

RAMADAN REFLECTIONS

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الذِّكْرُ الرَّسْمِيُّ لِلْقُدُوبِ

A Collection of Thematic Summaries of the Qur'an

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PREFACE

While leading prayers in the different mosques of the world since I was 12, I have always felt the need to share the Qur'anic message, especially with worshipers who stand during the long daily night prayers in *Ramadan*, called *taraweeh*. Throughout the years, I realized that although they are listening attentively to the Divine words of *Allah* in the Arabic language, the overwhelming majority of Muslims have no clue as to the words or message of what is being recited. *Ramadan Reflections* is a natural response for my long-held wish. For two years I shared the content of this book in the form of short lectures before *taraweeh* prayers at the *Islamic Society of Michiana*. Many young students from *the University of Notre Dame*, as well as local community members, expressed how they were touched by the Qur'anic messages presented in a simple and brief form, but with relevant subjects and style.

This further encouraged me to spend more intimate time with the book of *Allah* to pen down these reflections and summaries and have them presented to the worshipers. Each being typically five minutes, they were delivered in this year's late night summer *taraweeh* prayers by the community youth. Much of this content is in fact an abridgment of Qur'anic messages shared by popular Egyptian preacher, *Ustad Amr Khalid*. By no means am I claiming this to be a commentary or scientific summary of the Qur'an. I merely hope that this will be beneficial to many individuals and communities as a way to share the unique message of the Qur'an in the mosque during the month of *Ramadan*. I also hope that Muslims will live by its core values presented here as a series of reflections encompassing 23 years of prophetic revelation. In all of these reflections, I tried not only to present summaries of the chapters, but to also focus on motivating the ripe hearts in the month of *Ramadan*; to welcome and reflect upon the guidance of the Qur'an, and to take practical steps in implementing them in our lives as individuals and as a collective.

This is only a humble but unique effort to get the Qur'anic message to common Muslims to draw us closer to *Allah*. May *Allah* forgive me for my shortcomings and reward us and all of our brothers and sisters immensely for their help and support. In particular, my wife Atiya Khanam for her support throughout these years, and two dear brothers, Maaz Arif and Hythem Sidky for dedicating a lot of their time in editing and improving upon these reflections.

O Allah! Accept it from us and make this a source of blessings, mercy and forgiveness for us in this life and in the hereafter.

— Mohammad Sirajuddin

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ACRONYMS

- PBUH Peace Be Upon Him
GPS Global Positioning System
A.H. After Hijra

GLOSSARY

D

- du'ā'* an invocation or supplication to God
dunyā the temporal world and its earthly concerns and possessions

H

- Hajj* an annual Islamic pilgrimage to Mecca

J

- juz'* one of thirty parts of equal length into which the Qur'an is divided

M

- Medinan* chapters of the Qur'an that were revealed at Medina after Muhammad's (PBUH) migration from Mecca

S

- sura* a section or chapter of the Qur'an of which there are 114

T

- taraweeh* extra prayers performed by Muslims at night in the Islamic month of *Ramadan*
tasbīḥ the repetitive utterances of short sentences in the praise and glorification of Allah
tawḥīd' the indivisible oneness concept of monotheism in Islam
tayammum the act of dry ablution using a purified sand or dust, which may be performed in place of ritual washing (wudu or ghusl) if no clean water is readily available

U

umma the whole community of Muslims bound together by ties of religion

NIGHT ONE

THE OPENING (*Al-Fatiha*)

The Qur'an should inspire us to live a Godly life in an ungodly world, to live for the hereafter while we live in the reality of this dunyā. The Qur'an brings both together. Where do we begin our relationship with the Qur'an? We begin with sura *Al-Fatiha*, or *The Opening*. This sura is an incredible chapter of the Qur'an; it is the first complete chapter revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH¹). If you want to understand *Al-Fatiha*, think of it as the GPS², or as a blueprint for everything found in the Qur'an. It is like a passport or ID to enter into a conversation with God. The sura represents the very heart and soul of the Qur'an. Although it is one of the shorter suras, it is often considered to be the most illustrious of them all.

The phrase *al fatiha* is translated as “the opening”, but in reality it is *the opener*. It opens up our hearts and minds for the guidance of God, it opens our relationship with the Qur'an. It introduces us to the fundamental principles of Qur'an. It can be also translated as “the way out”: this sura gets us out of difficulty, depression and desperation. Not only is it ‘the opener’, but it is also ‘the healer’.

The Opening, as mentioned by *Imam Al-Qurtubi*, has many names. The Arabs have a saying: something given many names indicates greatness; this sura has twenty-two names. Some scholars have mentioned that it in fact has more than forty names but the Prophet (PBUH) gave the names *Al-Fatiha* (The opener), *Umm Al-Kitab* (The foundation of the book) and *Sab'ul Mathani* (The seven oft-repeated [verses]). Let us go through a translation of the sura:

1. *In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy!*
2. *Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds,*
3. *the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,*
4. *Master of the Day of Judgment.*
5. *It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help.*
6. *Guide us to the straight path:*
7. *the path of those You have blessed, those who incur no anger and who have not gone astray.*

The first half of the sura teaches us courtesy and proper manners in dealing with *Allah*, while the second half shows us the perfect way to

¹ Peace Be Upon Him

² Global Positioning System

ask *Allah* for help. It is quite interesting that both halves are equally divided, each containing fifty-nine letters. This sura covers all the main themes and topics of the Qur'an. The first three verses cover the Islamic theology on God, His nature and His relationship with us. The fourth verse covers aspects of worship, our prayer, our devotion and expressions of love and gratitude to God. Finally, the last three verses highlights the way of life that God wants from us: between the two extremes of puritanical orthodoxy and gross negligence, or hyper-conservatism and hyper-liberalism.

Breaking it down

The first verse is an expression of praise and gratitude to God. The second talks about God's names and attributes, which establishes our relationship with Him. One based on mercy, compassion and care. The third verse alerts us to be responsible for our actions and prepares us to give the final account of our words and deeds in the hereafter. The fourth verse teaches us to be sincere in our worship, in our search for help. The final three verses warn us against bad company. In all of these verses, by using the plural form "we", unity and inclusiveness of the umma is emphasized.

Reciting this sura opens up the greatest door of honor for us - a direct conversation with God. In a divine tradition, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: "I [God] have divided the prayer (meaning sura *Al-Fatiha*) between Me and My servant. When My servant says 'Praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds', I respond with 'My servant has thanked Me'. When My servant says 'the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy', I say 'My servant has praised Me'. When My servant says 'It is You we worship; it is You we ask for help', I respond 'This is between Me and My servant'. When My servant says 'Guide us to the straight path ...', I say 'this is between Me and My servant. My servant has gotten what they asked for'."

Every time one of us recites sura *Al-Fatiha*, we have a feeling that *Allah* is responding to us. What a great honor this is! Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz used to recite *Al-Fatiha* verse by verse, pausing after each and every one. When he was asked about this, he responded: "to enjoy the response of my Lord".

NIGHT TWO

THE COW (*Al-Baqara*)

Sura *Al-Baqara* is the second and the longest sura of the Qur'an. It has 286 verses, and covers about two and a half juz'. *Al-Baqara* is placed at the very front of the Qur'an; we step into it immediately after *Al-Fatiha*. Thus, serially, it is the second sura, but it is first in many respects. If we take *Al-Fatiha* as the preface to the Qur'an, then *Al-Baqara* is its first chapter. If *Al-Fatiha* is the deepest cry of the human heart before its Creator, then *Al-Baqara* is the first Divine response to that human cry, the first lesson in righteous living, the first step on the straight path. If the seven verses of *Al-Fatiha* are the seed, the foundation and the sum and substance of the entire Qur'an - as they are - *Al-Baqara* is the first flowering of that tiny seed. And what a flowering it is!

A good tree whose root is firm and whose branches are high in the sky, yielding constant fruit by its Lord's leave¹

Though *Al-Baqara* is placed at the very beginning of the Qur'an, chronologically the verses of *Al-Baqara* were revealed much later, at different times during the Medinan period, so much so that, according to al-Wahidi, verse 281 was revealed as late as during the Prophet's (PBUH) farewell Hajj.

Excellences of Al-Baqara

The Prophet (PBUH) spoke of the many excellences and merits of *Al-Baqara*. Sahl ibn Sa'd reports that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Of everything there is a pinnacle, and the pinnacle of the Qur'an is sura *Al-Baqara*. Whoever recites it in his house during the day, Satan will not enter his house for three days, and whoever recites it at night, Satan would not enter his house for three nights"².

Abū Hurayrah reports that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Do not turn your houses into graves; Satan does not enter a house in which *Al-Baqara* is recited"³.

Abu Umama al-Bahili reports that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Recite the Qur'an, for it will be an intercessor for its companion. Recite the two luminous ones, *Al-Baqara* and *Al-Imran*, for on the Day of

¹ (*Ibrahim*, 14:24-25)

² (*Ibn Kathir*, Tabrani)

³ (*Muslim*, *Ibn Kathir*)

Resurrection they will appear as two clouds or canopies, or as two flocks of birds in ranks, pleading for those who recited them. Recite *Al-Baqara*: for learning it is a blessing, and neglecting it results in great remorse, and only the slothful do not recite it"⁴.

To Ubay ibn Ka'b, the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Whoever recites it [*Al-Baqara*], on him are God's blessings and His Mercy. He will have the merit of one who has kept the siege for God's sake an entire year without wavering. Instruct the Muslims to learn sura *Al-Baqara*"⁵.

Sura *Al-Baqara* contains an ocean of meaning. The more one reflects and ponders over it, the more priceless gems of guidance, wisdom, and light that one finds; A canopy of light, indeed! Referring to the vastness of its meaning, Abdullah ibn Umar once said that it took him more than eight years to learn⁶.

May Allah help us all to recite, listen, study and to live by this sura. Ameen.

4 (Muslim, Ibn Kathir)

5 (al-Qurtubi)

6 (al-Suyūṭī)

NIGHT THREE

THE FAMILY OF IMRAN (*Al-'Imran*)

Sura *Al-'Imran* is Medinan. Parts of it were revealed after the eighth juz', *Al-Anfal*, in 2 A.H.¹, and other parts were revealed later in 9 A.H., after the battle of *Badr*. This is the third longest sura containing 200 verses. According to the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH), it is the twin sura *Al-Baqara*. Abu Umama al-Bahili reports that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "Recite the Qur'an, for it will be an intercessor for its companion. Recite the two luminous ones, *Al-Baqara* and *Al-'Imran*, for on the Day of Resurrection they will appear as two clouds or canopies, or as two flocks of birds in ranks, pleading for those who recited them. Recite *Al-Baqara*: for learning it is a blessing, and neglecting it results in great remorse, and only the slothful do not recite it"².

There are many similarities between these two suras. Both begun with three letters of *alif, lam, meem* and both end with a *du'ā'*. Although this sura presents a commentary on the two historical battles of *Badr* and *Uhud*, and what lessons Muslims can learn from the success and subsequent defeat, there is another discourse revealed in this sura. Muslims are shown how live peacefully with the people of other faiths. The sura discusses the delegation of Christians from *Najran* who came to understand Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) views about Prophet Jesus and Mary. This delegation of Christians was warmly welcomed by Prophet (PBUH) and were hosted in his mosque for days. There are many lessons in this example for our own interfaith with our local communities.

There is also another important lesson in this sura about the family of Imran. Imran himself was the maternal grandfather of Prophet Jesus. His wife was mentioned in this sura as "the wife of Imran", who in Bible is known as Hannah. They both were descendant from the lineage of Prophets David and Solomon. The wife of Imran made a promise to God that if she is given a son, she will dedicate him to the service of *Masjid Al-Aqsa* to serve God's House and call people towards *tawhīd'*. God accepts her prayer but not in the way that she expected: instead of a son, God gives her a daughter who becomes the mother of Prophet Jesus.

There are two salient lessons in this story:

1. God accepts her prayer, not in her terms, but in God's terms.

¹ After Hijra

² (Muslim, Ibn Kathir)

2. The woman's intention and goal was to have a child to serve God. So God blessed her with a child like Prophet Jesus.

Therefore, our families should work together towards to preserve their identity, the prophetic teachings and values. God blesses any family who lives for a good cause, to educate and improve the lives of others. A cause beyond just having nice car, nice home and nice family. Let us pick a cause, even a small project in our life and dedicate ourselves to it like the grandmother of Jesus.

May Allah bless our families and give us the strength to live for others, serving good causes in life. Ameen.

NIGHT FOUR

THE WOMEN (*Al-Nisa'*)

Sura *Al-Nisa'*, is a Medinan sura consisting of 176 verses, which takes its title from the many references to women throughout. This sura was revealed after the battle of *Uhud* on several occasions, beginning from 3 A.H. to the 6 A.H. One-third of this *sura* deals with the nucleus of human society, the family, especially women. It also discusses non-Muslims living in dominant Muslim societies, as well as the minorities of a community. The *sura* also urges justice to children and orphans, and mentions inheritance and marriage laws.

The reason for naming this *sura* "the women" is to make us reflect on our relationships with our spouses and in our households. We should ask ourselves if the relationships are based on justice and fairness, before we concern ourselves with the treatment of others; it begins in our home. This *sura* empowers the weak and especially women, who are the foundation of an Islamic society. Being fair and just with everyone starts with our home.

The *sura* contains with a powerful reminder to mankind that they were all created from one soul; our origin is one. It continues to warn people against injustice and exploitation of the weak in society such as orphans, powerless women and the destitute. Rulings on distributing wealth according to the laws of inheritance set by God are discussed, and for the first time women were awarded inheritance in spite of not being required to have financial responsibilities.

This *sura* also defines the relationship of husband and wife as a "strong covenant" and exhorts believers to treat their wives not only with fairness but rather with kindness and forgiveness. In the case of any serious discord, it allows a man to take steps to save the marriage by keeping the door of communication open, asking them to stay in the same home but separating the bed and admonishing the wife, but not to inflict any harm upon her. Young men and women are also warned not to engage in relationships outside of marriage, such as having boyfriends and girlfriends. Allah shows care towards young adults and their feelings, but He doesn't want anyone to be exploited. Every relationship that begins with disobedience of Allah is likely to end in failure.

Causes of injustice are identified, such as miserliness, arrogance, whimsical desires and hypocrisy, which are among the greatest sources of injustice in society. Allah sent down nine verses in this *sura* to clear a Jewish man who was wrongfully accused of theft by a Muslim

whose family was trying to influence the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) to rule in their favor. This was a compelling example of justice that the Qur'an commands towards non-Muslims. One of the last verses of this *sura* calls upon Muslims to uphold justice and bear witness to God,

*even if it is against yourselves, your parents, or your close relatives. Whether the person is rich or poor, God can best take care of both. Refrain from following your own desire, so that you can act justly - if you distort or neglect justice, God is fully aware of what you do.*¹

It is in this spirit of justice and fairness that the *sura* discusses the issues of polygyny, the rights of women, marital relations, disputes and arbitration, laws governing murder, the prohibition of drinking, dispensation in prayer and tayammum in the event of an emergency. Throughout all of this, it stresses a proper belief in God and His messengers.

