

Listening
to the
Qur'ān

Listening *to the* Qur'ān

INSIGHTS, COMMANDS
AND GUIDANCE FOR
OUR LIFE

KHALID BAIG



openmind press
GARDEN GROVE • CALIFORNIA

Openmind Press, Garden Grove, CA 92842

Copyright © 2014 Khalid Baig

All rights reserved. Aside from fair use, meaning a few pages or less for educational purposes, review, or scholarly citation, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior written permission of the copyright holder.

First edition Rabīʿ al-Awwal 1435 / January 2014

Printed in the United States of America

23 22 21 20 19 18 17 16 15 14 1 2 3 4

ISBN 0-9755157-4-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2013922750

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the minimum requirements of the American National Standard for Information Sciences - Permanence of Paper for Printed Materials, ANSI Z39.48-1984.

www.openmindpress.com

كُنْتُ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ إِلَيْكَ مُبْرَكٌ لِيَدَّبَّرُوا آيَاتِهِ وَلِيَتَذَكَّرَ أُولُو
الْأَلْبَابِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(Here is) a Book which We have sent down unto you, full of blessings, that they may ponder over its āyahs, and that those who are endowed with insight may take them to heart. (Sād 38:29)

قَدْ جَاءَكُمْ مِنَ اللَّهِ نُورٌ وَكِتَابٌ مُبِينٌ ﴿١٥﴾ يَهْدِي
بِهِ اللَّهُ مَنِ اتَّبَعَ رِضْوَانَهُ سُبُلَ السَّلَامِ وَيُخْرِجُهُم
مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ بِإِذْنِهِ وَيَهْدِيهِمْ إِلَى صِرَاطٍ
مُسْتَقِيمٍ ﴿١٦﴾

There has come to you from Allāh a light, and a Book Manifest. Whereby Allāh guides whosoever follows His good pleasure in the ways of peace and brings them forth from the depths of darkness into the light by His leave; and He guides them to a straight path. (Al-Mā'idah 5:15-16)

TRANSLITERATION KEY

ء (أء)	’ (a slight catch in the breath)	غ	gh (similar to French r)
ا	a	ف	f
ب	b	ق	q (heavy k, from the throat)
ة and ت	t (ة has an “h” sound at the end of a sentence)	ك	k
ث	th (as in “thorn”)	ل	l
ج	j	م	m
ح	ḥ (heavy h, from deep within the throat)	ن	n
خ	kh (“ch” in Scottish loch)	ه	h (as in “help”)
د	d (the hard “th” in “the”)	و	w
ذ	dh (the soft “th” in “the”)	ي	y (as in “yellow”)
ر	r	Vowels	
ز	z	ـَـُـ	a (slightly softer than the “u” in “but”); an
س	s	ـِـ	i (as in “in”); in
ش	sh	ـُـ	u (“oo” in “book”); un
ص	ṣ (heavy s, from the upper mouth)	آ ا	ā (elongated a, as when you would stretch the “a” in “plastic”)
ض	ḍ (heavy d, from the upper mouth)	أ	ā at the start of a word, ’ā in the middle (pronounced like اء)
ط	ṭ (heavy t, from the upper mouth)	و and ء	ū (“u” in “glue”)
ظ	ẓ (heavy z, from the upper mouth)	ي and ء	ī (“ee” in “feet”)
ع	‘ (like two a’s from deep within the throat)	س	stress symbol, indicated by repetition of letter

Honorifics

ﷻ	Glorified and Most High	ﷺ	May Allāh’s blessings and peace be upon him
ﷺ	May peace be upon him	ﷺ, ﷺ	May Allāh be pleased with him/her

Contents

Introduction	I
<hr/>	
Juz One	5
<hr/>	
Ta’wudh	5
Bismillāh	6
Sūrah al-Fātiḥah	7
Guidance and its Prerequisites	10
Congregational Prayer	14
Juz Two	15
<hr/>	
The Middle Nation	15
The Prophet’s Role, Our Responsibilities	16
When Calamity Strikes	17
True Piety	18
Spouses: The Metaphor of Garments	19
Wine and Gambling	20
Rights of Women	21
Generosity in Dealings	24

