]

Verses 19-35

The next verse is addressing the people who were earlier quoted as saying, “What! After we die and become mere dust, shall we be resurrected again?” [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“And then the twilight of death brings with it the realization of the full truth (*Ja-at sakrat-ul mawth-bil haqq*) – that very thing, O man, from which thou wouldst always look away! And in the end the trumpet (*soor*) of resurrection will be blown: that will be the Day whereof warning had been given” [50:19-20].

جَاءَتْ سَكْرَةُ الْمَوْتِ بِالْحَقِّ : means, O you human beings, now you are experiencing the very thing you used to deny before: death and the inevitable realization of the Truth; this is the promised Day, the Day about which every messenger of God talked, and warned his people, saying that your life in this world is limited – *whatever* the length of it – it is short, and a day will come. . . . A Day will come when you will be accountable for your deeds during this life.

Let us analyze every action in our lives in a logical way. We find that for every action, there is either a reward or a punishment: if you are a student in a school, at the end of every

year you either succeed or fail based upon what you have done. If you studied your lessons well, you will succeed; if you studied better, you will get an A; if you studied less you get a B, C, D or fail. So there is reward and there is punishment.

If you are a farmer and take care of your land, you'll have crops in varying degrees of productivity. You could have a good crop, you could have a small one, or you could have a medium one. It is exactly like the grades A, B, and C that a student receives. So, what about the grades for one's whole life on this earth? Are we going to live and die and everyone will be equal, and that's it? Do you suppose that everyone will be equal – those who did good, who were upright and honest will be equal to those who did bad deeds? It is impossible! The nature of life is that there is reward and punishment in everything. Therefore, life as a whole will be accounted for before God. And the Qur'an uses language that we understand. For example, the word *soor* in the above verse means “a horn”. In the army, when they wake up the soldiers in the morning, [known as reveille], they blow a bugle. When they retire for the night, they blow a bugle. The Qur'an is describing the Day of Resurrection using similar language. The

Qur'an states in chapter Az-Zumar⁸³ that there will be "two blowings in the horn". With the first one, every living being on this earth and in the sky will die. After the second blowing, every dead will be revived. Notice what the ulama of old said about this verse to explain it. They said that when the second blowing of the horn takes place, an angel will call: [Imam quotes Arabic. The translation is:] "O bodies that are torn to pieces, O hair that is scattered, O bones that are decayed, indeed, Allah orders you to gather for the Day of Judgment." That is an elaboration. Who told them that? Who can say that someone will be calling and saying that? This is wrong. Even the meaning of the Qur'anic verse itself ["two blowings in the horn"] is not the literal meaning when it is read in Arabic; this is just one example of the Qur'an talking to the human mind in a language which it can understand. Do we need someone to blow a horn in order to die, and then with the next blowing of the horn, we'll wake up? No. This is metaphorical speech and it means that it is ordained by God that every one on this earth will die and that the Power who created the people for the first time will simply recreate them for the second time. It is exactly like when God says "*kun fa-yakoon*" which means that when God intends a thing, He will say, "Be! And it is."

Other examples of the Qur'an talking to the human mind in a language that it understands are: [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"And on the Day of Resurrection We shall bring forth for him a record (*kitab*) which he will find wide open; and he will be told: 'Read this thy record! Sufficient is thine own self today to make out thine account.'" ⁸⁴

Here it is the idea of *kitab*, a concept human beings understand. Your deeds are registered in a book.

The *qalam* (pen) is mentioned in two separate places. [Imam quotes:]

"Consider the pen and all that they write therewith." ⁸⁵

"Read! In the name of thy Sustainer, who has created – created man out of a germ-cell! Read – for thy Sustainer is the Most Bountiful One who has taught man the use of the pen." ⁸⁶ This was the *first* verse of the Qur'an to be revealed and it mentions two things related to education: "Read", and "the

use of the pen" – the tool of education.