May Allah perfect our deeds and instill compassion between us and our families. Ameen.

¹ (Al-Nisa, 4:135)

NIGHT FIVE

THE FEAST (*Al-Ma'ida*)

Sura *Al-Ma'ida* was revealed in Medina, and contains 120 verses, which cover approximately one juz'. This sura appears to have been revealed after the treaty of *Hudaiyah* towards the end of the 6th or the beginning of the 7th year A.H. This was the time when *Quraish's* last ditch effort to suppress Islam had been crushed in the battle of the trench. At this point it became quite obvious to the Arabs nothing was going to stop the Islamic movement.

This sura is known by two titles: the more common is *Al-Ma'ida*, meaning "the feast" or "the table", and the other is *Al-'Uqūd*, meaning "the covenants". The former title comes from the request made by the disciples of Prophet Jesus, as evidence of his truthfulness, to ask God to send down upon them a meal from the heavens as an enjoyment and celebration. However, the story of this meal receives only a very brief mention towards the end of the sura, while the majority of it deals with the regulation of lawful and unlawful food, and obedience, which is part of the pledge between God and the believers. For this reason, the second title, *al-'Uqūd*, reflects the sura's wide ranging subject matter more accurately.

The main feature of this sura is the frequent use of direct rhetorical, emphatic speech of Allah to address the believers, "you who believe". This style of speech is used sixteen times, in which Muslims are commanded to many obligations. For example, in this sura God states:

You who believe! Fulfill your obligations.¹

You who believe! When you are about to pray, wash your faces and your hands up to the elbows. . .²

You who believe! Be steadfast in your devotion to God and bear witness impartially³

You who believe! Remember God's blessing on you⁴

You who believe! Be mindful of God, seek ways to come closer to Him and strive for His cause, so that you may prosper.⁵

¹ (*Al-Ma'ida* 5:1)

² (*Al-Ma'ida* 5:6)

³ (*Al-Ma'ida* 5:8)

⁴ (*Al-Ma'ida* 5:11)

⁵ (*Al-Ma'ida* 5:35)

*You who believe! Do not take as allies those who ridicule your religion and make fun of it. . .*⁶

*You who believe! Do not forbid the good things God has made lawful to you*⁷

*You who believe! Intoxicants and gambling, idolatrous practices, and [divining with] arrows are repugnant acts – Satan’s doing – shun them so that you may prosper.*⁸

Throughout this sura, the tone is stern and solemn, fully conveying the seriousness and weight of the issues being discussed. The declarations are usually followed by explanations and motivations to inspire Muslims to build and organize their community life in accordance with the laws and teachings of Islam. This sura also discusses the story of Prophet Adam’s two sons, Cain and Abel. When Cain murdered his brother Abel in cold blood out of jealousy and spite, he was at a loss to what to do with his body. The sura picks up the story:

*God sent a raven to scratch up the ground and show him how to cover his brother’s corpse and he said, ‘Woe is me! Could I not have been like this raven and covered up my brother’s body?’ He became remorseful.*⁹

This retold story shows that Cain’s attitude is symptomatic of human behavior. Killers are always under the illusion that they somehow benefit from the murder of their victims. However, the cold-blooded destruction of one soul can in no way be an enhancement for another. To build, promote, and reform human life is a positive and deliberate act of virtue that invokes God’s pleasure and favor. However, God deems the murder of one human being to be a crime against the whole of humanity.

May Allah give support and patience to the families of people who are killed unjustly around the globe each and every day, and He allow us all to study, recite, and learn from this sura. Ameen.

6 (Al-Ma’ida 5:57)

7 (Al-Ma’ida 5:87)

8 (Al-Ma’ida 5:90)

9 (Al-Ma’ida 5:31)

NIGHT SIX

LIVESTOCK (*Al-An'am*)

This is the first *Meccan* sura of the initial seven long suras of the Qur'an. It has 165 verses covering approximately a juz' and a quarter. The entirety of this sura was revealed upon the heart of the Prophet (PBUH) in one sitting at night during the last year of his stay in Mecca. This sura is also called *Al-Qudra* and *Al-Muwajaha*, or "The power [of God]" and "The confrontation [of the disbelievers]". The most amazing thing about this sura is that the revelation was accompanied by seventy thousand angels in a state of *tasbīh*. What a majestic angelic procession it was! This should motivate us to read this sura more eagerly and reflect on the topics it discusses.

In this sura, the false claims the polytheists made about livestock are thoroughly addressed: the sura in its entirety makes plain that it is God who creates, controls, and sees everything, and that it is to Him that we turn in times of need. Thus it gives a lengthy refutation of the idolaters' claims. The sura opens by immediately discussing the unity and oneness of Allah and not associating any partners with Him.

*Praise belongs to God who created the heavens and the earth and made darkness and light; yet the disbelievers set up equals to their Lord!*¹

A total of 49 verses, or around 30 percent of this sura reaffirms the issue of monotheism. This is why this sura was revealed in such an awe-inspiring atmosphere, especially during the night, which is the most appropriate time for spiritual inspiration. *May Allah make us the recipients of those spiritual inspirations, Ameen.*

One of the unique characteristics of this sura is that God is giving direct instructions to His Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) on how to educate, inform, and argue with the disbelievers. The instructive word *qul*, or "say", is repeated in this sura forty times, sometimes occurring as often as four times in the same verse,

Say, 'What counts most as a witness?' Say, 'God is witness between you and me. This Qur'an was revealed for me to warn you [people] and everyone it reaches. Do you really bear witness that there are other gods beside God?' Say, 'I myself do not bear

¹ (Al-An'am, 6:1)

witness [to any such thing].’ Say, ‘He is only one God, and I disown whatever you join with Him.’²

Another distinct feature of this sura is that God is frequently referred to in the third person singular *Hua*, which means “He”. This has the immediate result of capturing one’s attention very effectively, and one can feel the overwhelming and imposing presence of God, which invokes recognition of His majestic power and complete submission. Through this direct awareness and unparalleled sincerity and reverence, the Qur’an tries to pluck people out of traditions they have adopted, shake them up and rid them of the ignorance in which they have wallowed.

He is the one who created you from clay and specified a term [for you] and another fixed time, a known only to Him; yet still you doubt! He is God in the heavens and on earth, He knows your secrets and what you reveal, and He knows what you do.³

He feeds all and is fed by none.⁴

He is the Supreme Authority over His servants and He is the Wise, the Aware.⁵

He is everywhere all of the time, not merely as an observer or a spectator. Indeed God acts, directs and controls creation in accordance with His wisdom and purpose. He is not an abstraction, a theoretical concept, or an isolated notion of the imagination, but is proactive and in full charge of the affairs and destiny of creation.

He has the keys to the unseen: no one knows them but Him. He knows all that is in the land and sea. Not a leaf falls without His knowledge, nor is there a single grain in the darkness of the earth, or anything, fresh or withered, that is not written in a clear Record.⁶

It is He who calls your souls back by night, knowing what you have done by day, then raises you up again in the daytime until your fixed term is fulfilled.⁷

It is God who splits open the seed and the fruit stone: He brings out the living from the dead and the dead from the living – that is God – so how can you turn away from the truth?⁸

2 (Al-An’am, 6:19)

3 (Al-An’am, 6:2-3)

4 (Al-An’am, 6:14)

5 (Al-An’am, 6:18)

6 (Al-An’am, 6:59)

7 (Al-An’am, 6:60)

8 (Al-An’am, 6:95)

The arguments are eloquent, sincere, clear, straightforward and extremely powerful. It is being conducted by God Himself in the third form and often times on behalf of His Prophet (PBUH). Clearly the sura was revealed at a time of tense and heated confrontations between the Prophet (PBUH) and the disbelievers of Mecca. This sura also delivers clear and strong directives, or 10 commandments, in three verses from 151 to 153 as evidence of monotheistic teachings given by God to all prophets. They are:

1. Worship one God
2. Show kindness to your parents
3. Do not kill your children for fear of poverty
4. Avoid foul sins, in open and secret, such as adultery and fornication
5. Do not kill a soul that God has forbidden to be killed
6. Do not treat orphans unjustly
7. Be just and fair in your dealings and transactions
8. Be truthful even if it goes against your own
9. Be true to the covenant of God
10. Follow the straight path, do not deviate from it and be conscious of your Lord

This sura is called "Livestock" because Arabs at that time believed that their animals were their capital wealth and their life's blood, and God has nothing to do with them. God cleared all of these misconceptions in this sura.

May Allah make us among those who turn to him in time of need and in time of ease. May Allah help us uphold and fulfill our duties as believers: to believe in one God, to ascribe to him no partners, to show kindness to our families and to treat everyone in kind and to be kind to animals and protect our environment. Ameen.

NIGHT SEVEN

THE HEIGHTS (*Al-A'raf*)

This is the second *Meccan* sura in the present order of the Qur'an. It is named after the heights of the barrier which will divide the righteous from the damned on the Day of Judgment. The period of its revelation is about the same as that of *Al-An'am*, which is the last year of the Prophet's residence in *Mecca*. However, it cannot be asserted with certainty which of these two suras were revealed earlier. This chapter contains 206 verses and covers one and a quarter juz'. Along with the previous chapter, the time of revelation was during intense opposition and confrontation between Quraysh and the Muslims over the prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) message of monotheism. The animosity intensified after Muslims were given permission to openly invite people to Islam.

The primary theme and the recurring message of this sura are questions that we all need to answer: in a confrontation between truth and falsehood, between good and evil, are we confident and proud of our faith and what it stands for? Or are we afraid and confused about our identity as believers? Are we actively engaged in promoting Prophetic ideals or are we only passive spectators in this ever-continuing game of cat and mouse between truth and falsehood?

There is no sugar-coating it: Islam is not considered "cool" in popular culture today. Some people are afraid of wearing the hijab or identifying themselves as Muslim. Some even try to change their name out of fear and a sense of inferiority of their faith and identity. When the situation becomes tense, people react differently: some hold strongly to their faith while others lose it entirely. Let us all remember that what Muhammad Ali (May Allah have mercy on his soul) is remembered for the most is standing up for justice and peace. However, at the time it was an unpopular position and he was hated for it. Eventually, as it always does, the truth prevailed and he is unanimously recognized as an American hero.

With this self-reflection in mind, we can read the stories of this sura. That of Adam and *Iblis*, and the people of "the heights" who will be between heaven and hell, symbolizing the pessimist spectators who did not take a stand when it came time to support the truth. Then six additional prophetic narratives:

1. Prophet Noah and his rejection by the people
2. Prophet *Hud* and his nation's arrogance in the face of clear signs

3. The miraculous pregnant she-camel that was sent to the people of *Thamūd* and their denial of prophet *Ṣaleḥ*
4. The people of Midian with prophet *Shu'aib* and their economic corruption
5. The story of prophet Lot with his people and dealing with moral corruption
6. Prophet Moses and the pharaoh whose people were drunk with political, economic and military power, using their authority to enslave people and claim supremacy in God's land.

This sura also deals with the issue of dress. Human beings are unique amongst all creatures in wearing clothes to both cover their bodies and enhance their appearance. Clothes have become cultural symbols of class and status, as well as an expression of inner desires and feelings. The types of clothes people wear make powerful statements about them. Some clothes are worn to reflect worth and wealth, while some are worn to attract and seduce. In the end, one's worth or status is decided by what one wears.

In response to this, the sura refers to what may be called the "garb of piety", that internal and intangible personal quality which reflects one's true value and character and transcends outward appearance. At the same time, the Qur'an commands us to dress decently and appropriately, especially for prayer. The sura endorses this, saying,

Children of Adam, dress well whenever you are at worship, and eat and drink but do not be extravagant: God does not like extravagant people.¹

The Prophet (PBUH) is reported to have advised: "Eat what you wish to eat, and wear what you wish to wear, but avoid excess and ostentation" ². *May Allah help us to be respectful to others and to be humble and thankful for His blessings. May He help us to maintain moderation and decency in our food and dress.*

Finally, as part of the message of this sura, God invites the Quraysh, and all of us to reflect on where we stand with respect to these conflicts, and consider our contributions. Asking us not to be passive spectators in this struggle of the ages. *May Allah give us the courage to take a stand on the issues and challenges facing us during our time on this Earth.*

¹ (Al-A'raf, 7:19)

² (Al-Bukhāri, Ibn Mājah, Imam Aḥmad)

NIGHT EIGHT

Both *Al-Anfāl* and *Al-Tawba* are Medinan and approximately half a juz' in length. The first, *Al-Anfāl* has seventy-five verses while *Al-Tawba* has one-hundred and twenty-nine.

THE SPOILS (*Al-Anfāl*)

This sura is essentially a commentary on the battle of *Badr*, which was the first to be fought between the Muslims and Quraysh. The Muslims, some of whom were initially reluctant to fight, won in spite of being vastly outnumbered and began to question the distribution of the spoils, or *anfāl*, from which this sura gets its name. The sura reminds the Muslims that it was God who brought about the victors and discusses how the gains are to be distributed.

It also discusses the qualities of true believers,

*those whose hearts tremble with awe when God is mentioned, whose faith increases when His revelations are recited to them, who put their trust in their Lord, who keep up the prayer and give to others out of what We provide for them. Those are the ones who truly believe.*¹

As an extension of those qualities, the sura explains to us what it means to be true believers in practice. It elaborates on those qualities through commentary on the battle of *Badr* as the intersection between two motives: a human endeavor and Divine intervention and support. The sura goes on to explain the qualifications for victory and that success comes from God and not out of a vacuum. It requires us to have a unified vision for a cause or organization and strategic planning, training, and moral uprightness. All of these elements coupled with the balance of power brings God's help in the form of angels or otherwise.

Even after a clear victory, God warns the Muslims not to destroy their unity and fraternity by getting carried away with love of the spoils. He reminds them not to let the euphoria of success distract them from obeying Him and the prophet (PBUH). This is why the sura is called "the spoils": if your eyes are on the spoils - the material gains of war - then you will end up losing your strength, your spirit and the help of God.

This is also why towards the end of the sura, God draws our attention to the force of brotherhood that cements the Muslim community

¹ (Al-Anfāl, 8:2-4)

together, which allows us to act and grow as a whole. Such a bond is instigated by and devoted to the love of God and the advancement of His cause. Religious fraternity and ties bind people more strongly than any other, and Islam has made the Muslims into one unique entity, the likes of which had not been seen throughout human history.