Juz Three	25	The Majority Says...	52
Real Charity	25	Inward and Outward Sins	52
Concern for Hearts Swerving	26	Halal Slaughter	53
Creation of Jesus ﷺ	27	Hearts, Open and Constricted	54
The Interfaith Dialogue	27	A Muslim's Pledge	55
Juz Four	29	Dress Code	55
Muslim Unity	29	Homosexuality	56
Charter of the Ummah: Enjoining Good	31	Self-Righteousness	60
Anti-Islamic Propaganda	33	Juz Nine	63
Wisdom and Science Education	33	Hardships and Ease	63
Taqwā and Marital Bliss	34	Blind Imitation	64
Juz Five	37	The Prophet and His True Followers	65
Fundamental Law of Business Dealings	37	The Sabbath-Breakers	66
Unhealthy Rivalry: Feminism and More	38	Innate Sense of the Creator	67
Conflicts of Interest: Justice in the Face of Love	40	The Prophet and the Knowledge of the Unseen	68
Juz Six	43	Listening to the Qur'an	69
Basis for Cooperation	43	Juz Ten	71
Perfection of Religion	44	Nurturing Īmān Before Issuing Commands	71
Conflict of Interest: Justice in the Face of Enmity	44	The Wealth of the Hypocrites	73
Friendship with Enemies of Islam	45	Hypocrites versus Believers	73
Juz Seven	47	Juz Eleven	77
The Tyranny of Majority	47	Sin, Repentance, and Forgiveness	77
Self Reform	48	Boundaries Set by Allāh	78
Denying Life after Death	49	Education	79
Limits on Interactions with the Non-Believers	50	Calls to Revise the Qur'an	80
Juz Eight	51	The Reality of This Life	81
Slick Talk	51	No Compulsion to Accept Islam	82
		Essential Qur'anic Message	83

Juz Twelve	85
Joys and Pains of this Life	85
Pursuit of Happiness or Disaster	86
Response to Those Who Mock Our Religion	87
Supporting Oppression	88
Good Deeds Drive Away Bad Deeds	88
Destruction of Nations	89
Juz Thirteen	91
Sūrah Yūsuf	91
In-between Muslims	91
Human Nature	92
Sermon in the Prison	94
Tawakkul	95
Forgiveness	96
Knowledge, Wisdom, Blindness	97
Worldly Provisions	98
Peace of Mind	98
Conquering Nature?	99
Juz Fourteen	101
Message of Sūrah al-Hijr	101
Humble Biological Beginnings	102
How Allāh Creates	103
Asking those Who Know	104
Right and Wrong: Most Comprehensive Āyah	105
Essential Equality between Men and Women	106
Calling to Islam	107
Juz Fifteen	109
Tawhīd	110
Parental Rights	110

Being Spendthrift	111
Killing Children for Fear of Poverty	112
Adultery and Fornication	113
Murder	114
Vain Pursuits	115
Arrogance	115
Juz Sixteen	117
Sūrah Al-Kahf	117
InshāAllāh	118
Extremism	120
The Life of this World	121
The Greatest Loss	121
The Blessed People	122
Reflections on Āyahs of Sajdah (Prostration)	123
Importance of Ṣalāh	124
Juz Seventeen	125
Sūrah al-Ambiyā'	125
The Mission of the Islamic State	126
Juz Eighteen	129
Sūrah al-Mu'minūn	129
Reflections on Falāḥ (Success)	129
Qualities for Attaining Falāḥ	130
Sūrah an-Nūr: Hijab	132
Ḥayā'	133
Restraining Gazes	135
Juz Nineteen	137
Friendships	137
The Qur'ān and Us	138
Portrait of Believers	138