[Imam quotes Arabic verse. The *literal* translation is:]

"And every human being will come on the Day of Judgment with his escort (*saa'iq*) and his witness (*shaheed*)." [50:21].

[Alternatively, it can be translated as: "Every human being will come forward with that which drives (*saa'iq*) and that which bears witness (*shaheed*)."]

The word *saa'iq* in Arabic language could be translated into English as "driver". *Saa'iq-us sayyaa* means "the driver of the car". It could also be translated as "escort". For example, "the police is escorting the thief" and in this context the word has the connotation that the escort is *leading* the person. In our old tafeers, "*saa'iq*" is interpreted as "escorted by an angel"; "*shaheed*" is interpreted as another angel who will bear witness to what that person did in his life – good or bad.

But why would we need an angel to be a witness when other Qur'anic verses say "On the Day when their tongues, their hands, and their feet will bear witness against them as to their actions."⁸⁷ "Their hearing and their sight and their very skins will bear witness against them, speaking of what they were doing. And they will ask their skins, 'Why did you bear witness against us?' – and these will reply: 'God, who gives speech to all things, has given speech to us as well: for He it is who has created you in the first instance – and unto Him you are now brought back.'" ⁸⁸ So, if the parts of the body will be talking and witnessing to what we have done, then we don't need an angel or "*shaheed*" as a witness. We have some other explanations for this verse which make more sense: that every human being will come forward with his *saa'iq* or that which drives – i.e. his instinctive urges – and *shaheed* or that which bears witness, which is his conscious mind. [Imam quotes next verse and explains:]

When man will come forward with his *saa'iq* and his *shaheed*, he will be told: You forgot that there is a Day of Judgment; you were semi-asleep; you did not think there would ever come a day when you would be accountable before your Creator. Today, We removed that *hijab* which covered your eyes and prevented you from seeing the truth; covered your ears so you could not hear the truth, and covered your heart so you could not *think* of the truth. Then, the next phrase is metaphorical language. "*Basar*" means "eye" and

⁸³ Chapter 39

⁸⁴ 17:13-14

⁸⁵ 68:1

⁸⁶ 96: 1-4

⁸⁷ 24:24

⁸⁸ 41:20-21

“*hadeed*” means “iron or steel”. If we translate it literally it would mean “We have removed the covering and your eyes now are made of steel.” It does not make sense.

Metaphorically, the word *hadeed* (steel) is used to indicate power. It is the most powerful metal about which the Qur’an itself said: “We bestowed upon you from on high the ability to make use of iron, in which there is awesome power as well as a source of benefits for man. . . .”⁸⁹ Weapons, guns, and tanks made of steel kill and destroy life and property, while other objects made of steel can be used beneficially, for example, tractors, cars, and trains. So, the meaning of this verse is that on the Day of Judgment, it will be said to the person who denied that Day: You never thought that this Day will come and, as a result, you denied it, but today We have removed the covering from your eyes so ‘your sight today is like a spear’ – it is very powerful: you see everything, you see the facts, you see the truth.

So man’s *qareen* will say: “This it is that has been ever present with me.” Man’s *qareen* will say: “O our Sustainer! It was not I that led him astray, but he had gone far astray of his own accord” [50:23 and 27].

What is *qareen*? It means “companion”. In our normal Arabic language when we talk about a man who is going to get married, or a woman who is going to get married, we say, *‘aqdu qaraan*. *‘Aqdu qaraan* means this man and this woman will be companions to share a life. The man can be called *qareen* for the woman while the woman will be the *qareenah* for the man. But, there is another type of *qareen* as well which everybody has – married or not. That *qareen* is called *shaytān*. There is *shaytān* from among the human beings as well as from the jinn.⁹⁰ Sometimes we picture that *shaytān* as if he is a spirit or a jinn, but *shaytān* or the devil could be a human being. *Anyone or anything* which can take you away from the truth could be called *shaytān* – it doesn’t matter if it is *jinn* (an invisible being) or *ins* (a human being). The Qur’an said: “We have given them companions who made the world fascinating to them and led them astray.”⁹¹ So *shaytān* is a symbol for evil. Man is created of good (his moral consciousness and reason), and of evil (his instinctive urges and unrestrained appetites). So the evil part of him could be called the devilish part, and the good part could be called the angelic

part. And that will take us back to verse 21: “And every human being will come on the Day of Judgment with his escort (*saa’iq*) and his witness (*shaheed*)” which means “Every human being will come forward with that which drives (*saa’iq* – his instinctive urges) and that which bears witness (*Shaheed* – his conscious mind).”