God says,

*Those who disbelieve are allies to one another. If you fail to distinguish in your alliance between the believers and disbelievers, there will be disorder on Earth and great corruption.*²

The tragedy we face today is that Muslims are divided and fragmented into sects and groups and do not share a unified vision. The only way for us to emerge safely from our situation is to allow room for Islam to resume its proper role in our thinking and behavior, shape our internal and external relations and mold every aspect of our lives. *May Allah unite our hearts in His love and use us for His cause, Amen.*

REPENTANCE (*Al-Tawba*)

This is the only sura that does not begin with the formula, *Bismillah*. It opens by giving notice of the severance of a treaty between the Muslims and idolaters because they had violated its terms. This is why the sura is also called *Al-Barā'a*, or the chapter of withdrawal from the protection of God and His messenger (PBUH). This sura is also known as the *kāshifa* for its exposing and debasement of hypocrites. Although this sura has stern warnings and threats to the disbelievers in addition to a strong emphasis on Muslims defending their faith, in the end it keeps the door open for *tawba*, or repentance. Everyone is invited to deal with their internal desires, sins and doubts.

The word *tawba* is mentioned seventeen times in this sura, more than any other chapter in the Qur'an. This is also one of the last suras to be revealed to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He lived only 15 months after its revelation. towards the end of the sura there is a powerful story of the repentance of two companions. They turned back to God in sincerity after not supporting Islam at a time of need. This story encourages us to reflect on our own sins and engage in personal repentance for not doing enough to improve our situation or having the due reliance and faith in God's promises.

Some of the verses of this sura are also frequently used by so-called Muslims to justify their violent and hateful ideologies. On the other hand, those same verses are used by some non-Muslims to claim that the Qur'an teaches violence and hatred of disbelievers. Anyone who does not have a sincere heart and thorough understanding of Islam and its sacred text can be easily misled by these verses. It is of

² (Al-Anfāl, 8:73)

paramount importance for us to understand their context within the life of the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), when the pagans of Mecca were attacking the Muslims both in Mecca and Medina. These verses do not allow Muslims to engage in terrorism. Rather, they are warnings against terrorism that contain clear calls for restraint and utmost care.

Religious texts in general, if not read within their textual and historical contexts, are easily manipulated and distorted. Muslims believe in all the prophets sent by God and hence should not misuse or misrepresent the religious texts of other faiths in order to defame them. Even in recent times, Muslims faced and are still facing genocidal campaigns in Bosnia, Chechnya, Kashmir, Palestine, and Burma - yet they do not question the religion of those at whose hands these crimes were perpetrated. Such a spirit needs to be reciprocated.

May Allah make us instruments for positive change in this world. May Allah allow us to turn to Him in sincerity for all of our sins and shortcomings, as well as for not doing enough to defend Islam. May Allah give us the strength to stand up for His religion while it is vilified and demonized by the media and people of ill-will. May Allah guide them and help them turn to Him. Amen.

NIGHT NINE

JONAH (*Yūnus*)

This sura was revealed during the last state of the prophet's (PBUH) residence in Mecca. It contains one hundred and nine verses and covers three quarters of a juz', sharing many features seen previously in the Meccan chapters of the Qur'an. The sura stresses God's power, the authenticity of the Qur'an, and the fate of evildoers. God's anger at those who consistently deny the truth of His revelations and signs is made clear. Also, the fact that were it not for God's decision to await the Day of Resurrection, His judgement would have already fallen upon them. The prophet (PBUH) is encouraged to be patient and reminded of the fact that he cannot force people to believe.

The sura attempts to guide man to his Creator by means of observation, contemplation, and reflection upon God's vast creation. This approach proved very effective for the pagan Arabs as a way to stimulate their minds and to revive their intellectual instincts, leading them to believing in one God. These verses would be just as effective today in dealing with agnostics, secularists, and athiests. One of the unique aspects of the Qur'an is the manner with which it earnestly appeals to the human mind and soul - forcing it to wake up, seek God, and prepare for meeting Him.

Meccan idolaters were overwhelmed by materialistic logic which relied entirely on the senses, and were totally preoccupied by worldly gain. This is reminiscent of what we observe in many contemporary societies. In such societies, the majority of people have no interest in God or any yearning to know Him. Established religion has no lasting impact on most people because they live for the moment and have no drive to look beyond life here on Earth. Materialists find the Qur'an, and divine revelations as a whole, eccentric and incomprehensible. This attitude is at odds with the essence of the Qur'an, which forces its reader to deeply contemplate the observable universe.

This sura opens with a depiction of this attitude,

Is it so surprising to people that We have revealed to a man from among them that he should warn people, and give glad news to those who believe, that they are on sure footing with their Lord? [Yet] those who disbelieve say, 'This man is clearly a sorcerer' ¹

Along this theme, the sura focuses on the issue of Divine predestination, which is one of the articles of Islamic faith but misunderstood

¹ (Yūnus, 10:1-2)

by many. That is why God calls upon mankind to rely on His wisdom and planning, reminding us that He is not unjust to humans but rather he is *Al-Haqq*, the True, the Real, whose existence is not coincident, random or by chance and that His actions are full of wisdom and planning. This is perhaps one of the reasons that this sura frequently uses the names of God such as *Al-Hakim* (The Wise), *Al-Mudabbir* (The Planner), and *Al-Haqq* (The True).

A very brief reference is given in this sura to the story of prophet Noah, prophet Moses and prophet Jonah who was sent to the people of Nineveh and swallowed by an enormous fish. He was then saved miraculously because of his remembrance of God and repentance to Him. In particular, Jonah is mentioned to comfort prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to draw a parallel to what was he was enduring with the Quraysh during their opposition to the prophetic message. In the beginning they viciously opposed him, but in the end they accept Islam, just like the people of Jonah.

HUD (*Hūd*)

A Meccan sura, it contains 123 verses and covers almost three quarters of a juz'. It is considered the twin sura of *Yūnus*. In much of the same way, the sura reiterates the stories mentioned in the previous chapter. This is in fact one of the three suras placed together with the names of prophets: Jonah, *Hūd* and Joseph. These three suras were revealed in the same order they appear, and were sent down during the same time period. The miracle of the Qur'an is highlighted in a key verse, which occurs in other forms throughout the Qur'an.

*These accounts are part of what was beyond your knowledge [Muhammad]. We revealed them to you. Neither you nor your people knew them before now, so be patient: the future belongs to those who are aware of God.*²

As a Meccan sura, and without access to Google or Wikipedia, the prophet delivered the tales of the previous prophets in succinct and lucid narratives. Such detailed and encyclopedic knowledge of Biblical and non-Biblical prophets was not known to the pagans of Mecca, as the verse alludes to. Indeed, as we all affirm, the knowledge came from a heavenly source. It is also interesting to note that when a sura is named after a prophet, there is a discussion about that prophet, but the key to understanding the core message of the chapter is actually the final verse at the end of the story. In this sura, the last verse is the message to be steadfast, not to waver, not give up and not to resort to violence. These are the three responses that are typical of people when they are oppressed, persecuted or face enormous challenges in their life. This was the toughest time for Muslims and for

² (Hūd, 11:49)

prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as he lost his pillars of support, his wife *Khadīja* and his uncle *Abū Tālib* who, in spite of not accepting Islam, supported Prophet (PBUH) till the end of his life. During this time the Muslims also lost all support in Mecca, and after the Prophet (PBUH) goes to neighboring city of *Tā'if*, he is chased out of the city by thugs who stoned him until his shoes were soaked in blood.

Now imagine: these three suras are being revealed at this time of desperation and need in the early Muslim community. God gives comfort to Muslims and the prophet (PBUH) in particular through these verses, channeling the life and times of previous prophets who also went through unbearable difficulties and witnessed God's guidance and plan of action. This is mentioned in the last verse of the story of *Hūd*,

So keep to the right course as you have been commanded, together with those who have turned to God in repentance with you. Do not overstep the limits, for He sees everything you do. Do not rely on those who do evil, or the Fire may touch you, and then you will have no one to protect you from God, nor will you be helped. [Prophet], keep up the prayer at both ends of the day, and during the parts of the night, for good things drive bad away - this is a reminder for those who are aware. Be patient: God does not let the rewards of those who do good go to waste. ³

These are the Qur'anic responses in times of challenges:

1. Do not lose hope, keep working for change and be wise and patient
2. Do not resort to violence out of frustration and despair
3. Do not lose your identity as a community of faith and values
4. Consistently seek help and guidance from God through prayer, good work and perseverance

May Allah help us stay focused on the Qur'anic guidance in facing the challenges of our time, Amen.

³ (Hūd, 11:112-115)

NIGHT TEN

JOSEPH (*Yūsuf*)

This sura contains 111 verses and covers three quarters of a juz'. It was revealed during the last stage of the prophet's (PBUH) residence in Mecca. It was a time when the Quraysh were seriously considering killing, exiling, or imprisoning him. The story of the Biblical prophet Joseph was unknown to pagan Arabs of Mecca. The Jews of Medina, who were being consulted by the Quraysh, wanted to test Muhammad's (PBUH) claim to prophecy by inquiring about Joseph's story, and the history of the Isrealites. This sura was revealed in response to this challenge.

It also was meant to draw the attention of Quraysh to the brothers of Joseph and their treatment of him, and the resolution of inter-sibling conflict. This sura is the longest single narrative in the Qur'an. In fact, the story of Joseph is referred to as the "best of the stories". It is filled with all of the essential ingredients of a captivating story, grabbing the attention of the reader by presenting vivid pictures of the various events, all while maintaining coherence despite the use of extensive symbolism.

Some of the literary elements that stand out in this chapter include opening with a dream and ending with that dream coming true. The prophet Joseph's shirt is also used as evidence of the innocence of his brothers, which was a lie. In a later episode involving the wife of an Egyptian governor, Joseph's shirt is used once again to prove his innocence. As you read the story, it seems that its meaning and events are being played out in front of you in words and pictures. Perhaps this is of the reasons why God calls it the best of the stories.

An important lesson in Qur'anic story telling is that narratives are not there simply for the sake of telling a story. In fact, no stories in the Qur'an are mentioned needlessly. Its purpose is to teach us lessons. At the end of the story God says,

*God does not deny the rewards of those who do good to anyone who is mindful of God and steadfast in adversity.*¹

The primary theme of this sura is "God knows and we don't know". God's plan is sometimes different than our plan, which is limited by what we can see and perceive as human beings. Sometimes God's plan is in fact quite the opposite. In the story we see that Joseph was a young boy who was loved by his father, but because of which he

¹ (Yūsuf, 12:90)

was thrown into the well by his own brothers. Superficially, being thrown into a well is a terrible turn of events. But as a result of that he eventually ends up in the palace of an Egyptian governor.

Being raised from then on in a palace is apparently a good thing, but he ends up in prison accused of adultery. Again, going to prison is an apparently bad outcome, but as a result of this he is appointed as a minister of Egypt. Throughout all of these turns of events, God teaches us that He makes plans for us using His infinite wisdom, but we are both incapable and often too short-sighted to comprehend the will of God.

This story also teaches us that our lives are nothing but times of ease and difficulty. There is no human being that experiences only one of those two, because this life is life of trials and tribulations. Prophet Joseph stays strong and steadfast in both circumstances. He faced the challenges with patience, perseverance and hope and maintained his humility and sincerity to Allah in times of difficulty and adversity. This sura in fact, is the story of a successful human being in the form of Joseph who went through not only the most difficult challenges in life, but upheld radical hope and high moral values without compromising his chastity and the purity of his character.

Interestingly enough, all these events do not happen as direct miracles from God, but rather they took place as a result of his resilience, hope and trust in God's promises. From the depths of a dark well in the desert, to slavery, the hatred of his brothers and false accusations, he rises to the highest position in the kingdom of Egypt at that time. That is the success in this life, and when he resists the temptations from the wife of the governor who was a beautiful and powerful woman, he attained the success in the eyes of God. That is the success of the hereafter. Then, at the height of his success, he turns to God and attributes his success to Him alone.

There is a great lesson in this story for all of us, especially for our youth, in the practical life and times of Joseph. A lesson to excel in this life and in the hereafter with knowledge, hard work, overcoming temptations, all through patience and God-consciousness to win the blissful gardens of paradise and to also live a decent life in this world. *May Allah help us and guide us to success in both worlds, Amen.*

NIGHT ELEVEN

THUNDER (*Al-ra'd*)

Scholars of exegesis have different thoughts about the time of revelation of this sura. From its style and subject matter it seems to be Meccan, revealed in its last period. It has forty-three verses, and covers a little over a quarter of a juz'. The main theme of the sura is that *haqq*, or truth, is firmly rooted in reality and *bāṭil*, or falsehood, is weak, transitory and bound to be defeated no matter how charming, attractive and popular it looks. It simply does not have any firm standing to last forever.

One of the unique things about this chapter is that it presents six opposites that only God can combine: truth and falsehood, light and darkness, hope and fear, His knowledge of secrets and outwardly spoken words, contraction and expansion of the fetus in the wombs, and thunder as a symbol of opposing energies, carrying with it electricity and light which causes shock and awe. It is outwardly scary but inwardly glorifies God. In this context, reflection upon this universe's physical structure and cosmology would reveal that denial of God is neither a rational nor a reasonable position to take. It leads to the conclusion that submission to, or worship of, other man-made gods, is a nonsensical practice.

ABRAHAM (*Ibrahīm*)

This sura is Meccan, contains fifty-two verses, and covers just over a quarter juz'. This is the chapter of gratitude to God. What we usually consider to be the greatest blessings of our life are wealth, big houses, nice families, children, and expensive cars whilst we consider the greatest calamity to be the loss of worldly possessions. However, this sura teaches us that the greatest blessings are *īmān*, or faith in God, and being guided through the prophetic message. Faith is symbolized in this sura as a good tree that is firmly rooted in the ground with its branches high in the sky. It yields constant fruit by the will of God.

Prophet Abraham is presented as a role model of gratitude who thanks God for being guided by Him and for having children who are dedicated to God and care and pray for their parents. Beautiful prayers are taught in this sura through the words of Abraham where we can see all of them being accepted. Towards the end of the chapter, God warns us from being heedless to His power and from standing in

front of Him on the Day of Judgment. The speech of satan is recorded in this chapter. On the Day of Judgment satan himself is going to tell us how we only have ourselves to blame for our wrongs because he didn't force anybody to commit those actions. This sura also ends with a statement of what the Qur'an is in a nutshell,

*This is a message to all people, so that they may be warned by it, and know that He is the only God, and so that those who have minds may take heed.*¹

ROCKY TRACT (*Al-ḥijr*)

This sura was also revealed around the same time as the previous chapter during the last period of the Prophet's (PBUH) residence in Mecca. It contains ninety-nine verses though it covers only a quarter juz'. Normally, a juz' contains around forty to fifty verses, but the verses of this chapter relatively short. It appears from the repeated warnings in this sura that the people in general had not accepted the prophet's message; rather they had become more stubborn in their antagonism, animosity and ridicule.