Pharaoh and “Political Islam”	140
Juz Twenty	141
Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ	141
Qārūn (Korah) and Others of His ilk	142
Successful Personality	144
Limits of Parental Rights	145
A Great Reassurance	146
Juz Twenty One	147
Sūrah ar-Rūm	147
Limits of Scientific Knowledge	147
Music and Distractions	148
Juz Twenty Two	151
Sūrah al-Aḥzāb: Reflections on Hijab	151
Satan: The Eternal Enemy of Human Beings	154
The True People of Knowledge	155
Juz Twenty Three	157
Ignoring the Signs of Allāh	157
Did Man Create gods?	158
Doubt the Hereafter? Answer This.	159
Juz Twenty Four	161
Sincerity	161
Turning Back to Allāh	162
Admonishment to Pharaoh	163
Fighting Evil with Good	164
Juz Twenty Five	165
The Purpose behind Economic Scarcity	165

Shūrā = Democracy?	166
The Perils of Affluence	168
Juz Twenty Six	169
Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt	169
News Reports	169
Brotherhood	170
Mocking and the Standup Comedian	171
Suspicious, Spying, Backbiting	173
Tribalism	174
Juz Twenty Seven	175
Purpose of Our Life	175
Individual Responsibility	176
Qurʾān is Easy	176
Sūrah Ar-Raḥmān	177
The Space for Women	177
This Life and That Life	178
Juz Twenty Eight	181
The Peril of Humanism	181
Judging Others	182
Muslim Women Marrying Non-Muslim Men	182
Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ in the Bible	183
Useless Knowledge	184
Deceptive Appearances	185
Way Out of Hardships	185
Juz Twenty Nine	187
Life and Death	187
Listening- Reasoning	188
Human Weakness and its Treatment	189

Juz Thirty	191
Vain Speech	191
Got it Made?	192
Perspective on Iqra	192
Appendix	195
Qur'an: Witness the Miracle	195
Glossary	200
Index	202



INTRODUCTION



This book grew from the daily *tarāwīḥ* reflections I wrote during Ramadan 1434. *Tarāwīḥ* is a unique phenomenon. While other religions claim to possess the Word of God, there is none that can show a book that commands anything even remotely comparable to the devotion that the Qur'an commands and has commanded all through the centuries. Where else can you find millions of people all around the world standing in long prayers for a whole month to listen to an entire book being recited from memory?

However while our devotion to the Words of Allāh is unsurpassed, our devotion to the Message of Allāh requires more. We need to understand and reflect on the wisdom and commands contained in the Divine Words so that we are truly listening to them and not just hearing them. That is the basic idea behind this effort. I selected a few āyahs from every night's recitation to reflect on their message as it relates to our life and our challenges today. This was published on www.albalagh.net and distributed to a small email list. The feedback I received encouraged me to compile these in this book form. For this purpose these were much expanded and thoroughly revised and edited. In some cases I have also used

passages from my first book, *First Things First*. Each of the thirty sections in this book consists of selected āyahs from the corresponding *juz* of the Qur'ān.

This is not meant to replace any commentary or *tafsīr*. It is only meant to start us thinking about some important Qur'ānic messages thereby making the listening more rewarding, more enriching, and more beneficial for our individual and collective lives. Such reflection is important for developing a strong personal relationship with the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān demands it by asking, “Will they not, then, ponder over this Qur'ān? – or are there locks upon their hearts?” (Muḥammad 47:24).

Obviously not everyone will become a Qur'ān scholar but every Muslim must develop a personal relationship with the Qur'ān. This requires regularly reading and reflecting. It is hoped that this short collection of reflections and observations will stimulate us to do that. Of course the exercise may whet our appetite for a more detailed study for which a number of translations and commentaries are available. But even then we should not forget that our purpose is to listen to the Qur'ān itself; the external aids are just meant to help in that goal.

The Qur'ānic translations in this book have been chosen carefully from the works of Mufti Taqi Usmani, Abdullah Yūsuf Ali, Marmaduke Pickthal, Muḥammad Asad, and Arthur J. Arberry.