Some of the earlier ulama of Islam who explain those verses have said that the *qareen* is the angel who was with the person during his lifetime, while another group of ulama disagree; they think it is not the angel, but the devil. The former group’s interpretation is: on the Day of Judgment, while the person is under questioning, the angel (*qareen*) will be telling Allah that he tried his best not to allow the person to commit any action which will be considered bad or disobedient. But the latter group of ulama says that the *qareen* must be the devil, because the devil normally leads people astray, not the angels, and, moreover, the angels are always obedient and incapable of sinning, and therefore, they have no need to defend themselves on the Day of Judgment.

So, man and his *qareen* will be arguing in front of God on the Day of Judgment. [Imam quotes Arabic verses. The translation is:]

“And every human being will come forward with his erstwhile inner urges and his conscious mind and will be told: ‘Indeed, unmindful hast thou been of this Day of Judgment; but now We have lifted from thee thy veil, and sharp is thy sight today.

And one part of him [his *qareen* – the good part, his moral consciousness or reason] will say: ‘This it is that has been ever-present with me!’

Man’s other self [his *qareen* – the evil part] will say: ‘O our Sustainer! It was not I that lead his conscious mind into evil – nay, but it had gone far astray of its own accord’ [50:23 and 50:27].

God will respond: [Imam quotes] “Contend not before Me, O you sinners, for I gave you a forewarning of this Day of Reckoning. *The judgment passed by Me shall not be altered; but never do I do the least wrong to my creatures!*” [50: 28-29].

Allah says His promise *will never be changed*; what He has decided is *not a subject of change*. This brings us to a very important point.

Two days from today, the month of Rajab will come to an end and the month of Sha’baan will start. The 15th night of Sha’baan is called, in Arabic, *Laylatu nisf Sha’baan*, and, in

⁸⁹ 57:25

⁹⁰ 6:112

⁹¹ 41:25

Urdu, they call it *Shab-bi-beraat*. The people celebrate that night by making a special type of *du'a*.⁹² But we should know that there is no warrant for it in Islam because when we consider the Qur'anic verse before us, "My promise", or, "My decision will never be changed" we find that during this night the *du'a* the people are making is exactly opposite to what God is saying: they are praying to God to change for them what is "written" for them in the coming year. They go to the mosque after Maghrib prayer and make *du'a* like this: O God, if you have written me in the Mother Book (Umm-ul-Kitab) as a poor man, or a bad man, or a sick man... change this and write me again as a good man, a happy man, a rich man, and so on. This is exactly what they are concentrating upon during that night when they make that *du'a* between the Maghrib and 'Isha prayers. In actuality, the people, in their *du'a*, are asking God to change things which are "written" – if we utilize that term – or, to change the Destiny. The Qur'anic verse above refutes that idea completely. So, if you study deeply, you will not find any authentic hadith, or the Qur'an supporting or providing any grounds for celebration of the night of the middle of Sha'baan.

The next verse [50:30] is widely misunderstood also.

[Imam quotes the verse. The translation is:]

"On that Day We will ask Hell, 'Art thou filled?' – and it will answer, **وَتَقُولُ هَلْ مِنْ مَزِيدٍ** 'Is there yet more for me?'"