As a result of this hatred, God promises divine protection to the believers in this sura. Even the title of this sura alludes to the fact that only God can protect people. The people of the rocky tract, *Thamūd*, who carved houses into mountainsides felt safe, much like in the gated communities and subdivisions of our time. When the punishment of God took them by surprise one morning in a great blast, all of their safety measures were of no use. God is saying in this chapter that He alone is the ultimate protector.

God also promises in this sura that He will unilaterally protect His Book, the Qur'an, the final revelation. In addition, He is the One who is going to protect His sincere servants from satan, and secure for them their provisions while constantly guarding the heavens and earth from evil. In this context, He is giving assurances to the prophet (PBUH) and his followers that He will protect them from their enemies and their devious plots. He will take care of their detractors and agitators, and we believe He will do that with the Islamophobes in our time too. It is merely a test of our steadfastness and resilience. There is great promise of protection by God in this sura for Islamic activists and those who help spread the prophetic teachings.

The chapter ends with words of advice, comfort and safety for Muslim activists by saying,

We have given you ... the whole glorious Qur'an. Do not look at the good things We have given some of them to enjoy. Do not grieve over the disbelievers ... So proclaim openly what you have

¹ (Ibrāhīm, 14:52)

*been commanded to say, and ignore the idolaters. We are enough for you against all those who ridicule your message . . . We are well aware that your heart is weighted down by what they say. Celebrate the glory of your Lord and be among those who bow down to him: worship your Lord until what is certain comes to you.*²

The story of satan and that of Prophet Lot are also mentioned in this chapter to drive the message home that only God can protect us from satan, moral vice and from His punishment. *May Allah give us that understanding and keep us safe, Amen.*

BEES (*Al-Nahl*)

This sura was clearly revealed during the latter part of the Meccan period. It has 128 verses and covers three quarters of a juz'. The seven year famine, which had stricken Mecca, came to an end and persecution from the pagans had forced some Muslims to migrate. This chapter reminds people of God's blessings in this world. While sura *Ibrahim* reminded us of God's greatest blessing, faith, this sura reminds us of all the other blessings we experience throughout the day that we take for granted. The blessing of our creation, of good health, live stock, birds, honey, meat, food and clothing. The blessings of water and the blessings of farming. The blessings of the beautiful earth and the amazing oceans. The blessings of knowledge and our senses. The blessings of the Qur'an and sub-servitude of this Earth for humans.

All of these blessings are from God. Nobody can fully enumerate, appreciate or fully thank God for these gifts, but the disbelievers are blinded by their arrogance and entirely reject His clear blessings. The honey bee is used as a symbol for revelation. In the same manner that the honey bee uses God's blessings and obeys His commands, God brings forth from her pure, useful honey. If people follow the revelation and implement its teachings in their life they will have the honey of guidance, and light for society to cure their bodies and souls. *May Allah make the truth apparent to us and guide us along its path, and may He make falsehood apparent to us and steer us clear of it, Ameen.*

² (Al-Hijr, 15:87-99)

NIGHT TWELVE

THE NIGHT JOURNEY (*Al-Isrā'*)

This sura is also known as *Banī Israel*, or the Children of Israel. It was revealed in the last year in Mecca before the migration of Muslims to Medina and after the night journey of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) from which the chapter gets its name. It has 111 verses and covers around a half juz'. Its opening verse refers to Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) remarkable night journey from Mecca to Jerusalem. The sura is framed by references to the Children of Israel at the beginning, and to the Pharaoh at the end. The bulk of the chapter deals with the Qur'an as guidance and warning, the prophet Muhammad, and the nature of prophecy, especially the fact that he is a human being and incapable himself of producing miracles. It also warns of satan's promise to tempt mankind and of the fate of the disbelievers.

The beginning of the sura symbolizes a transfer of prophethood from the lineage of the Israelites to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), who was honored with an ascension into the heavens and with leading all other prophets in prayer in Jerusalem. The prophetic message that is being transferred is in the form of the final Book, the Qur'an. That is why the words *Al-kitāb* and *Al-Qur'an* are mentioned very frequently throughout this chapter. The Qur'an is described as a cure for our spiritual ailments, as honey is described in the previous sura as a cure for physical diseases. The chapter finally ends with verses describing the Quran as that which,

*when it is recited, people of knowledge fall down into prostration glorifying God, weeping and increasing in their reverence to Him.*¹

This sura also contains the Qur'anic equivalent of the ten commandments,

1. Worship none but God
2. Be kind and obedient to your parents
3. Give to relatives and the needy
4. Do not be miserly or spendthrift
5. Do not kill your children
6. Do not commit adultery

¹ (*Al-Isrā'*, 17:107)

7. Do not kill unjustly
8. Do not speak without knowledge
9. Do not walk arrogantly on Earth
10. Protect the property of the orphan

*May Allah help us follow His commandments and live with His guidance,
Amen!*

NIGHT THIRTEEN

THE CAVE (*Al-Kahf*)

This sura was revealed in Mecca just before the migration to Abyssinia. It contains 110 verses, covering just under three quarters of a juz'. This sura consists of 4 stories: the seven sleepers of Ephesus, the owner of the two gardens, the Prophet Moses and *Khidr*, and the story of *Dhul-Qarnayn*, a righteous emperor who built a wall containing God and Magog. In all four of these stories, God teaches us about the primary tests we will face in our lives and how we should handle them successfully.

In the first story, the people of the cave were tested in their faith. They were seven young believers who went into hiding after being threatened with death by their king if they don't renounce their faith in God. Fleeing persecution, they isolated themselves to protect their faith, and God helped them by putting them to sleep for hundreds of years and then bringing them back to life - a miracle for having passed their test of faith.

In the second story, the owner of a garden was tested in his wealth. He was blinded by greed and love for his wealth after being blessed with a beautiful garden. He started boasting and bragging to his poor friend about his garden, claiming that his garden will last forever, even going so far as to deny the day of judgment. He further claimed that if there was an afterlife, he will be more blessed there too because he was blessed in this world. This is how some people in our times think too, that "God must be happy with them if they are rich". However, in one night his garden was destroyed, and he became filled with regret for not believing in God.

The third story illustrates a test in knowledge. The prophet Moses was once asked in a gathering about who is the most knowledgeable person in the world. He responded: "I am". His answer was correct: as a prophet of God, he was the most knowledgeable person in the world at the time. However, God wanted to teach Moses a lesson in humility so He sent him on a long and arduous journey to meet a righteous servant of God called *Khidr* so that he may learn some of the special knowledge granted to him by God. Moses, after experiencing many incidents and realizing his lack of knowledge, learns that there is always someone who has more knowledge, and that it is better to be humble no matter how much you may really know.

In the fourth and final story God teaches us through the story of *Dhul-Qarnayn* how to be humble in a position of authority, power

and leadership. In spite of being a great emperor with a large army of men at his disposal, *Dhul-Qarnayn* is presented as a role model. He intermingled with his people and always attributed his achievements to God's Grace and Mercy. Interestingly, in between these stories, the story of *Iblīs* is also presented as an instigation of discord in humans; sometimes through their religiosity, other times through wealth, knowledge, and authority. However, we are warned to keep satan as our enemy.

The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) also told us of the greatest test or trial humanity will ever face, from the creation of Adam until the end of time: it is that of the of the *Dajjāl*, or anti-Christ. "Whoever memorizes ten verses from the beginning of *Al-Kahf* will be protected from the false Messiah."¹ Muslims have been instructed to recite this sura at least every Friday to be protected from the trials of the anti-Christ and day-to-day life, and to be illuminated by the light of God and His guidance.

May Allah illuminate our lives with His guidance, love, and protection. May He guard us against the evil of our own selves and the trials and tribulations of this world, Amen.

¹ (Muslim)

NIGHT FOURTEEN

MARY (*Maryam*)

This is a Meccan sura which takes its name from the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. It was revealed before the migration of Muslims to Abyssinia. Its most striking feature is that 72 of its 98 verses end with the same two Arabic letters, producing a unique and distinctive rhythm. Another feature is that the Arabic word, *Rahman*, or the Merciful, one of God's most exalted names, appears in the sura 16 times. This surah recounts the grace given by God to a number of prophets and tells their stories. It highlights Prophet Zachariah's cry to his Lord and the birth of Prophet *Yahya* (John), the story of *Maryam* (Mary) and the miraculous birth of Prophet *'Isa* (Jesus). Jesus's speech in the cradle is recalled and his divinity is firmly denied. The sura also briefly covers prophet Abraham's gentle and humble advice for his non-believing father. It gives references to prophets Moses, Noah, Ishmael and *Idris*, praising them for their faith and good work, while condemning some of their progeny who lost the faith of their ancestral prophets. Throughout the sura, there is a focus on the human desire for having children but directs that urge to continuing the prophetic legacy and lifestyle. *May Allah make us among the followers of prophetic traditions and teachings, Ameen.*

This chapter in particular has strong words for those who ascribe children to God. It says,

*The disbelievers say, 'The Lord of Mercy has offspring.' How terrible is this thing you assert: it almost causes the heavens to be torn apart, the earth to split asunder, the mountains to crumble to pieces, that they attribute offspring to the Lord of Mercy. It does not befit the Lord of Mercy [to have offspring]:.*¹

May Allah keep us on the straight path of monotheism, Amen.

TAHA (*Ta ha*)

Some authentic traditions indicate that this sura was revealed before 'Umar ibn Al-Khattāb embraced Islam in Mecca. It has 135 verses covering a half juz'. According to some narrations, the beginning verses of this sura were revealed when prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was standing in prayer so earnestly and so long, that the pagans of Mecca accused him of self torture. So in response to them the verses read:

¹ (Maryam, 19:88-90)

We have not sent down this Qur'an upon you to cause distress, but only as a reminder for those who stand in awe of God. Revelation is a reminder and a leading light to overcome negligence and forgetfulness. ²

In other words, the Qur'an is not meant to distress nor deprive us from fun and enjoyment in life. But it also does not mean that staying on the straight path and calling people to Islam bears no challenges and risks. The story of Moses encompasses the ups and downs of life. The beginning verses of this sura were so powerful that they touched the heart of 'Umar who was originally on his way to kill his sister for converting to Islam.

Scholars of Qur'an have noted in this sura a systematic reference to the notion of awareness and forgetfulness. There are at least a dozen references in this sura reminding mankind that in remembering God you will find, peace, tranquility and happiness. On the other hand, being neglectful of Him leads you to live a suffocated life. That is why the sura ends with,

Glorify your Lord with His praise before sunrise and sunset, glorify Him during the hours of night as well as at both ends of the day, so that you might be content (pleased with God). ³

May Allah bless us with His awareness and His pleasure, Amen.

THE PROPHETS (*Al-Anbiya'*)

This sura was revealed towards the end of the Meccan period and takes its name from the fact that sixteen prophets are mentioned by name, with brief accounts of parts of their history. It has 112 verses and covers a half juz'. At the end of these stories we are told that the main message and the core teachings of all prophets is the same. The message of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is stressed as a comprehensive and universal one, and that he was sent as a mercy to the worlds.

In these stories, God highlights the worship, obedience and the humility of prophets in their supplications, and God's acceptance of them. The prophet Noah called upon his Lord when he was in distress, prophet Job prayed to God when he was afflicted by hardship, prophet Jonah cried out to God when he was in the belly of a whale and prophet Zachariah asked God for a child. In each case, God says, after each prophet's supplication, "right after their prayers we granted them what they asked for".

In this special month of *Ramadan* may God take us from negligence and forgetfulness into His presence, and make us to spend time in

² (TaHa, 20:2-4)

³ (TaHa, 20:130)

prayer, especially before breaking our fast. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said: “The fasting person has a very special prayer at the time of breaking the fast which will not go unanswered.”

NIGHT FIFTEEN

THE PILGRIMAGE (*Al-Hajj*)

This is the first partly Medinan sura after twelve Meccan suras in sequence. It has 78 verses and covers a half juz'. It is interesting that some of its verses were revealed in Mecca and some in Medina, some during the day and some at night, some during travel and some at the prophet's (PBUH) residence. It is also unique in that it is the only sura named after one of the pillars of Islam, *Hajj*.

The chapter begins with an emotional appeal, highlighting the terrifying aspects of the Day of Judgment, designed to shock humans and shake their conscious. It's also meant send us the message that *Hajj* is a reminder for that day. The *Hajj* clothing is like the burial shroud. Its crowds, heat, long lines and sweat is a reminder of the torment of Day of Reckoning. *Hajj* also trains a believer for *Jihād*. In *Hajj* we leave our comfortable homes, filling meals, designers clothes to scramble from one place to another, from one ritual to the next. It conditions our souls to be active, constantly moving to overcome adversity in life through patience. *Hajj* also teaches us how to be true servants of God. It makes us feel that whole world is subservient to God. On the day of 'Arafa, you feel that you are not alone in prostrating to God. You feel like your entire tent is prostrating, the mountain is prostrating and everyone around you is submitting, prostrating and calling upon God for their needs.

As one of its verses says,

Do you not see how all in the heavens and the Earth bow down in worship to God, including the sun, the moon, the stars, the mountains, the trees, the animals and a large number of people? ¹

May Allah teach us the lessons of Hajj: devotion to our Creator, Islamic activism and consciousness of everlasting life in the hereafter, Amen.

THE BELIEVERS (*Al-Mu'minūn*)

This sura was revealed during the climax of the famine in Mecca. It has 118 verses and covers a half juz'. This sura describes the characteristics of true believers, offers up the stories of historical role models of faith, the Prophets, and ends with a prayer. It opens with a promising note:

¹ (*Hajj*, 22:18)

*[How] prosperous are the believers! Those who pray humbly, who shun idle talk, who pay the prescribed alms, who guard their chastity . . . who are faithful to their trusts and pledges and who keep up their prayers, will rightly be given Paradise as their own, there to remain.*²

May Allah make us from those successful believers who are promised of everlasting paradise, Amen!

According to an authentic tradition, 'Umar, who had embraced Islam by that time, said, "This sura was revealed in my presence and I observed the state of the Prophet (PBUH) during its revelation. When the revelation ended, the Prophet (PBUH) said, 'On this occasion ten verses have been sent down to me and whoever lives by them will surely enter paradise.' Then, he said, the Prophet turned towards the Ka'ba, raised his hands into the air and said: 'God, please increase our share of goodness and do not reduce it; be generous to us and do not humiliate us; give to us and do not deprive us; favor us and do not favor others more than You favor us; and give us contentment and be pleased with us, Amen.'"

THE LIGHT (*Al-Nūr*)

This is a Medinan sura, has 64 verses, and covers around a half juz'. It was revealed after the campaign against *Bani Al-Mustalaq*, which took place after the battle of trench in 6 A.H., on the occasion of the slander against Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) wife, *A'isha*. This sura clarifies several regulations for the Muslim community, mainly to do with marriage, modesty, obedience to the Prophet (PBUH) and appropriate behavior in the household.