In this work I was helped by my daughter Sumayya and my son Muneeb, both of whom graduated from madrasas in Pakistan in addition to receiving schooling in the US. Sumayya helped with searching the Arabic source texts, especially Hadith collections and commentaries. Both of them helped with proofreading, editing of the text, and typesetting. This has become a better book as a result of their hard work and constructive suggestions.

If you find any good in this book, please pray for me and those who helped in its production. If you find any errors, please inform me so they can be corrected.

May Allāh accept this effort and make this book a means of strengthening our relationship with the Qur'ān.

Khalid Baig
Muḥarrām 1435
December 2013

JUZ ONE

Ta'wwudh

أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ

I seek protection from Allāh against the accursed Satan.

We always begin our recitation of the Qur'ān by saying these words. This is not an āyah of the Qur'ān but the Qur'ān commanded us to seek this protection in the following āyah:

فَإِذَا قَرَأْتَ الْقُرْآنَ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ ﴿٩٨﴾

Now whenever you read this Qur'ān, seek refuge with Allāh from Satan, the accursed. (An-Naḥl 16:98)

The first step in any successful communication is to make sure the communication link is solid and all external interference is eliminated. In receiving the communication from on High, the external interference that we have to be most concerned with is that of the whisperings and persuasions of our hidden enemy—the Satan.

As the next āyah in Sūrah an-Naḥl makes clear, the way to protect ourselves from satanic influences is by entrusting our affairs to Allāh. (“He (Satan) is such that he has no authority over those who believe and place trust in their Lord,” An-Naḥl 16:99) It is those who rely on their own powers, physical as well as intellectual, who become easy prey to the machinations of the Satan.

Anyone who begins his interaction with the Qur'an by seeking Allāh's help has put himself in the right state of mind for benefiting from Allāh's Words—provided this is a conscious and sincere act. He has established a secure communication link so he can begin to listen to the Words of Allāh as he reads or hears them.

Bismillāh

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allāh the Most Beneficent, the Most Merciful.

We begin every significant act by invoking the name of Allāh and remembering His mercy and kindness. It is a measure of the extraordinary importance of the right beginning that the very first revelation began with this command: “Read in the name of your Sustainer.”¹ It was not just a command to read—as expropriated later by those who would use it to provide Islamic sanction for secular pursuits—but a command to read in the name of Allāh. (See more on this in the reflections on the last juz).

Beginning in the name of Allāh helps filter out acts and intentions that are disapproved by Him. It makes us conscious that Allāh is watching so we do not take wrong

turns after starting. It assures us of Allāh's help in completing it successfully.

Pagans in Arabia, as elsewhere, used to begin any task in the name of their idols. In the secular “enlightened” West many a time people begin important projects by saying “knock on wood.” This is how people ward off evils in the old and new worlds of superstition. In contrast a Muslim seeks guidance, help, and support from none other than Allāh—the Merciful Lord of the worlds. His day is filled with the calls of Bismillāh. It is Bismillāh before taking a shower, before putting on clothes, before eating, before getting on his ride, before starting his work, before starting a meeting, before signing an important paper, before taking a baby step, before taking a gigantic leap. And he can feel the blessings—the strength, the confidence, the peace of mind—this invocation brings throughout his days and nights.

Sūrah al-Fātiḥah

This sūrah is an extraordinary petition taught by the One to whom the petition is to be made. While ṣalāh is the most important act of worship in a Muslim's life, Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is the most important part of ṣalāh. It is recited in every rak'ah (unit) of every ṣalāh.

This sūrah deals with the fundamental questions of life. Where are we coming from? Where are we going? What is the purpose of life? These are the issues that humanity has been grappling with throughout its history. In seven short āyahs this sūrah answers these questions. This entire universe, and others that may be out there, are created by Allāh Most High, Who is the Sustainer of them all. He is the Benevolent and Merciful God. He alone deserves all the praise for all the goodness in the world and all thanks for all the blessings and favors that we have received and continue to receive

¹ *Al-Qur'an*, al-'Alaq 96:1.

throughout our lives. He is also the Master of the Day of Judgment when all the wrongs will be punished and right actions will be rewarded.