Wa taqūlo hal mim mazeed: From the point of view of the Arabic language, this verse can mean two things. One school of thought interprets this verse as: "*Jahannam*⁹³ replies: 'No, bring me more.'" The verse *could* mean that. The other school of thought interprets it exactly the opposite of the other explanation: "*Jahannam* replies: 'Is there any more, O God? That is enough!'" That shows the depth of the Qur'an and the challenge to the human mind. We are explaining the Qur'an today in a different way from the people who explained it a hundred years ago, and people who will come 100 years from now will explain it in ways different from us. This difference in explanations is based upon the body of knowledge which the people possess at that time, and that is why the Qur'an will never be obsolete and it is applicable in every time and every place.

⁹² Supplication to God

⁹³ Hell

[Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:] "And on that day paradise will be brought within the sight of the God-conscious, and will no longer be far away" [50:31].

After talking about *jahannam*, the Qur'an moves to the other side. That verse indicates, to me, that *jannah* or paradise is not something, or some place, where the people will go, but it will come *nearer to them*. Then, the sura describes the heaven that is promised to the *muttaqeen* or pious people, and to "all those who will repent and be steadfast in their repentance" (*awwaab hafeedh*). The word *awwaab* in this verse means "*raaji*" in Arabic; it means "the one who will come back"; in other words, the one who was deviating from the rules of God but now he has come back to them. So *awwab* means the one who repents his past misdeeds and comes back to the way of God. *Hafeedh* means he is steadfast to his *awwab* (his repentance).

It is very popular among people to say, "I have made *tawbah*." *Tawbah* means repentance, and what they really mean is that they will commit all the sins, then make *tawbah*, then go back and commit more sins, then have another *tawbah* and so on. But the recommendation of the Qur'an is to make your repentance or *tawbah* continuous – *awwaab hafeedh*. It means that, after you repent for the past, and start a new life, then, guard (*hafeedh*) and protect that repentance by continuing on the new life; be steadfast in that new life.

[Imam quotes next verse. The translation is:] "Everyone who stood in awe of God although He is beyond the reach of human perception (*al ghayb*), and who has come unto Him with a heart full of contrition" [50:33].

The word *al ghayb* (beyond the reach of human perception) is opposite to the scientific theories of nowadays. A scientist normally would like to see and observe. If the thing is not observable, he says it is not there. So, therefore, when you believe in something that you cannot see or observe, that constitutes the highest type of belief and this is one of the foremost attributes of the believers or the pious people (*muttaqeen*) described at the start of the Qur'an. *Al ghayb* sometimes is not observable by some people but "observable" by others who deduce the presence of that *al ghayb* from some external manifestations. Say, for example, you don't see butter in milk, but we believe that milk has butter in it. We cannot observe cheese in milk, but still we believe that there is cheese in milk. We cannot see electricity but we see its manifestation on pushing a button and the bulb lights up, indicating the electric power in the wire. Therefore, it does not mean that

anything you don't see does not exist. It is the highest type of belief to believe in something you cannot observe, and, as a result, it is one of the foremost attributes of the pious people. Anyone who believes in Allah, (the *Al Ghayb*) and comes to Him with his heart full of sincere repentance, then, what will be his reward? He will be told: "Enter Paradise in peace. This is the Day of Eternity – the start of the eternal life."

[The above verses are now presented in sequence to put them in perspective.]

"On that Day We will ask Hell, 'Art thou filled?' – and it will answer, 'Is there yet more for me?'"

"And on that Day paradise will be brought within the sight of the God-conscious, and will no longer be far away; and they will be told:"

"This is what you were promised – promised unto everyone who was wont to turn to God and to keep Him always in mind – everyone who stood in awe of the Most Gracious although He is beyond the reach of human perception, and who has come unto Him with a heart full of contrition."

"Enter this paradise in peace; this is the Day on which life abiding begins!"

The next verse reminds me of my childhood. When we were children and we read a Qur'anic verse such as [Imam quotes] "In that paradise they shall have whatever they may desire – but there is yet more with Us (*ziyāda*)", our teachers

would explain it by telling us that if we want grapes, right away they will come to you; if you want a banana, right away it will come to you. . . . That's how they explained it – in a language that children could understand. But such verses are called *ayat-ul-targheeb* – verses which attract; they make you want to do those actions which promise to bring you all those good things.