Al-Nūr, or "the light", as title of this sura implies, is one of God's exalted names and appears in verse 35. God alone is the source of all life and creation. He is also the source of light, physical as well as metaphysical. The universe is like a shadow that cannot exist without a body; if the latter goes then the former fades away. The universe only exists because God is there, controlling it and running its affairs. The light that enables life to continue originates with God Almighty. This word *nūr* is used by prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in many of his prayers, such as when he pleaded to God with a broken heart after being rejected by the people of *Tā'if*. He said: "I take refuge in the light of Your face which illuminates every darkness".

In this sura God gives glad tidings of His light to those who guard themselves against social corruption and sexual transgressions. This is achieved by avoiding its leading causes such as dating, showmanship and overt displays of beauty to the opposite gender. It also requires preventive measures such as the lowering of gaze, wearing the

² (Al-Mu'minūn, 23:1-11)

ḥijāb, moderate dress for both men and women, and not delaying marriage unnecessarily.

May Allah help us to embody the Qur'anic teachings of modesty and decency in the age of hyper-sexualization, undignified popular culture and loss of social and family values. May He help us become the recipients of His Light into our souls, hearts, homes and communities, Amen.

NIGHT SIXTEEN

THE DIFFERENTIATOR (*Al-Furqān*)

This is a Meccan sura revealed after sura *Yasīn*. With 77 verses, it covers around a third juz'. It begins with a condemnation of polytheism, then deals with the different arguments put forth by the disbelievers against the Prophet (PBUH) and the Day of Judgment. The sura describes the power and grace of God, and ends with the qualities of the true believers.

It is interesting that the accusations brought forth by the pagans of Mecca are no different than claims made by modern day critics of Islam. In over fourteen centuries, people have only managed to rehash old arguments that the Qur'an has already dealt with. Their allegations, and the Qur'anic response is as follows,

*The disbelievers say, 'This can only be a lie he has forged with the help of others' - they themselves have done great wrong and told lies - and they say, 'It is just ancient fables, which he has had written down: they are dictated to him morning and evening.' Say, 'It was sent down by Him who knows the secrets of the heavens and earth. He is all forgiving, all merciful.' ... The evil-doers say, 'The man you follow is simply under a spell.' See what they think you are like! They have gone astray and cannot find the right way.*¹

The sura proceeds to refute their arguments at length, and show that their rejection stems from selfish desires. The Qur'an on the other hand, and Islam as a whole, serves to differentiate truth from falsehood, light from darkness, faith from disbelief. In the closing argument, God gives a description of people with sincere hearts and true faith, "servants of the Lord of Mercy", as embodying the following characteristics:

1. Walking on earth with humility
2. Saying "peace" when confronted with ignorance
3. Spending the night in prayer and prostration
4. Pleading with their Lord to spare them the torment of Hell fire
5. Spending their wealth and resources in moderation
6. Not invoking any other deity besides God

¹ (Al-Furqān, 25:4-6,8)

7. Not murdering or committing adultery
8. Repenting for their wrongdoings and following it up with good deeds
9. Not bearing false witness
10. When reminded of their Lord, do not turn away
11. Ask God to make their families leaders for the righteous

May Allah make us from among the "Servants of Al-Rahmān", Ameen. This sura ends with a note that if it was not for our prayers, God would not care about us. So prayer is a pillar of our relationship with God.

THE POETS (*Al-Shu'arā'*)

This sura was revealed in Mecca when the Muslims were instructed to start preaching the message of Islam to close family members and semi-publicly. It has 227 verses, but covers a little less than a half juz' because of its short verses. This sura recounts the stories of seven prophets, their beautiful calls to the truth and the reactions of their people. In these stories, there are many lessons for interfaith dialogue, especially with the polytheists and idol worshipers of our time.

In a sense, this sura exemplifies how to launch PR campaign in favor of Islam, and to spread its true message across the public in an effective and beautiful manner, embedded in the culture of our time. At the time of prophet Moses, the Egyptians were most proud of magic, and held it in high regard. For prophet Abraham, his people were into intellectual debate. For prophet Jesus, the Romans took pride in their knowledge of medicine. Finally, during the time of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), the Arabs were renowned for their poetry and eloquence. As in every one of these situations, the messengers were given clear, unambiguous evidence of their prophethood - particularly undeniable to knowledgeable people.

Poetry during the time of the prophet was in many ways, a tool for propaganda. It was the CNN, Fox News, Facebook and Twitter of the time. This is where the sura gets its title of *Al-Shu'arā'*, or the poets. Good poets are praised and bad poets are condemned, as in our times, where good media needs to be praised and supported and bad media needs to be condemned. In essence, this chapter teaches us how to market and communicate the message of Islam in the most effective way using whatever means are at our disposal. Media must be used to promote good and not to spread evil, corruption, immorality and indecency.

May Allah inspire us to utilize our Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts for good causes such as fighting poverty, illiteracy, disease, to ease the pain and suffering of many people in the world and to honor Islam and its beautiful teachings, Amen.

THE ANTS (*Al-Naml*)

This is a Meccan sura which has 93 verses and covers less than a half juz'. While the last sura shows us the importance of media in promoting good, this sura tells us about greatness in civilization. Besides the importance of spiritual elements to our faith, such as praying, fasting and charity, we as Muslims need to excel as a civilization as well. The story of prophet Solomon and his dealings with the queen of Sheba from Yemen and with an ant colony is at the heart of the sura's message.

Solomon's kingdom, a superpower of its time, is presented as a symbol of success that managed to combine material and professional success with strong faith in God. Prophet Solomon was given the unique privilege of commanding a multi-species army consisting of *jinn*, humans, and animals. He recognized the value of knowledge and gratitude to God and the importance of passing on that knowledge to the next generation. His kingdom was blessed with lots of natural resources and the people worked hard to preserve and improve them. It was a fully functioning society with diverse professional expertise, division of labor, organization and enough acumen to deal with challenges. This success, recognized as a favor of God, was also employed to invite people to God. When the Hoopoe, or *hud-hud*, brought Solomon the news of queen Sheba who did not believe in God, she was invited into his palace as a royal guest. When she arrived and saw the majesty of Solomon's kingdom and her altered throne - brought to Solomon in the blink of an eye - she said:

*'O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, now I submit myself in Islam with Solomon to God, Lord of the worlds.'*²

This story summarizes the elements of success in our life: living for a greater purpose, knowledge, technological advancement, physical strength, and having a sense of responsibility coupled with belief in God's overwhelming power. This is why the sura ends with a discussion of God's amazing power in nature to remind and humble humans into recognizing their own limits. In particular, ants, despite being small and tiny insects, can teach us amazing lessons in building a successful society. Their ability to build colonies and homes with central air-conditioning, warehouses to store food, division of labor, social skills, defense and discipline is a lesson for mankind. It is from all of this that the sura draws its name.

May Allah help us to take Qur'an as a Book of guidance in all aspects of life, Ameen.

² (*Al-Naml*, 27:44)

NIGHT SEVENTEEN

THE STORY (*Al-Qasas*)

The main focus of this sura are some aspects of Prophet Moses's story. His birth, his mother casting him into the river as a baby, his upbringing in the Pharaoh's palace, his departure from Egypt to Midian, his marriage, his return to Egypt a decade later and finally his victory over the Pharaoh and his forces. The sura concludes by mentioning the story of *Qārūn*. This is the only sura that focuses on the story of prophet Moses without discussing his dealings with the Israelites.

Through the story of Moses, assurances are given to prophet Muhammad (PBUH) that he will one day return to Mecca victorious, as Moses did after leaving Egypt many years prior. God promises Moses's mother that he would return to her, and God fulfilled his promise. The prophet Muhammad (PBUH), after fleeing persecution in Mecca, returns within a decade, much in the same way Moses returned to Egypt. Many promises that were fulfilled by God are mentioned in this chapter: the promise of making Moses a prophet, the promise of supporting Moses with Aaron, the promise that the Pharaoh and his army will not harm them and the promise that victory belongs to the righteous.

One of the lessons of this sura is that we must have confidence and faith in the promises of God no matter how long it appears to take and how difficult it seems. This chapter also shows us the great role women played in supporting Islam. Four women are mentioned in this sura: the mother of Moses and her role in his life, his sister, the wife of the Pharaoh and the wife of Moses.

May Allah strengthen our hearts and give us the patience to see the fulfillment of His promises, Amen.

THE SPIDER (*Al-Ankabūt*)

This sura was revealed shortly before the Muslims' migration to Abyssinia. It has 69 verses, covers little less than a half juz'. The sura stresses that believers will be tested and that they should remain steadfast. Challenges in life are meant to test our sincerity and resilience in the face of difficulty. How are we going to be graded in the hereafter without a test? God discusses this in the opening verses of this chapter:

Do people think they will be left alone after saying 'We believe' without being put to the test? We tested those who went before

them: God will certainly mark out which ones are truthful and which are lying. ¹

Stories of the prophets are presented to show how they went through the tests and tribulations in their life time. Prophet Noah called his people to God for 950 years with little success and much ridicule. Prophet Abraham was thrown into a fire by his own people. In facing this trial he gave up his home, but he did not give up his faith. The sura equates the support of those other than God - in particular during times of need - as being weaker than a spider's nest. Towards the end of the sura, God makes us a promise of His own,

Those who strive in our cause, We will surely guide them to Our ways; surely, God is always with the righteous. ²

May Allah help us to pass the tests of our life for our faith with patience and success, make us among the righteous, Amen.

THE BYZANTINES (*Al-Rūm*)

This sura was revealed the same year Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) gave permission to the oppressed Muslims to migrate to Abyssinia. It has 60 verses and covers a half juz'.

Although this sura identifies a relationship between Islam and Christianity, its main focus is the signs of God. The sura urges people to reflect on their own creation, the heavens and the earth, and all of God's wonders. His power to give life to a barren land is oft-repeated as an indication of both His ability to raise the dead and of His mercy to mankind. The word *āya*, or sign, is used in this sura more frequently than in any other. This word reminds us of the fact that God placed in His kingdom two types of books; a readable book, the Qur'an, and an apparent book; the universe. Both of them interact with each other and serve to guide one other.

One of His signs is that He created you from dust - lo and behold! - you became human and scattered far and wide. Another of His signs is that He created spouses from among yourselves for you to live with in tranquility: He ordained love and kindness between you. There truly are signs in this for those who reflect. Another of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the diversity of your languages and colors. There truly are signs in this for those who know. ³

May Allah help us to become closer to Him through His signs, Ameen.

¹ (Al-'Ankabūt, 29:2-3)

² (Al-'Ankabūt, 29:69)

³ (Al-Rūm, 30:20-23)

LUQMAN (*Luqmān*)

This sura was also revealed in Mecca at the same time as sura *Al-Ankabūt*. It has 34 verses and covers a quarter juz'.

Our attention is drawn to God's power, knowledge and His hidden and manifest blessings in the universe. In addition, it brings into focus the responsibility of parents in nurturing their children with good manners. Some of those core values are mentioned here through the advice of *Luqmān*, a wise and righteous man of the past, to his son,

We endowed Luqmān with wisdom: 'Be thankful to God: whoever gives thanks benefits his own soul, and as for those who are thankless - God is self-sufficient, worthy of all praise.' Luqmān counselled his son, 'My son, do not attribute any partners to God: attributing partners to Him is a terrible wrong.' ... [And Luqman continued], 'My son, if even the weight of a mustard seed were hidden in a rock or anywhere in the heavens or earth, God would bring it to light, for He is all subtle and all aware. Keep up the prayer, my son; command what is right; forbid what is wrong; bear anything that happens to you steadfastly: these are things to be aspired to. Do not turn your nose up at people, nor walk about the place arrogantly, for God does not love arrogant or boastful people. Go at a moderate pace and lower your voice, for the ugliest of all voices is the braying of the asses'.⁴

Many fathers in today's society take a back seat in the raising of their children. They are only called on during an emergency when siblings are fighting or for report cards. However, this sura teaches us that fathers are as responsible for good, faith-based nurturing of their children as mothers are.

May Allah help our fathers to spend time with their children and nurture them with Islamic morals and manners, such as being kind to the elderly, not wasting food, and being clean, because Allah is pure and He loves cleanliness, Amen.

PROSTRATION (*Al-Sajda*)

This sura was revealed during the middle period of the Prophet's (PBUH) residence in Mecca. It has only 30 verses, covering less than a quarter juz'. As is obvious from its name, this sura is a symbol of submission and obedience to God. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to recite this sura during the *Fajr* prayer of every Friday, the Muslim sacred day, in submission and humility to God.

We see in this sura God praising the believers who submit to Him,

4 (*Luqmān*, 31:12-19)

The only people who truly believe in Our messages are those who, when they are reminded of them, bow down in worship, celebrate their Lord's praises, and do not think themselves above this. ⁵

Outward signs of a believer's submission to God is also illustrated,

Their sides shun their beds in order to pray to their Lord in fear and hope; they give to others some of what We have given them. No soul knows what joy is kept hidden in store for them as a reward for what they have done. ⁶

If you feel tired and exhausted in your worship and prayer, and want to revive your spirit of submission to God, then read this sura. If we don't submit to God willingly in this life, we will be forced to submit in the next.

May Allah help us to keep up our spirit of submission, worship and dedication to Him, Amen.

⁵ (Al-Sajda, 32:15)

⁶ (Al-Sajda, 32:16-17)

NIGHT EIGHTEEN

JUZ' TWENTY-TWO AND TWENTY-THREE

All of the following suras are in the twenty-second and twenty-third juz's. They are all Meccan except for *Al-Aḥzāb*. A common theme that ties these chapters together is submission to God. He provides us with proofs of His existence, His power and wisdom and His creation. We are then asked if the time has come for us to submit to Him in sincerity. Each of the suras can be summarized as follows:

1. *Al-Aḥzāb* teaches us to submit to God, even in the face of adversity and in the worst of situations, such as the Battle of the Trench.
2. *Saba'* reinforces the idea of sustaining civilizations with faith, and submitting to the Divine. This is discussed in the context of the kingdoms of Sheba and prophets David and Solomon.
3. *Fāṭir* takes submission to God to the next level. Dignity and honor are connected to our submission because God is the originator of all things. He alone maintains balance in the universe.
4. *Yāsīn* teaches us about submission to God through preaching - even if we do not see immediate results. This lesson is illustrated through the story of a believer who continuously called people without much success. This sura is supposed to be recited every day and even at the last moments of life to remind us to submit to Allah.
5. *Al-Sāffāt* calls us to submit to God, like the angels do, even if we don't comprehend the full wisdom of His commands. The story of Abraham and his son Ishmael is used as an example of submitting to God's command through sacrifice.
6. *Ṣād* invites us to submit to God even if we make mistakes. The stories of the prophets David, Solomon and Job, are given, each of whom submitted to God despite making mistakes. However, what sets them apart is that they did not insist on their wrong like Satan did, who arrogantly refused to submit.