It follows then that our greatest concern should be to know right from wrong and have both the willingness and ability to follow the former and avoid the latter. This is the Straight Path that leads one straight to eternal success. The petition is that He shows us the Straight Path and makes it easy for us to follow it.

The Straight Path is not a theoretical construct. It is not defined by some nice principles or commandments which sound good as decoration pieces but cannot be put into practice. It refers to a road well travelled by real people who lived on this earth. They are referred to as blessed people here and fall into four categories as explained in an āyah in Sūrah al-Nisā': "Those who obey Allāh and the Messenger are with those whom Allāh has blessed, namely, the prophets, the Ṣiddīqīn (those who never deviated from the truth), the Shuhadā' (martyrs) and the righteous. And how goodly a company are these!"² Followers of the Straight Path have company. And what a great company it is!

Further, those who deviate from it are condemned in no uncertain terms as being either willful rejecters of Divine guidance or being careless about it. The point of this condemnation is to distance ourselves from them and their ways for our own protection.

While Sūrah al-Fātiḥah encapsulates the essence of ṣalāh, this āyah encapsulates the essence of al-Fātiḥah:

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

You alone do we worship, and from You alone do we seek succor.
(Al-Fātiḥah 1:4)

² *Al-Qur'an*, an-Nisā' 4:69.

This āyah is the affirmation of *tawḥīd* as both an article of faith as well as an overriding principle in total control of our actual life.

The word *ʿIbādah*, translated here as worship for lack of a better word, implies establishing an absolute master-slave relationship, which includes unquestioning obedience, total submission, and devotional acts like bowing and prostration. Pagans do worship idols by bowing and prostrating before them and treating them as gods. Others worship wealth, power, or celebrity in a figurative sense; they put them in the driver's seat in their life. This āyah is a bold and loud rejection of all of these acts of worship meant for anyone except Allāh. It is also a reminder that we should not start serving other gods even without realizing it.

The second part of this āyah is a corollary of the first part, but it needs an explanation. In our daily life we do offer and receive help from others. The Qur'an itself mentions this help at many places. For example, it says: "Help each other in righteousness and piety, and do not help each other in sin and aggression."³, thus regulating it by making righteousness or lack thereof as the basis for offering or withdrawing it. It praises the believers who help the Prophet ﷺ: "So, those who believe in him and support him, and help him and follow the light sent down with him,—those are the ones who are successful."⁴ It reports that Prophet ʿĪsā (Jesus) ﷺ asked his companions for help: "Who will be my helpers in Allāh's cause?"⁵ Obviously this help is not negated here; it is offered and sought under the system of cause and effect, which itself has been created by Allāh for the normal running of this universe. What is negated ("We do not seek help from anyone except Allāh") is the help from other beings (e.g.

³ *Al-Qur'an*, al-Mā'idah 5:2.

⁴ *Al-Qur'an*, al-A'rāf 7:157.

⁵ *Al-Qur'an*, Āl-i-ʿImrān 3:52.

saints and dead men) that is thought to transcend the system of cause and effect. Also negated is any help that is supposed to work independent of—or worse in defiance of—the Will of Allāh.

Allāh can help through means that we could not have imagined—even bypassing the system of cause and effect. And He also helps through the normal system of cause and effect. For every need we seek help from Him, and even when we call on other people for assistance we fully realize that they are not independent agents for providing that assistance.

Lastly we seek Allāh's help in performing the worship we promised in the first part. As a Ṣūfī master suggested, if one is finding it difficult to stay away from sins and to perform acts of worship, then reciting this āyah profusely will help greatly.

Guidance and its Prerequisites

ذَٰلِكَ الْكِتَابُ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ هُدًى لِّلْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٢﴾

That is the Book, wherein is no doubt, a guidance to the God-fearing. (Al-Baqarah 2:2)

We asked for guidance in Sūrah al-Fātiḥah. The response is immediate. The entire Qur'ān provides that guidance. It is here. Further, guidance requires certain knowledge. And this is the Book that contains certain knowledge and absolute truth. There is absolutely no room for doubt here. If someone entertains doubts about this Book, the problem is with them—not with the Book.