But, in addition to everything you want, you will yet have more (*ziyāda*). Another Qur'anic verse elsewhere states: "For those who were charitable in this life they will have "*al husna*" (Paradise) and more (*ziyāda*)."
In Islamic philosophy, some ulama say "*ziyāda*" means they will "see God." But, in my view, it represents another instance of *ayat-ul-targheeb* because you cannot see God since He is not limited, He has no shape, no space; He is not an identity surrounded by something so that you can see Him. He is not a personality bound to a time or a place, so how will you see Him? This is a very, very big issue in Islamic philosophy and students study it for one year in the school of theology. But this shows that there were differences in opinion even among the old scholars.

The description of heaven that I, personally, like the best is the one the Prophet quoted when he was asked about the nature of heaven. The Prophet said: "God says: 'I have readied for My righteous servants what no eye has ever seen, and no ear has ever heard, and no heart of man has ever conceived.'"

Sura Qāf

Imam A. M. Khattab

[Part 9 of 9]

Verses 36-45

The next verse shows you the beauty of the Qur'ānic language, because, although it is a repetition, you don't feel that it is redundant or boring; rather, it seems to be something new and refreshing. Basically, it is a reminder and talks about all the people who denied life after death: Pharaoh, the people of 'Ād, the Thamūd, the people of Ar-Rass etc. In effect, it says, remember how many "*qarn*" or people We have destroyed before them. They were more powerful in money, in arms, in children, and they traveled widely for commerce and for war. Did any of this save them from death? And nothing will save them from being resurrected after death. The word *qarn*, which is used in this verse, has two meanings in the Arabic language. It could mean, literally, "a century", and it could mean "horn", like that of an ox, for example. Metaphorically the word *qarn* means "generation".

The ulama have interpreted this verse "Remember how many *qarn* We destroyed before them" in various ways. One group of ulama says *qarn* means "time" in the sense that the people of Thamūd, or the people of 'Ād, occupied a certain generation or a certain span of time. The other group of ulama says *qarn* means exactly that – the horn of a cow or an ox: it is

the foremost part of the body and is indicative of a war between right and wrong. [Imam quotes Arabic verse. The translation is:]

"And how many a generation have We destroyed before those who now deny the truth – people of greater might than theirs –: but when Our chastisement befell them, they became wanderers on the face of the earth, seeking no more than a place of refuge."

"In this, behold, there is indeed a reminder for everyone whose heart is wide-awake – that is everyone who lends ear with a conscious mind" [50:36-37].

So, the Qur'an is telling us that in these verses there is a reminder for anyone who has a heart, sight, and hearing. These are the faculties that assimilate knowledge and cause understanding and reasoning.

Next, we come to a very important point in verse number 38: [Imam quotes] "We have indeed created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days and no weariness could ever touch Us." The Qur'an states that God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and you find the same statement in the Bible and the Torah even as they exist today. But, although all three faiths believe in the same theory,

there is a very essential point that distinguishes the Muslims from the Christians and Jews. And, although a difference exists, we, the Muslims, fall into the same mistake as the Christians and the Jews. In the Bible and in the Torah it is written: “God created the sky and the earth in six days and” – they added – “He rested on the seventh day”, whereas the Qur’an states “We have indeed created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days and *no weariness could ever touch Us*.” The message of Islam was revealed while Judaism and Christianity were prevalent, and because the Torah and the Bible had the identical statement about creation but with the addition of “He rested on the seventh day”, this verse of the Qur’an came as a correction, and as an answer to what is written in the Bible and the Torah.