With this brief statement about each sura and the theme of submission, there are a few additional important lessons from *Al-Aḥzāb*, which talks about the challenges faced by Muslims in Medina when they were caught between an external army and enemies from within. An enormous united pagan army had surrounded the Muslim city. Unknown to the Muslims, the pagans had struck a covert deal with

the hypocrites in Medina and others who violated their promise to defend the city. Under siege, the Muslims reached a point which the Qur'an describes as,

*your eyes rolled [with fear], your hearts rose into your throats, and you thought [ill] thoughts of God. There the believers were sorely tested and deeply shaken. The hypocrites started teasing them by asking 'Where is the help of God now? His promise is nothing but a delusion.'*¹

Another lesson relates to the story of *Zainab bint Jahsh* who was from a noble family and married the freed slave and adopted son of prophet Muhammad (PBUH), *Zayd*. However, the marriage ended in divorce, and became a test of submission to God. The prophet (PBUH) was commanded to marry the divorced wife of his adopted son, which was at odds with the customs of their time. In doing so, believers are asked to submit to God's decree, and no longer take adopted sons as real sons. From that moment on, *Zayd* was called *Zayd ibn Al-Hārith*, not *ibn Muḥammad*: the son of *Hārith*, not the son of Muhammad, who had adopted him.

The wives of prophet are also asked to submit to a modest life. The *ḥijāb* is also mentioned in this sura as a symbol of submission. The words obedience and loyalty are found in this sura fifteen times in the context of God's divine decree. The sura ends with a reminder that everything in creation submits to God, but humans have taken on the responsibility of submitting to Him willingly. That is where our true freedom lies; submitting to our Creator and not to our desires, lust greed and ego.

May we all renew our intentions to submit to our Creator not His creation and to enjoy the true meaning of freedom, Amen.

¹ (*Al-Aḥzāb*, 33:10-12)

NIGHT NINETEEN

SAD (*Ṣād*)

This chapter invites us to submit to God even if we make mistakes, illustrated through the stories of the three prophets David, Solomon and Job. However, what sets them apart is that they did not insist on their wrong like Satan did, who arrogantly refused to submit. It also draws a clear link between the arrogance displayed by the disbelievers of Mecca, the previous generations, and Satan, the original rebel. The first and last verses assert the truth and nobility of the Qur'an.

*Saad. By the Qur'an with its reminding ...! Yet the disbelievers are steeped in arrogance and hostility ... This is only a warning for all people. In time you will certainly come to know its truth.*¹

THE THRONGS (*Al-Zumar*)

This is an early Meccan sura. It has 75 verses and covers a little less than a half juz', and if considered to be one of the most beautiful suras of the Qur'an that Muslims love to recite and memorize. The main focus of the sura is the contrast between those who follow the true faith, and those who ascribe partners to God. The sura emphasizes that people are free to choose whether to believe or disbelieve, but urges them in the strongest possible terms to turn to the right path while there is still time to repent. The title also sends a strong message about the kind of friends and acquaintances with whom we associate and socialize. We should all remember that we are going to be grouped with them in the next life, so we should choose our friends wisely.

The sura opens with the topic of sincerity to God by refuting the justification given by idolaters that their idols bring them closer to God. It makes it clear that on the day of judgment, no one will bear the burden of others. It calls upon us to have a purity of intention in our acts of worship: helping others, treating our spouses and raising our children. In every act of life, our primary intention should be to obey God and to please Him alone. If we reach this level of sincerity in all of our actions, then we will be resurrected among the believers on the day of reckoning.

¹ (*Ṣād*, 38:1-3,88)

To illustrate the meaning of *ikhlas*, or loyalty to God, the sura draws many examples. It states,

God puts forward this illustration: can a man who has for his masters several partners at odds with each other be considered equal to a man devoted wholly to one master? All praise belongs to God, though most of them do not know ²

Now we should ask ourselves: are our hearts and minds full of love and loyalty for God or are they preoccupied with loyalty and devotion to celebrities and materialism? It should be apparent to all of us the need to spend less time with video games and more time with the Qur'an; less time on Facebook more time at the mosque. It should be easier to wake up for fajr, spend for God's cause and to sacrifice our ego and insecurities for God's sake.

May Allah give us ikhlas, loyalty and true love for Him, His Book and His obedience, Amen.

This sura also contains a verse known as the "most hopeful verse" in the Qur'an, as it gives hope to the wrongdoers to come back to God. In this life, a person might reach a point of total despair, surrender to Satan and to all of his schemes and temptations, piling up sins and transgressions. But no matter how dark the picture gets, this sura tells us that there is always room for hope and salvation.

[God says], 'My servants who have harmed yourselves by your own excess, do not despair of God's mercy. God forgives all sins: He is truly the Most Forgiving, the Most Merciful.' ³

May Allah forgive all of our shortcomings and wrong doings in this month of forgiveness, Amen.

Finally, this sura closes with a vivid portrait, describing how God will treat two distinctive groups: the good believers and the arrogant disbelievers. Disbelievers will be dragged into hell by surprise and will be tormented with the reminder of their arrogance and negligence in this world. The good believers on the other hand will be honored, welcomed by the angels and will resume their life in Gardens with peace and comfort, constantly praising and glorifying their Lord for their rewards and gifts.

May Allah make us from the people of ikhlas and gather us among the groups of people of paradise on the day of Judgment, Amen.

² (Al-Zumar, 39:29)

³ (Al-Zumar, 39:53)

NIGHT TWENTY

The collection of the seven suras from chapter 40 to 46 are together called *hawamīm al-sab'a*. They are connected by a common set of themes listed below:

1. All seven suras open with the individual Arabic letters *hā* and *mīm*.
2. They all follow with the assertion that the noble Qur'an is a direct revelation from God.
3. They were all revealed in Mecca. Chronologically speaking, their order in the Qur'an is the same as that in which they were revealed.
4. They all mention the story of Moses and the Israelites.
5. They all indicate that prophethood is being transferred from the Children of Israel to the nation of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).
6. They end by encouraging Muslims to be patient, to give respite and to forgive.

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is reported to have said: "Chapters with the beginning letters of *hā* and *mīm* are seven and the gates of Hell are seven. Each of these suras will stand at the gates of Hell and plead to God saying, 'O God, do not admit the one who used to believe and recite me.'" The Prophet (PBUH) further said: "For everything there is a fruit, and the *hawamīm* are the fruit of the Qur'an. They are well-guarded, closely knitted gardens. Whoever wants to enjoy the gardens of paradise let them read these suras." In many ways this represent a prologue of the Qur'an.

THE FORGIVER (*Ghāfir*)

The first, sura *Ghāfir* (The Forgiver), also known as *Al-Mu'min* (The believer) is the sura of da'wa and du'ā' - the chapter of calling people to God in the best way possible and turning to God. Examples of prophet Moses and a strong believer from the family of the Pharaoh are presented in this sura. This courageous believing man sees the truth of Moses but dares not only to disclose his Islam. However, he gives a convincing speech to the audience in the Pharaoh's court. When he is threatened to be killed he turns to God like Moses, saying "I entrust my affairs to God". In calling people to God, there needs to be lots of *tawakkul*, or reliance on God, to take risks. *du'ā'* is the expression of that reliance on God as this sura emphasizes. It says,

Your Lord said, 'Call upon me and I shall answer your prayers. Surely, those who are too arrogant to worship Me shall soon enter hell in humiliation.' ¹

VERSES MADE CLEAR (*Fuṣṣilat*)

This sura represents the transition from da'wa to confrontation. In this stage, Muslims are called upon to make the message clear, and people are told to receive it with open hearts and minds. It is said that the disbelievers' ears are blocked, and they are blinded by their arrogance from seeing the truth.

Muslims are called to be steadfast in practicing their faith and calling people to it. God says,

As for those who say, 'Our Lord is God,' and take the straight path towards Him, the angels come down to them and say, 'Have no fear or grief, but rejoice in the good news of Paradise, which you have been promised.' Who speaks better than someone who calls people to God, does what is right, and says, 'I am from those devoted to God'? ²

May Allah give us strength to be steadfast and consistent in our good deeds throughout this month and the rest of the year, Amen.

CONSULTATION (*Shurā*)

This sura calls upon us to avoid the causes of division and says that it is natural and rational to have disagreements. The only way to maintain unity with diverse opinions is to have mutual consultation between our family members, community members, staff and workers in our businesses. *May Allah help us to follow this beautiful Qur'anic guidance and keep our hearts together as Muslims, Amen.*

ORNAMENTS OF GOLD (*Zukhruf*)

This sura warns the believers from being deceived by worldly glitters and losing focus on achieving the rewards of the hereafter and Paradise. Interestingly enough, this is why gold and silver are mentioned in this sura more than any other as they are overt representations of material wealth. The Pharaoh is presented as a symbol of might and wealth who asserted his superiority by rhetorically asking his people about the manifest stronghold he had over the kingdom of Egypt. He proclaims,

¹ (*Ghāfir*, 40:60)

² (*Fuṣṣilat*, 41:30-33)

'My people, is the Kingdom of Egypt not mine? And these rivers that flow at my feet, are they not mine? Do you not see? Am I not better than this contemptible wretch who can barely express himself?' ³

On the contrary, Prophet Jesus is presented as a symbol of asceticism, turning away from a materialistic life style. The sura also warns those who make friends based on socio-economic status,

On that Day, even close companions will become enemies to one another with the exception of the righteous ⁴

May Allah guide us to find good friends who will remind us of Allah, help us to practice Islam and keep us from troubles, Amen.

SMOKE (*Al-Dukhān*)

This chapter warns us from the evil consequences of a corrupt, materialistic life. Referring to the destruction of Pharaoh, his army and his followers, the sura says,

Many a garden and spring they left behind, many a cornfield and noble building, many a thing in which they had delighted: We gave these to another people to inherit. ⁵

May Allah keep us safe from such destruction and help us maintain humility with our worldly positions and success, Amen.

KNEELING (*Al-Jāthiya*)

This sura further reinforces the idea of not deriving arrogance from material possessions and power. Referring to the people who used to make fun of the Prophet (PBUH), the Qur'an and Islam, God describes how humiliated and helpless they will be on the Day of Judgment: *[on that day], you shall see every nation on its knees* ⁶. This refers to the arrogant disbelievers who will be on their knees in humiliation and disgrace. The sura ends with a verse that shakes the heart of every person who has any amount of arrogance in his/her heart,

True greatness in the heavens and the earth is rightfully His: He is the Mighty, the Wise. ⁷

³ (*Zukhruf*, 43:51-52)

⁴ (*Zukhruf*, 43:67)

⁵ (*Al-Dukhān*, 44:25-28)

⁶ (*Al-Jāthiya*, 45:28)

⁷ (*Al-Jāthiya*, 45:37)

Due to the destructive consequences of arrogance personalities, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Anybody who has arrogance in their heart, even equivalent to a mustard seed, they shall not enter paradise."

May Allah purify our hearts from our ego, arrogance and false vanity and help us to detect and treat this disease with the Qur'anic remedies of humility and gratitude, Aeen.

THE SAND DUNES (*Al-Aḥqāf*)

Here we are reminded again of the consequences of arrogance. After all these admonitions, there will be those who would still insist on rejecting the message, like the people of 'Ad who lived in the sand dunes and challenged prophet *Hūd* to bring upon them the punishment of God. Even as the clouds of punishment approached, they shrugged it away and said the clouds will bring forth rain. But it was fierce wind that came down upon them and destroyed everything they had, by the command of God. Nearby *jinn* who were listening to this Qur'anic narrative were amazed by it and accepted Islam. This acceptance is also compared to the relationship between parents and children. There are good children who pray to God and thank Him for their parents, and there are others who rebuke their parents and rebel against them by not following the faith of Islam and its teachings.

May Allah make us among the good obedient parents and children who obey Allah and His messenger, and are of those who are respectful and thankful to Allah and our parents, Amen.

NIGHT TWENTY-ONE

MUHAMMAD (*Muḥammad*)

Ubbay ibn Ka'ab narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever recites sura *Muḥammad*, God will take it upon himself to grant him drink from the rivers of Paradise". In another narration he states that whoever recites this sura, no doubt shall ever enter into his heart about his faith and he will be safe from disbelief. This sura is also known as the sura of fighting. The Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever wants to know our condition and the condition of our enemies, then they should recite sura *Muḥammad* because for every verse for us, there is a verse for our enemy."

In this chapter of 38 verses, the subject of acceptance and rejection of our actions is mentioned twelve times and is connected directly with the obedience and disobedience of God. In this sura, believers are called open to obey Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in all matters including struggling and giving for God's cause. Today this translates to defending Islam and supporting institutions and individuals who are working for Islam. The last powerful verses of this sura are about giving for Islam.

*Behold! You are called upon to give in the cause of God but some of you are tightfisted; they are only miserly towards themselves. God is self-sufficient but you are destitute. If you turn back, He will replace you with others who shall not be like you at all.*¹

May Allah help us to overcome our weaknesses and keep us from being stingy when it comes to giving for our faith.

The Prophet (PBUH) said, "A miserly person is away from God, away from people and away from Paradise, and the generous one is closer to people, closer to God and closer to Paradise. Make us generous and closer to God, Paradise and closer to the people."

TRIUMPH (*Al-Fath*)

Ubbay ibn Ka'ab narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) said, "Whoever reads sura *Al-Fath*, it is as if they have witnessed the conquest of Mecca." The Prophet (PBUH) also said about this chapter that it was revealed to him on a night more beloved to him than anything the sun rises over. This sura was revealed when the Prophet's (PBUH) companions

¹ (*Muḥammad*, 47:38)

were distraught at the fact that they were denied access into Mecca by Quraysh. The Prophet (PBUH) then made a peace agreement with the Meccans which did not appear to be in favor of Muslims. Many Muslims felt that peace agreement was humiliating towards Islam and Muslims which forced them to return to Medina. In this sura, God Himself from above the seven heavens, sends glad tidings of many victories to the Muslims.

Victory of forgiveness of sins, victory of perfecting His blessings upon the Muslims, victory of guidance, victory of support and help, victory of tranquility for the Muslims, victory of humiliating the hypocrites and polytheists, victory of entering into Paradise, victory of God being pleased with the Muslims, victory of gaining spoils from the enemy, victory of promise to enter Mecca, victory of safety and security, victory of Islam's success and ultimately the conquest of Mecca.