Right at the start we are being warned to shed our preconceived ways of discovering truth. With the proliferation and predominance of the secular and secularizing curriculum

in the educational institutions throughout the world, this assumes even greater importance for us today. As Sayyid Naquib al-Attas writes: “(In rationalism) doubt is elevated as an epistemological method by means of which the rationalist and the secularist believe that truth is arrived at. But there is no proof that it is doubt and not something else other than doubt that enables one to arrive at truth. The arrival at truth is in reality the result of guidance, not of doubt.”⁶

But there are prerequisites for benefitting from this guidance. These are mentioned here and in the next two āyahs. If we are sincere in seeking guidance, then we must also be serious in satisfying the prerequisites.

The first prerequisite is that the seeker must be a person of *taqwā* (translated here as “God-fearing”). If *taqwā* is the end result of guidance, how can it be its prerequisite? It is because *taqwā* is both an attitude and a state. The attitude is the prerequisite. The state is the result of a lifelong struggle. Ibn Abi ‘d-Dunyā notes, “The beginning of *taqwā* is the right intention.”⁷ It is the intention to follow Allāh's command, to leave out whatever He forbids and carry out whatever He mandates. It is the intention to seek knowledge to translate it into action. It is a result of internalization of the knowledge that Allāh is the greatest so no one else can distract us from listening to Him and obeying Him. Only those with this attitude will be able to benefit from the guidance.

The resulting state was described by someone in a letter of advice to ‘Abdullāh ibn az-Zubayr رضي الله عنه: “The people of *taqwā* are known by these signs: Patience in the face of hardships, contentment with the Will of Allāh, gratitude to

6 Sayyid Naquib al-Attas, *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam: An Exposition of the Fundamental Elements of the Worldview of Islam*, 117.

7 Ibn Abi ‘d-Dunyā, as quoted in Jalāluddīn as-Suyūṭī, *Ad-Durr al-Manthūr fī t-Taḥsīn bil Ma‘thūr*, Sūrah al-Baqarah, verse 2, 1:58. [Dār Iḥyā t-Turāth al-‘Arabī].

Allāh for all the good things in life and humble submission to His commands.”⁸

الَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْغَيْبِ وَيُقِيمُونَ الصَّلَاةَ وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنْفِقُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Who believe in (the existence of and the knowledge given by Allāh about) that which is beyond the reach of human perception, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others out of what We provide for them as sustenance. (Al-Baqarah 2:3)

The visible spectrum is only a small fraction of the total reality. Everything beyond that is *al-ghayb*. While science, of necessity, deals only with the perceptible world, scientism insists that that is all there is to it. The successful guidance seeker is the one who is not blinded by this loud but false assertion. He is fully aware that the fundamental questions of life—about the existence of God and the purpose of creation, the life after death, the existence of spiritual forces, and so forth cannot be answered by science. He seeks them in revelation and finds them in the Qur'an and its explanation in the Hadith.

Since seeking guidance is not just an academic exercise, the true seeker has these two other qualities that encompass practical application of the guidance in all areas of life. He is always ready to follow the guidance, whether the demands are made on his body (e.g. ṣalāh) or his possessions (e.g. spending in the path of Allāh).

وَالَّذِينَ يُؤْمِنُونَ بِمَا أُنزِلَ إِلَيْكَ وَمَا أُنزِلَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ وَبِالْآخِرَةِ هُمْ يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٤﴾

And who believe in what has been revealed to you and what was revealed before you; and who are certain of the Hereafter. (Al-Baqarah 2:4)

It is obvious that the Qur'an will provide guidance to those who believe in it. But why the requirement of belief in the previous scriptures? It is so because we must believe in the historic continuity of the revealed guidance. The coming of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ was not an historic anomaly but the culmination of a long chain of Prophets (124,000 in all according to a famous report), all of whom came with the same message.