On the basis of this verse, found in the Bible and the Torah, the Christians and Jews say God relaxed on the seventh day. He took a holiday. He was very tired; so He relaxed. It happens that the Christians believe that the start of creation was on a Monday: Monday through Saturday God was working hard, created the universe and by the time He was done, He was tired, and it being Sunday, He relaxed. The Jews say He started creating the universe on Sunday and finished on Friday, so they take Saturday as a holiday, and they relax as God relaxed. As a result, the Jews don’t do anything on Saturday. They don’t even drive a car. Similarly, the Christians are not supposed to do anything on Sunday. We don’t get that feeling, here, in the United States, that the Christians take Sunday as a day of complete rest, because the dollar now has become god and all the stores are open on Sundays. But, cross the border to Canada and you will find everything is at a standstill; not a single store is open because they are very good Christians.

That Qur’ānic verse came to indicate that the Muslims are different: we agree on the first part of the verse [that God created the sky and the earth and all that is in between in six days] but not the second part. On the basis of this verse, we have no relaxation. But, what about Friday? It is observed as a holiday in most Muslim countries. It is not supposed to be. The Qur’an says clearly that the significance of Friday lies solely in that the noon prayer (*Al Jum’ah*) *has to be performed in congregation*. The rest of the 35 prayers of the week can be prayed in congregation or they could be prayed individually, but the *Jum’ah* – the noon prayer of Friday – *has to be in congregation*. This is stipulated in the Qur’anic verse in Chapter Al Jum’ah which says: “O you who believe, when the call to prayer is sounded on the day of congregation, hasten to

the remembrance of God, and leave all worldly commerce: this is for your own good, if you but knew it. And when the prayer is ended, disperse freely on earth and seek the provisions of God” – earn your living, in other words. It means, O Muslims, you are not like the Jews, and you are not like the Christians: the seventh day of the week is also a working day. All that is required of a Muslim is to close his business, perform the *Jum’ah* prayer, and go back to his business after the *Jum’ah* prayer. So Friday is not a holiday in the sense that the Christians and the Jews understand their holidays. They take a holiday and relax, because, according to their Bible and Torah, “God rested on the seventh day”. The Qur’ān says God does not tire: “No weariness could ever touch Us.” He needs no rest or relaxation. Sometimes, mistakenly, or, out of ignorance, we call Friday our “holy day”. If we call it “holy” because we pray *Jum’ah*, then it may be acceptable to use that term, but if we use “holy” to mean that it is a day on which we *don’t work*, then it is wrong.

Now we come back again to using our brain: “We created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days.” What is the meaning of “day”? How do we interpret the word “day”? *One* day, if we use the literal meaning in the Arabic language, could mean one of two things: 1) A day could be from sunrise to sunset (the daylight hours – *nahar*). 2) Or, a day, in the Arabic language, means one day and one night i.e. 24 hours.

How are we to understand the term “day”? Does it mean that God created the skies and the earth in 24 hours multiplied by six, or what? We have to utilize our brain here. Normally, we say the day is 24 hours, and it is composed of the light (day) and the dark (night), although, strictly speaking, the “24-hour-day” is not scientifically correct. If we go to the North Pole or South Pole, we find the “day” is six months and the “night” is six months. The “day” of the moon is different; the “day” of the planet Venus is different, and so on. Here, the modern ulama, at least, say that “day” means “a period of time” or “a span of time”. This span or period of time could be millions of years – geologic time – if it is considered in relationship to the Creation. There are Qur’ānic verses which will make this explanation of the concept of time somewhat easier for us to understand. For example, “One day of your God is like 1000 years of what you calculate.”⁹⁴ Another verse in the Qur’ān refers to the Day of Judgment as “A Day which

⁹⁴ 32:5

is equal to 50,000 years.”⁹⁵ So, is one day equal to 1000 years or 50,000 years? The ulama understand this to mean that a “day” is equal to a span of time covering an unknown number of years that could range from thousands to millions of years. If we consider what science is telling us, nowadays, it supports this idea. According to current scientific research, this universe originally was formed of gas and it has gone through stages of evolution. In one stage of its evolution it was gas (helium). With the passage of time, it solidified and formed the solar system. Then this solar system was fragmented to form the moon, and the sun, and the stars. I am not saying that the Qur’ān talked about this specifically, but, at least, we have some references in the Qur’an which will invite Muslims scientists to think and to research. For example, we have a whole chapter in the Qur’ān known as Chapter Ad-Dukhān – chapter of “The Smoke”. And we have a verse in Chapter Fussilat which says: [Imam quotes in Arabic] – that is a verse I cannot understand, and I cannot explain. It needs space scientists to analyze these words and to put them in the context of science. [The translation of the verse is:]