This chapter is also generous in its praise of the companions of Prophet (PBUH), in spite of the fact that they were not happy with the treaty. But God praised them nonetheless to show that their disappointment was for God and for Islam not for themselves, or their ego. During the two years of the treaty, many more people embraced Islam than in many of the previous. A similar situation is found throughout history: Islam spread more during the time of peace, not war. *We pray to Allah to end the ongoing wars in the Muslim world, to relieve the suffering Muslims everywhere, to unite the hearts of the nation of prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to let the religion of peace prevail with peace, Amen.*

THE PRIVATE ROOMS (*Al-Hujurat*)

This sura teaches us how to be respectful to fellow Muslims, especially Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). This chapter also teaches us to put God and His messenger before our own opinions and desires, not to raise our voices in the presence of the Messenger (PBUH), to be careful in reporting any news and relating it to others with credible source, to honor brotherhood, to strive to mend relationships and not to make fun of each other and respect all human beings as our fellow brothers and sisters. If we really want to strengthen our relationship with the Prophet (PBUH), we should read these three suras.

We ask Allah to inspire us with the beautiful meanings of these suras, to help us practice their teachings of respect and obedience to Allah and His Messenger, and to show brotherhood and love to each other, Amen.

Juz' 27 of the Qur'an focuses on reviving faith in the hearts of the believers. The initial Qur'anic revelation presented the Divine way of life, then explained the necessary ingredients for human and civilizational progress and development, and ended with a prophetic model of submission to God. Generally speaking, in these next three parts of the Qur'an, we find recurring passages and chapters directed at strengthening the faith of believers, purifying their hearts and reminding them of the hereafter. The common theme that connects the suras of the 27th juz' is the contrast between guidance and misguidance, between a life of gratitude or a life of ingratitude, between a life of excessive materialism or a life full of spirituality. Between the road to Paradise or the path to Hell.

QAF (*Qāf*)

This is a Meccan sura which deals predominantly with the Resurrection and the Day of Judgement. Scenes from the day of judgment, the conditions of people on that day and a conversation between man and Satan is presented. If you really want to soften your heart, this is the best sura to recite and reflect upon. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) used to recite this sura for the Friday sermon from the beginning to the end.

SCATTERING WINDS (*Al-Dhāriyāt*)

This Meccan sura gives several of the signs of nature as proof of the Resurrection, among them the scattering winds that give the sura its title. It enforces the belief that sources of provision are in the hands of God. God reminds us that our sustenance is in the heavens not in this world with our bosses. It begins by mentioning the wind, which is a vital element for life on earth as it carries clouds that brings rain to people and animals, as well to the land for tilling and cultivation. The hospitality of prophet Abraham is mentioned and people are asked to race to God, to remind each other and to remember that their primary goal in life is to worship and serve God.

THE MOUNTAIN (*Al-Ṭūr*)

This sura has a gentle and soothing effect on the human spirit. It brings light into a believer's life like that which comes with the dawn

at the end of a long dark night. *Jubāyr ibn Mut'im* was a member of the Meccan delegation who had gone to Medina to negotiate the release of prisoners following the pagan defeat at Badr. While the Muslims were praying, he heard the Prophet reciting sura *Al-Ṭūr*. He was captivated by what he heard and began to question his own pagan belief. Later on, he said that he felt his heart almost jump out of his body when he heard the words,

*Were they created out of nothing? Were they themselves the
creators?*¹

These verses had such a profound impact on him that he felt an immense fear of Divine punishment and accepted Islam.

THE STAR (*Al-Najm*)

A Meccan sura that confirms the Divine source of the Prophet's message and refers to his ascension to heaven during the Night Journey. The sura refutes the claims of the disbelievers about their goddesses and angels, and the third paragraph lists several truths about God's power. The sura closes with a warning of the imminent Day of Judgment.

THE MOON (*Al-Qamar*)

A Meccan sura dealing mainly with the punishment dealt out to previous generations of disbelievers. These are presented as a warning to the disbelievers of Mecca, with the phrase 'Will anyone take heed?' running throughout the sura. Finally the treatment of the disbelievers on the Day of Judgement is contrasted to the everlasting bliss the believers will enjoy. The title is taken from verse 1 and is a reference to the Day of Resurrection.

THE LORD OF MERCY (*Al-Raḥman*)

A Medinan sura that has 78 verses. It highlights God's favors and wonders in this world, describes the end of the world, and paints a beautiful picture of the delights of Paradise. Hell is briefly contrasted with the joys that await the righteous. The sura is characterized by the phrase *which, then, of your Lord's blessings do you both deny?* which runs throughout the sura.

The sura divides mankind and *jinn* into three classes: the disbelievers, the best of believers, and the ordinary believers. Once the companion *Abū Bakr* heard the verse *sinner will be recognized by their faces and they shall be seized by their forelocks and their feet*, he started

¹ (*Al-Ṭūr*, 52:35)

thinking about the Day of Judgment, Paradise and Hell, and he said he wished could be a piece of grass consumed by an animal. Then the verse was revealed, *for those who fear the standing before their Lord, there will be two gardens.*

May Allah make us from among the people of those gardens, Amen!

THAT WHICH IS COMING (*Al-Wāqī'a*)

A Meccan sura whose central message is stated in its opening verses, from which the sura takes its title. The Day of Judgment is inevitable and it will sort people into the humiliated and the richly rewarded. As in the previous sura, people are divided into three classes: those brought near to God (the best of the believers), those on the right (the ordinary believers), and those on the left (the disbelievers). Ample proof is given of God's power and consequently His ability to bring about the Resurrection.

When you read / listen to this sura, think about God's blessings; blessings of His creation, blessings of food, crops, water and fire. God is asking us in the sura,

Have you ever considered the water which you drink? Is it you who send it down from the clouds or Are We the sender? If it be Our will, We could turn it salty. Why then do you not give thanks? Have you ever considered the fire that you kindle; is it you who made the tree to grow which feeds the fire or Are We the grower? We have made it a reminder for man as to what would be the life without it. ²

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said that whoever recites it every evening, hunger will not touch them. In other words our financial security is guaranteed by the most truthful prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in the recitation of this sura every night. It is narrated that when *Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd* was on his death bed, he was visited by *'Uthmān* who asked him, "Of what do you complain?" He responded, "Of my sins." *'Uthmān* then asked, "Of what do you desire?" *Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd* said, "The mercy of my Lord." *'Uthmān* then inquired, "Shall I not call for a doctor?" *Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd* declined, "It is The Doctor who has made me ill." *'Uthmān* asked further, "Shall I at least provide you [some wealth to leave for your family]?" *Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd* retorted, "I have no need of that." *'Uthmān* pleaded, "At least to leave behind something for your daughters..." Finally *Abdullāh ibn Mas'ūd* said "Do you fear poverty for my daughters [O *'Uthmān*]? I have instructed my daughters to recite *sura Al-Wāqī'a* every night. I heard the Prophet of God (PBUH) state: 'Whoever recites *Al-Wāqī'a* every night shall never be afflicted with desperate need.' " ³

² (*Al-Wāqī'a*, 56:68-73)

³ (*Ibn Kathīr*)

May Allah inspire us to believe in the promises of the Prophet (PBUH) and to practice his teachings, Amen!

IRON (*Al-Ḥadīd*)

A Medinan sura that urges the believers to spend in God's cause and uphold justice and maintain balance between their spiritual needs and worldly necessities – the sura takes its title from the iron mentioned in verse 25. The all pervasiveness of God's power, knowledge, control, and glory is affirmed to encourage the believers to right action, and the fate of the hypocrites is described. Previous prophets are mentioned, especially Noah, Abraham, and Jesus, showing the response they received. The sura closes with a reference to the People of the Book. Iron is used as an example of a resource which God provides that is mighty in strength and has many uses for Mankind, and which is supposed to be used for good by those who strive in His path.

There is a verse in this sura that shakes our conscious and moves our hearts. When the verse was revealed, the companions of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) said, "Our Lord has rebuked us because our hearts are hardened." The verse states,

Has not the time come for the believers to submit with fervent hearts to God's warning and to the truth He has revealed, so that they may not become like those who were given the book before this, when the time passed by, their hearts turned hard in accepting God's guidance. ⁴

May Allah make us among those whose hearts are softened by the ayat of the Qur'an and who are brought near to Allah on the Day of Judgment, Amen.

⁴ (*Al-Ḥadīd*, 57:16)

NIGHT TWENTY-THREE

Juz' 28 of the Qur'an contains a diverse collection of suras which deal with justice, unity and warn against hypocrisy.

THE DISPUTE (*Al-Mujādala*)

This sura begins with the plea of a woman who was oppressed. God listens to her complaint from above the seven heavens and gives instructions on how to make the divorce fair for her. In this sura, Hypocrites are also taken to task for their hidden malice and conspiracies against the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), such as wishing him ill instead of greeting him with warm welcome. In addition, Muslims are taught better social behavior: they are instructed to avoid selfishness and narrow-mindedness in gatherings. They are also asked to welcome the new comers with open arms and give them room to sit during gatherings. Those who befriend God's enemies are called allies of Satan, and only loyal and sincere Muslims are the ones who truly allies of God.

THE GATHERING (*Al-Hashr*)

A Medinan sura, the bulk of which is taken to refer to the Jewish clan of *Banū Al-Nadīr*, who originally agreed to an alliance with the Prophet (PBUH) yet, after the Meccan defeat of the Muslims in the Battle of *Uḥud*, made an alliance with the Meccans. They also attempted to kill the Prophet (PBUH) while he was in their part of town. In return, he asked them to leave and they agreed, but *Ubayy*, the head of the 'hypocrites' of Medina, promised them that if they fought the Muslims, he and his camp would fight with them, and if they had to leave Medina, he and his camp would leave with them. Because the *Banū Al-Nadīr* had repeatedly broken their agreements, the Muslims besieged them in Medina, and the Hypocrites did not fulfill their promise to leave Medina. Eventually the tribe left Medina, some going to Syria and others to the nearby city of *Khaybar*. In this sura, God stresses that any gains were His doing and should be distributed in accordance with His instructions. The end of the sura, consequently, emphasizes obedience and awe towards God. The sura takes its name from the gathering of forces in the second verse.

WOMAN TESTED (*Al-Mumtahana*)

This sura clearly defines interfaith relations: believers cannot under any circumstances have relations of love and friendship with the disbelievers who are actively hostile to Islam and Muslims. However there is no harm in dealing kindly and justly with those disbelievers who are not practically and directly engaged in hostile activities against Islam and in the persecution of Muslims. This sura also dealt with a social problem after the truce of *Hudaybiyya* where some Muslim women were left behind in Mecca with their non-Muslim husbands, and some Muslim men had pagan wives who were left behind in Mecca as well. The question arose as to whether the marriage between them remained valid. God settled this problem forever, saying that a pagan husband is not lawful for Muslim women, nor is a pagan wife lawful for Muslim men. Women who gave an oath of allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) are recognized for their loyalty and obedience to God and to His messenger.

SOLID LINES (*Al-Şaff*)

A Medinan sura encouraging the believers to stick together in support of God's cause. It criticizes those who broke their word and those who argued against the faith. Moses and Jesus are cited as examples of prophets whose communities were divided: the rebellious were left to stray and the faithful granted success. The rewards of those who strive in God's cause are described in some detail.

*Have faith in God and His messenger and struggle for His cause with your possessions and your person - that is better for you if only you knew - and He will forgive your sins, admit you into Gardens graced with flowing streams, into pleasant dwellings in the Gardens of Eternity. That is the supreme triumph.*¹

THE DAY OF CONGREGATION (*Al-Jumu'a*)

A Medinan sura which takes its title from the instruction to the believers to observe the Friday prayer promptly and reliably when called. The sura reminds the Muslims of God's grace in granting them a prophet and the chance to grow spiritually. Those who do not act in accordance with the knowledge they have been given are criticized as "donkeys carrying books" from which they derive no benefit.

¹ (*Al-Şaff*, 61:11-12)

THE HYPOCRITES (*Al-Munafiqūn*)

Hypocrites are unprincipled individuals who lack decisiveness and stability; they go with the flow, guided only by their egotistic interests and selfish desires. They preach holiness while practicing deceit and mischief. They turn any trivial incident in the Muslim community into a crisis and do their best to spread hostility and ill-will. This Medinan sura warns the believers about the treachery of the hypocrites and describes their behavior in some detail. A specific occasion on which the hypocrites tried to stop anyone donating money to believers is described and God calls on the Muslims to compensate for this by giving more of their own funds to the needy. The sura also tries to awaken the Muslim consciousness by warning them of distractions and evils from within their midst.

May Allah help us heed these verses and support Islamic causes in America. Causes to support Islam, to preserve our identity and to grow with dignity, and protect us from stinginess and from hypocrisy, Amen.

MUTUAL NEGLECT (*Al-Taghābun*)

A Medinan sura that reminds the disbelievers of those who disbelieved before them, and their denial of resurrection is strongly refuted. Muslims are reminded that their own family members may serve as their enemies, by undermining their dedication to God through worldly distraction. They are encouraged to be forgiving, to remain steadfast and spend in God's cause.

DIVORCE (*Al-Ṭalāq*)

This chapter outlines some regulations concerning divorce and urges people to observe God's regulations and guidance in matters of marriage, housing and maintenance. This is reinforced by reminding the reader of earlier disobedient people in contrast to the rewards of the obedient. God's power and knowledge are emphasized at the end.

PROHIBITION (*Al-Taḥrīm*)

A Medinan sura that discusses episodes of the Prophet's (PBUH) home life. It rebukes two of the Prophet's wives for an incident where confidence is betrayed and urges believers to submit themselves to God and to guard themselves and their families against Hellfire.

NIGHT TWENTY-FOUR

JUZ' 29

All of 11 suras of this juz' were revealed in Mecca except for *Al-Insān* about which scholars differ. The common theme of these suras is that of calling people to God, as well as the introducing the world to the Islamic way of life; an obligation on every Muslim male and female. In the example of *Abū Bakr*, the very first day he accepted Islam he helped an additional six people come into the fold of Islam. His knowledge of Islam at that time might have been less than what we have today, but he was immediately an ambassador of Islam and accomplished in a single day what many of us don't accomplish in a lifetime.

May Allah inspire us with the spirit and love of Abu Bakr for Islam, Amen.

DOMINION (*Al-Mulk*)

Abu Huraira narrates that the Prophet (PBUH) said: "There is a chapter in the Qur'an which has thirty verses. I shall plead for its reader until God grants them forgiveness." The Prophet (PBUH) would not sleep until he recited both this sura and *Al-Sajda*. He is also reported to have said: "I wish this sura could be in the heart of every person of my nation."

The chapter is also called *Al-Māni'a*, or the protector, because whoever recites it, God will protect them from the torment of the grave. *Ibn Abbās* narrates that the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, "It is a protector; a rescuer; saving from the chastisement of the grave."

May Allah help us realize its value and to memorize and recite this sura every night, Amen.

This chapter also calls upon us to first introduce God to people whom we call to Islam. This sura invites us to see God's greatness, His kingdom, His perfection in creation and His magnificent construction. That there exists no faults and no one could have created it except God, the Almighty.