This is a fundamental point in Islam's worldview. Humanity did not start its journey on this earth in the darkness of ignorance; it started it in full light of Divine guidance. By succumbing to temptations, human beings periodically deviated from that path and chose darkness over light. Spiritually and morally we have not been evolving, but rather deviating, and then being called back to the Straight Path by the Messengers of Allāh. We believe in them all, not to seek guidance from the previous scriptures or prophets (because according to the Divine plan they were not preserved), but to affirm our conviction about the system of guidance whose last manifestation is the coming of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ.

With this worldview it is easy to see every new philosophy of life not as a mark of evolutionary progress but as another deviation, another failure, another move to darkness.

This āyah also implies the finality of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ, since it does not mention any upcoming prophets. This is in contrast to āyah 3:81, which says that the followers of the previous prophets were told about the coming of Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ and asked to pledge that they would accept him as the Prophet and support him.

⁸ ʿAbdullāh ibn az-Zubayr as quoted in Ibid.

Congregational Prayer

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

And be steadfast in Ṣalāh (prayer), and pay Zakāh, and bow down with those who bow down. (Al-Baqarah 2:43)

The bowing mentioned here refers to the position in ṣalāh called *rukūʿ*. Of course what we are being required to do is to perform the entire ṣalāh, and not just *rukūʿ*, in congregation. This congregational ṣalāh is highly desirable; according to the majority of the jurists it is an emphasized sunnah. This applies to the five daily ṣalāhs and ṣalāh of Jumuʿah and ʿEids, as they are all mandatory. It does not extend to the nafl ṣalāhs, which should be offered individually. Through this arrangement a balance is struck between public and private worship.

By extension we can also understand the balance between individual and collective rights and responsibilities prescribed by Islam. Our accountability before Allāh will be on an individual basis. But we live and worship in a community. Sūrah al-Fātiḥah, the essential part of every ṣalāh, uses the plural form; It is *we* not *I* seeking the Straight Path. It follows that we will be travelling on it together. The four pillars of Islam, ṣalāh, zakāh, fasting, and ḥajj are all collective acts. All were ordained (zakāh, fasting, and ḥajj) or given final shape (ṣalāh) in Madinah where Muslims could live in a community. Even when travelling, for whatever reason, we are asked to choose an *amīr* so the travel will be an organized one. Both the individual and the group are controlled by the Sharīʿah, which makes sure we avoid all excesses in their interaction.

The West has gone from the extremes of collectivism and totalitarianism to the extremes of individualism. It is important to remember that the middle course of Islam avoids both extremes.

JUZ TWO

The Middle Nation

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَاكُمْ أُمَّةً وَسَطًا لِتَكُونُوا شُهَدَاءَ عَلَى النَّاسِ وَيَكُونَ
الرَّسُولُ عَلَيْكُمْ شَهِيدًا

And thus have We willed you to be a community of the middle way, so that (with your lives) you might bear witness to the truth before all mankind, and that the Apostle might bear witness to it before you. (Al-Baqarah 2:143)

Ummatan Waṣṭan can be translated as the middle nation, the best nation, and an Ummah justly balanced. The phrase captures the essence of Islam, which is to shun all excesses. At other places (e.g. Al-Mā'idah 5:12) the Qur'an refers to the path it shows as *sawā as-sabīl*. Abdullah Yūsuf Ali explains: "The Arabic word *sawā* signifies smoothness as opposed to roughness; symmetry as opposed to want of plan; equality or proportion as opposed to want of design; rectitude as opposed to crookedness; a mean as opposed to extremes; and fitness for the object held in view as opposed to faultiness."

JUZ THIRTY

Vain Speech

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا ﴿٣٥﴾

No vanity shall they hear therein, nor Untruth. (An-Naba', 78:35)

For most people the idea of having a nice time in a luxurious garden setting invariably involves gossiping with friends. And gossip, in order to be fun, tends to consist of vain conversation and, embellishments, even lies. By promising the total absence of such speech in Paradise, the Qur'an is reforming our idea of fun. Paradise is the ideal place. Every possible means of joy will be there. If something will not be there, that is sufficient evidence that that thing is not enjoyable or desirable, regardless of its appearance.