“Moreover, He comprehended in His design the skies, which were yet but smoke; and He it is who said to them and to the earth ‘Come into being both of you, willingly or unwillingly!’ – to which both responded, ‘We do come in willing obedience.’ And He it is who decreed that they become seven heavens in two days and imparted unto each heaven its duty and function. And We adorned the skies nearest to the earth with lights, and made them secure: such is the ordaining of the Almighty, the All-Knowing” [41:11]. Such a Qur’ānic verse is beyond the ken of the ulama of religion. It needs scholars from different disciplines to sit together and analyze it and to decipher at least part of its meaning. And what brought us to the discussion of all this? That one little Qur’ānic verse in Chapter Qāf, “We have indeed created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days.” Thus the Qur’ān complicates the challenge even more: Chapter Fussilat states He made seven skies in two days – *seven skies in two days* – while Chapter Qāf says, “We have indeed created the skies and the earth and all that is between them in six days.” So what is the difference between “the skies” and “the skies and the earth and all that is between them”? This invites one to think.

If you remember we said, in the beginning, that this

chapter was revealed as an answer to the people who disbelieved in life after death, and the Resurrection: “What! After we die and become mere dust, shall we be resurrected again? That is impossible! Such a return seems far-fetched indeed!” [Imam quotes] *اصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ* means, be patient with whatever they may say and don’t pay attention to what they say about you. What did these deniers of the faith say about the Prophet? They used to call him *kaadhib*,⁹⁶ *saahir*,⁹⁷ and contemptuously referred to “O that Qur’an!” The Qur’ān is advising Muhammad *اصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ* – to face these insults with patience, and, to attain even greater comfort, the Qur’an advised Muhammad to glorify the name of God before sunrise and before sunset: [Imam quotes in Arabic. The translation is:]

“Hence, bear thou with patience whatever they may say, and extol thy Sustainer’s limitless glory and praise before the rising of the sun and before its setting; and in the night, too, extol His glory, and at every prayer’s end” [50:39-40]. Sometimes we look at the beauty of the sun as it rises, or, as it sets, and it makes one think, and wonder about the power behind the law that makes the sun move unfailingly for billions of years, from one point to the other, so you see the sunrise and the sunset every day. It urges one to glorify the name of the One who is that powerful.

I told you earlier about certain Qur’anic verses talking about a horn being sounded on the Day of Judgment. Here, in Chapter Qāf, the idea is the same, but it is expressed differently; here it is expressed as a “cry” instead of a horn. [Imam quotes:]

“Listen for the day when He who issues the call of death shall call thee from a nearby place and they will hear the cry; this will be the Day of Resurrection. Verily, it is We who grant life and deal death; and with Us will be all journeys’ end on the Day when the earth is rent asunder from men hurrying out towards God’s judgment: that gathering will be easy for us to encompass” [50:41-43].

It indicates the power of God.

What was the job of the Prophet? If we look at the last verse of Chapter Qāf, we will know that the Prophet was recommended by God to report the Message, not to exercise

⁹⁵ 70:4

⁹⁶ Liar

⁹⁷ Magician/conjurer

authority over the people, nor to force them, but just to remind those who fear Allah's warning and His promise. So, the job of the preacher is to report, to remind, but not to impose or to enforce. Some Muslims, especially, try to correct things by force; to push religion by force. [Imam quotes

Arabic. The translation is:] "Fully aware are We of what they who deny the resurrection do say; and thou art not one to overawe them by force. Yet nonetheless, remind, through this Qur'an all such as may fear My warning" [50:45].