THE PEN (*Al-Qalam*)

Also known as *Nūn*, this chapter describes the basic characteristics of the caller to Islam and praises the high morals of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), in contrast with the low character of his enemies. The

story of the owners of a garden is discussed, illustrating the bad nature and fate of arrogant, stingy people. This is the second *sura* to be revealed to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). As the first chapter *Al-'Alaq* commands us to read, this second chapter encourages us to write to preserve our knowledge.

May Allah make us the people who read and write.

THE INEVITABLE (*Al-Hāqqa*)

This is one of the names of the Day of Judgment. Scenes of that Day are presented in the *sura* to wake people up from their state of heedlessness and invite them to be from those who will be happy and overjoyed on the Day of Judgment. Those who believe in God and do good deeds. This chapter played a big role in changing the heart of the third Caliph 'Umar leading to his conversion. The depiction of the Great Event is mentioned through the statement of records each person will receive,

*On that Day you will be exposed and none of your secrets will remain hidden. Anyone who is given his Record in his right hand will say 'Here is my Record, read it. I knew I would meet my Reckoning!' And so he will have a pleasant life in a lofty Garden, with clustered fruit within his reach. It will be said, 'Eat and drink to your heart's content as a reward for what you have done in the days gone by.' But anyone who is given his Record in his left hand will say, 'If only I had never been given any Record and knew nothing of my Reckoning. How I wish death had been the end of me.'*¹

May Allah make us from those whose book of deeds on the Day is handed to them in their right hand and are happy and proud for their reward, Amen.

WAYS OF ASCENT (*Al-Ma'ārij*)

In the beginning of this chapter, God refers to Himself as the "Lord of the Ways of Ascent". While *Al-Qalam* talks about the characteristics of calling to Islam, this chapter focuses on aspects of worship and devotion for those who invite others to God. Righteous worshipers and charity givers are praised in this *sura*. It says,

Man was truly created anxious: he is hopeless when misfortune touches him, but tight-fisted when good fortune comes his way. Not so those who pray and are constant in their prayers. Who give a due share of their wealth to the needy and the deprived.

¹ (*Al-Hāqqa*, 69:18-28)

Who believe in the Day of Judgment and fear the punishment of their Lord. ²

May Allah make us from the people who are hopeful, generous and regular in their prayers, Amen.

NOAH (*Nūh*)

After explaining the characteristics of a caller to God in the previous four chapters, God now presents a model caller, Prophet Noah. He called his people day and night, utilizing every possible means for 950 years with little success. Still, he did not give up and asked people not to lose hope in God. He also tells them that if they accept his message they will be rewarded in this life and in the next. He says,

Seek forgiveness of your Lord, He is ever ready to forgive you. He will send abundant rain for you from heaven, help you with wealth and sons, and provide you with gardens and flowing rivers. ³

May Allah give us patience in working for His cause and reward us with goodness in both worlds, Amen.

THE JINN (*Al-Jinn*)

A beautiful speech of the *jinn* who embraced Islam after hearing the Qur'an is presented in this chapter. It motivates people to think because of how the *jinn*, creatures from a different world, are touched by the power of the Qur'anic message. This is a lesson to humans, who are told that the Prophet (PBUH) can help them only by delivering the message - God is the All Powerful One. The disbelievers are threatened with what they will meet on the Day of Judgement.

ENFOLDED (*Al-Muzzamil*)

Calling people to God and His way is not an easy task. It needs Divine support and help. God calls upon Muslims to stand up in prayer during the night, strengthening their hearts with Divine provisions, and to be active during the day. Devotion to God and activism for Islam is emphasized in both this chapter and the next. The Prophet (PBUH) is urged to be patient, told of the punishment that awaits the Meccan disbelievers in Hell, and reminded of the punishment that befell Pharaoh in this life.

² (*Al-Ma'ārij*, 70:19-27)

³ (*Nūh*, 71:10-12)

WRAPPED IN HIS CLOAK (*Al-Muddathir*)

After his first encounter with the angel Gabriel in the Cave of *Hirā'*, the Prophet (PBUH) went home trembling and asked his wife to cover him with his cloak. The first verses of this Meccan sura were then revealed. It then proceeds to remind the disbelievers of their fate on the Day of Judgement and a specific opponent of the Prophet, *Al-Walīd ibn Al-Mughīra*, is singled out. The end of the sura exposes the foolishness of the disbelievers' attitude to the Revelation and the Day of Resurrection.

THE RESURRECTION (*Al-Qiyāma*)

A Meccan sura dealing with the Day of Resurrection and man's denial of that Day. God's power is convincingly described in several passages. The Prophet (PBUH) is instructed on appropriate reception of the revelation. The sura is meant to remind us to keep our focus on the hereafter and its rewards through our activism, not on the results in this life.

MAN (*Al-Insān*)

Similar to the previous sura, *Al-Insān* speaks of how man will be tested and what the results will be for the evildoers and for the righteous. The Prophet (PBUH) is urged to persevere in his devotion and to be patient. God ends by stating *He admits whoever He will into His Mercy and has prepared a painful torment for the disbelievers.*

[WINDS] SENT FORTH (*Al-Mursalāt*)

Finally, in this chapter, God warns the disbelievers on consequences of their rejection and promises the righteous believers a dwelling amidst Gardens with cool shades, springs and fruits of their choice. They will be told to eat and drink to their hearts content as a reward for their good deeds.

May Allah make us the recipients of these rewards in the hereafter in Paradise through our love and passion to work for Islam, Ameen.

JUZ' 30

This last juz' of the Qur'an consists of 37 sura's, and has a special, distinctive color. All the suras in this juz' are Meccan, except for two, *Al-Bayyina* and *Al-Nasr*. Although the suras vary in length, in general they are all short. Most significantly however, is that they form a single group with more or less the same theme. They share many of the same rhythms, imagery and overall style. They are like a persistent and strong knock on the door, or a series of loud shouts to awaken those who are in a deep slumber or have lost consciousness entirely, or those who are too absorbed with fun and games to realize what is coming. The knocks keep coming: Wake up! Look around! Think! Reflect! There is a God! There is a plan, a trial, reward and punishment. The same warnings are repeated again and again.

This juz' concentrates on certain scenes in the universe and in the world of the human soul, as well as certain events which take place on the Day of Decision. Emphasis is also given to the Day of Resurrection, which is described in different places as the Greatest Catastrophe, the Stunning Blast, the Enveloper, etc. Scenes of the reckoning, great reward and severe retribution are also given prominence. All these are given as a proof of the reality of creation and the elaborate planning of the universe by God, as well as evidence confirming the reality of the life to come, and its reckoning.

The first sura, *Al-Naba'*, or *The Announcement*, lays its emphasis on the realities of creation and resurrection, and on scenes of the universe and the hereafter. The same applies to the next sura, *Al-Nāzi'āt* (The forceful chargers). The third sura, *'Abasa* (He Frowned), discusses an incident that happened while the Prophet (PBUH) was speaking to some disbelieving notables, hoping to convert them. A blind Muslim man came up to learn from him, but in his eagerness to attract the disbelievers to Islam, the Prophet (PBUH) frowned at him. The Prophet (PBUH) is then admonished and told not to concern himself with the disbelievers. This teaches us to treat people with the utmost respect and kindness: if Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) was reproached for a simple frown, then we need to think deeply about how we treat people around us and if we live up to the Prophetic standard.

Chapter 81, *Al-Takwīr* (Shrouded in Darkness), portrays scenes of the chaos which envelops the whole world on the Day of Resurrection. It also affirms the truth of revelation and the Prophet Muhammad's

(PBUH) honesty. The next sura, *Al-Infītār* (Torn apart), also contains scenes of chaos, coupled with scenes of perfect happiness and eternal suffering in the hereafter. As it portrays these it aims to shake and awaken people's hearts,

O mankind, what has lured you away from God, your generous Lord, who created you, shaped you, proportioned you, in whatever form He chose? ¹

We as human beings, often forget to be grateful to God, to thank him for our very existence. Instead we become arrogant and defiant, as if everything we have achieved in this world, which is insignificant compared to what God has, was of our own doing. Rather, we should turn back to God, remember His countless blessings upon us, and use what He gave us to strive in his path, strengthen our ties with Him and with our fellow Muslim brothers and sisters. In the next sura, *Al-Muṭaffifīn* (Those who give short measure), the practice of cheating is condemned. The fate of those who cheat and the disbelievers is contrasted with what is in store for the righteous. How often have each of us engaged in some form of cheating? Whether it's very obvious, like on an exam, or more subtle, like cheating our employers out of the time we are supposed to be getting paid for? This sura teaches us that such behavior is un-Islamic and we should all turn to God and repent before it is too late.

More scenes of reward and punishment are portrayed in sura 84, *Al-Inshiqāq* (Ripped Apart). Sura 85, *Al-Burūj* (The towering constellations), strengthens the heart of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his followers by telling the story of a group of believers who were subjected to extreme torture by the unbelievers. It states how God will inflict greater and more severe torture on the evil doers, and emphasizes His power on the whole universe - from the stars in the sky to the evildoers in the sura. This chapter should help us during our own struggles against Islamophobia and discrimination. It teaches us to strengthen our resolve, and that in the end God will give everyone what they deserve, even if we don't see it in this world.

The next sura, *Al-Tāriq* (The Night-comer), draws some scenes of the universe and speaks of the origins of man and plants prior to an oath, by all these, affirming that "This is surely a decisive statement; it is not something to be taken lightly." Sura 87, *Al-A'lā* (The Most High), speaks of creation, planning, divine guidance and the various stages of the growth of pastures. All this is given by way of introduction to the theme of the hereafter, reckoning, reward and retribution. Sura *Al-Ghāshiyā* (The Enveloper), provides some images of the believers' happiness in the hereafter, and the unbelievers' suffering. It also draws attention to the creation of camels, heaven, earth and the mountains. The same applies right through to the end of this

¹ (*Al-Infītār*, 82:6-8)

juz', with the exception of a few chapters which are devoted to the principles of faith, such as *Al-Ikhlāṣ* (Purity of Faith), *Al-Kāfirūn* (The Unbelievers), *Al-Ma'ūn* (Common Kindness), *Al-Asr* (The Declining Day), *Al-Qadr* (The night of glory), and *Al-Nasr* (Help).

There are also a few chapters which give encouragement and solace to the Prophet (PBUH) and direct him to seek refuge with his Lord against all evil, such as *Al-Ḍuhā* (The morning brightness), *Al-Sharḥ* (Relief), *Al-Kawthar* (Abundance), *Al-Falaq* (Daybreak), and *Al-Nās* (People).

We ask Allah to make us among those who take heed in his signs. Those who turn to him in times of difficulty and in times of ease. We ask Allah to put us on the path of our beloved prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and to soften our hearts to his signs, Amen.

INVOCATION

O Allah, make us amongst those You have guided and make us amongst those You have protected.

Make us amongst those You have blessed and make us amongst those You have healed.

Protect us and our families from any evil that You have decreed.

It's You who's our judge. From Your day we take heed.

You have authority over all, and sent us Your divine creed.

O Allah, To You belongs all praise, in the heavens and in the earth.

You are the light of our days, You are our protector since birth.

You are the truth. Your speech is true and Your promise is true. So keep us on Your path and protect our youth.

O Allah, We've submitted to You, and believed in You, and depend on You and repent to You.

Overlook what we've committed. Forgive our past sins and new.

You know what's in our heart and minds. Our actions You're aware of too.

Week seek refuge in You from being those whose faces are blue.

On the day in which there's no shade, no savior, no relief. Except for those whom You have chosen to give amnesty to.

O Allah, We ask You for paradise and all that brings us close. From good actions and speech and even during repose.

We ask You to not foreclose, Your vast gates of mercy. Or make us from those who respond to You adversely.

O Allah, Forgive our sins. Fulfill our debts. Accept our prayers and give joy to those upset.

Protect our travelers. Cure our sick. Assist our needy. And keep our faults hidden.

Have mercy on our dead. Give them vast blissful gardens. Bless those of us in want, with healthy righteous children.

O Allah, Don't make this world and its glamor, our biggest worry in life. Grant us the gardens of paradise, and spare us from strife.

Make not our sins a source of oppression, upon ourselves. Nor our families or children nor our parents or wives.

O Allah, You are the great Pardoner, so pardon our sins. So pardon our sins. So pardon our sins. We submit ourselves to You. Mind, body and limbs.

O mover of hearts, keep our hearts firm. Let not Satan deceive us, and cause us to burn.

Grant us eternal bliss, and a coolness of the eyes. For You are the All-Knowing, the Most Merciful, the Most Wise.

O Allah, Make us righteous. and others at our hands. Guide us too, and others in our lands.

Make us openers of good, closers of bad. Bestow Your favor upon us, and don't let us get mad.

O Allah, We ask You for spoils of good. and reprieve from evil. Entrance into heaven. and refuge from the devil.

O Allah, Fill us with the joy of seeing Your Blessed Face. And a desire to meet You in our final resting place.

Make us amongst those, who upon their death - will be met with roses, lavender and a soft breath.

Of angels welcoming us to a content Lord, and a paradise of gardens and vastness of Grace.

O Allah, Accept our fasting, and accept our prayers. And overlook our shortcomings, and our betrayals.

Make us from those whose fasting is accepted. And becomes overjoyed with Your worship . . . Do not leave us rejected.

O Allah, Provide for us a sip from Your Prophet's fountain out of mercy. A sip, after which, we will never be thirsty.

Gather us in his crowd and accept his intercession. On our behalf for our transgression.

O, the one who is High and Mighty, the one to whom everything is nothing but lowly.

To You we flee and fumble, upon Your door we knock and wait, from Your glory we are left humble.

O the listener of cries and duaas, the one whom beyond no one can pass.

Our sins have led us astray. Their burden tightens our airway. There is no one else to whom we can pray.

We ask You, by Your limitless mercy, to forgive our sins, though we are unworthy.

No matter their size, small or big, no matter the time, morning or night.

No matter their type, in secret or public, no matter our state, in comfort or fright.

O Allah, Whoever has helped build this blessed house of Yours. Whoever has helped keep open to worshipers its doors.

Whoever has served the worshipers who pray here. We ask that You forgive their sins no matter what they may be.

We ask You that You conceal their faults and open their breasts. For are there serving You, when we are all at rest.

O Allah, Whosoever You've made sick or afflicted with disease. Make it a source for them of unencumbered ease.

Cure their ailments and pains they are truly in need. Raise their ranks in the heavens for their every good deed.

O Allah, Grant us good in this world, and good in the life to come.

Keep us safe from the Fire, and from being deaf, blind and dumb.

Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or fall into error. Lay not upon us such a burden which would leave us in terror.

Our Lord! Impose not on us that which we have not the strength to bear. Grant us forgiveness and have mercy on us, and show us Your care.

Our Lord! We have sinned against ourselves, and unless You grant us forgiveness... And bestow Your mercy upon us, we shall most certainly be filled with wickedness.

Our Lord! Send Your blessings and greetings upon Your last Prophet Muhammad. And upon his family, friends, companions and those whom, his path, they tread.