Got it Made?

فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ، وَنَعَّمَهُ، فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٥﴾

As for man, when his Sustainer tries him, giving him honor and bounties, he says (puffed up), "My Sustainer has honored me." (Al-Fajr, 89:15)

This is the description of a shallow person. Due to his very narrow perspective, he sees the achievements in this life as rewards instead of tests. The person in this āyah still remembers God. Many people today simply say, "I got it made." The easily puffed up person also is easily turned to despair when the going goes tough as the next āyah says.

وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ، فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهْنَنِ ﴿١٦﴾

But when He tries him, and thus straitens his provision for him, he says (in despair), "My Sustainer has humiliated me!" (Al-Fajr, 89:16)

Immediately after describing these habits, the Qur'an adds an emphatic *kallā*. Nay. Not at all. This is not so. If you accumulated a lot of wealth, position, and prestige in this world, this does not necessarily mean Allāh is pleased with you. If you have none of these, it does not necessarily mean that Allāh is angry with you. It is the beginning of wisdom that we stop confusing the test with the test results.

Perspective on Iqra

اقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ ﴿١﴾

Read in the name of your Sustainer, who has created. (Al-'Alaq, 96:1).

This is the very first āyah that started the revelations that lasted for twenty three years. It is a very famous āyah. It is also a greatly misused āyah. We frequently hear that the first Qur'ānic command was to read. With that we justify all sorts of activities that go on in the name of education.

The irony is that we stop reading immediately after the word "read." For the very first command was not simply "Read." It was "Read in the name of your Lord." And there is a world of difference between the two.

To understand the difference, we can look more closely at the revelations. The very first revelation consisted of five āyahs. It began with this āyah and ended with, "He taught man what he did not know."¹ The command was not to read anything and everything, but to read with a purpose and a proper perspective. Allāh is the source of true knowledge. And the command is to acquire that knowledge.

The remaining āyahs of this sūrah were revealed sometime later. And here is how the sūrah that began with the word Iqra ended: "bow down in sajdah, and come close to Me."² This is the logical result of reading done in the name of Allāh. It impels the person to prostrate himself before his Creator and thus brings him closer to Him. We can judge whether we are reading as commanded by seeing if it is producing the result as mentioned in the command.

Further, the entire sequence of revelations ended twenty-three years later. And it is also very instructive to see how that happened. The very last āyah to be revealed said: And be conscious of the Day on which you shall be brought back unto Allāh, whereupon every human being shall be repaid in full for what he has earned, and none shall be wronged.³

¹ *Al-Qur'an*, al-'Alaq 96:5.

² *Al-Qur'an*, al-'Alaq 96:19.

³ *Al-Qur'an*, al-Baqarah 2:281.

This is the ultimate result of reading in the name of Allāh. The command to read was clearly leading in this direction, making us lead Hereafter-conscious lives. If our reading is not doing the same then we are not really following the command. It is a great travesty that our current education systems are promoted and justified by invoking this āyah, although they are not at all informed by it.

APPENDIX

Qur'ān: Witness the Miracle

NIGHT AFTER NIGHT in Ramadan, the believers witness a unique spectacle at masjids around the world. They stand in special Tarāwīḥ prayers in which the prayer leader will recite the entire Qur'ān from memory. Those who have accomplished this extraordinary feat of memorizing all of the 6,236 verses are not a handful of devotees but there are hundreds of thousands of them. Most, just like most Muslims in the world today, do not speak Arabic. Yet they have painstakingly learned to pronounce each and every word of the Qur'ān correctly. The phenomenon is not a result of some religious resurgence that would pass. From the very first day that the Qur'ān was revealed, it was memorized. And the number of those who have memorized it has been increasing ever since. Memorization of the Qur'ān has been going on all through the centuries, all over the globe wherever Muslims are.

There are other religions that claim to possess the Word of God. There is none that can show a book that