

done, the un-Islamic society in which they live will take a stand against advocates of the Islamic faith. It first turns a deaf ear, and then challenges them. It then starts to subject them to oppression and iron-fist tactics. Therefore, the next stage of striving, or *jihād*, follows as a natural progression from the proper delivery of God's message: "Thus have We set up against every prophet enemies from among hardened sinners. Yet none can give guidance and effective support as your Lord does." (25: 31)

Such is the way, and it is the only true way.

Man's Actions and Future Life

An important feature of this *sūrah* is that it states the final word concerning the relation between a human being's attitude and action on the one hand and his fate and destiny on the other. It makes it clear that people's conditions are determined by what they do for and by themselves. At the same time, it states that every event takes place by God's will. The *sūrah* includes several statements which are relevant to this point. They are sufficient to make the Islamic concept of this very serious issue abundantly clear. Here are just a few such examples:

Indeed God does not change a people's conditions unless they first change what is in their hearts. When God wills people to suffer some misfortune, none can avert it. Besides Him, they have none to protect them. (Verse 11)

For those who respond to their Lord is a rich reward. As for those who do not respond to Him, should they have all that the earth contains, and twice as much, they would gladly offer it for their ransom. Theirs shall be an awful reckoning, and hell shall be their abode, an evil resting place! (Verse 18)

God lets go astray anyone who wills [to go astray] and guides to Himself those who turn to Him; those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. It is indeed in the remembrance of God that people's hearts find their comfort. (Verses 27-28)

Have they who believe not come to realize that, had God so willed, He would indeed have guided all mankind? (Verse 31)

Indeed their own cunning devices seem fair to the unbelievers, and they are turned away from the right path. Whoever God lets go astray can never find any guide. (Verse 33)

The first of these verses clearly states that God's will to change the lot of any community depends on, and is fulfilled through, what this community does for itself and how it changes its behaviour and actions both in attitude and practice. When a community changes their direction and actions, God changes their lot on that basis. Should their new situation require that misfortune befall them, God's will is done and nothing can stop it. There is no one to protect them from it. They will never find anyone to give them support against God.

On the other hand, if they respond to their Lord, and change their situation, God will give them what is best, ensuring that they receive it in the life of this world, or in the life to come, or in both. On the other hand, when their response is negative, God will cause misfortune to befall them, and will put them to severe reckoning on the Day of Judgement. No ransom will buy their release from God's punishment, should they return to Him without having responded to His message in this life. It is clear from the second text quoted above that the nature of people's response depends on the direction they choose for themselves and the actions they perform. God's will is fulfilled through both their attitude and action.

The third text begins with a statement asserting God's free-will to let anyone go astray, but this is followed by saying that God "*guides to Himself those who turn to Him.*" This is a definite statement that God gives His guidance to anyone who turns to Him. This shows that God lets go astray only those who do not respond to Him. He never denies His guidance to anyone who turns or responds to Him. This is in line with His promise in another *sūrah*: "*Those who strive hard in Our cause We shall certainly guide to paths that lead to Us.*" (29: 69) Thus both guidance and straying away from it are the outcome of God's will as it affects His servants. His will is done through people's own actions and what they choose for themselves, responding to their Lord or turning away from Him.

The fourth text states that God could have guided all people, had He so willed. In light of all the texts, it is clear that what this means is that God could have created all people with the same propensity to accept His guidance, or He could have forced them to follow it. But He has willed to create them in their present nature, with their dual susceptibility to either follow His guidance or go astray. It is not His will to force them either to follow guidance or to go astray — far be it for Him to force anyone to stray. He has made His will dependent on their response to the pointers to His guidance and the evidence supporting faith.

The last of these texts states that the unbelievers have turned away from the right path and that their foul devices are made to appear fair to them. Taking such a statement on its own has led to the well-known argument in Islamic history about man's free-will and predestination. But when this text is taken together with all relevant texts, the complete concept becomes clear. We then realize that such foul

devices and turning away from guidance are the result of people's negative response to God's call and their denial of the faith. Indeed the unbelievers reject the faith, and this leads to the operation of God's will so that their foul devices are made to acquire a fair appearance, and so they are turned away from the right path.

A final word is needed to clarify this point concerning which there is much controversy in all religions. The direction people choose to follow does not, by itself, bring about their fate. Fate is an event which is brought about by an act of God's will. Indeed every event that takes place in the universe is caused by a separate act which puts God's will into effect: *"We have created everything in due measure and proportion."* (54: 49) There is no mechanism in the system of the whole universe, nor is there any set of causes that lead inevitably to certain results. Both cause and effect are of God's creation, and they are created in due measure. What direction people choose for themselves allows God's will to operate in a manner that fits this direction. As for the actual working of God's will and the practical effects that depend on it, these are fulfilled by a special act for every event: *"With Him everything has its definite measure."* (Verse 8)

This concept, as we said earlier, increases the responsibility of human beings in as much as it shows the honourable position God has assigned to man in the system of the universe. Man is the only creature whose action and direction lead to the fulfilment of His will in a certain way. This is a heavy responsibility and a great honour.

Blind Rejection of the Truth

This *sūrah* provides the final word on the fact that rejecting God's religion and giving a negative response to the truth embodied in this faith is evidence of human nature going awry and the malfunctioning of its receptive system. No sound human nature, without any corrupting or distorting influences, would hesitate to respond positively to the truth, choosing submission to God, when it is presented so clearly, as it is in the Qur'ān. Deep inside, human nature knows this truth and accepts it. It is only turned away from it when a person has something that makes him choose for himself an option other than faith and its true guidance. He thus makes himself deserving of error and thereby incurs God's punishment. This is what God says in another *sūrah*: *"I will turn away from My revelations those who, without any right, behave arrogantly on earth: for, though they may see every sign, they do not believe in it. If they see the path of righteousness, they do not choose to follow it, but if they see the path of error, they choose it for their path; because they disbelieve in Our revelations and pay no heed to them."* (7:146)

In the present *sūrah* we have a number of similar verses which indicate the nature

of unbelief, making it clear that it is nothing other than blindness of the heart. Indeed, the mere acceptance of the truth and the following of God's guidance indicate that human nature is no longer blind. Indeed there are enough pointers and indicators everywhere in the universe which show the truth clearly to those who think and use their reason.

Is, then, he who knows that what has been revealed to you by your Lord is the Truth like one who is blind? Only those who are endowed with understanding keep this in mind: those who are true to their bond with God and never break their covenant; and who keep together what God has bidden to be joined; who fear their Lord and dread the terrors of the reckoning; who remain patient in adversity seeking the countenance of their Lord, and attend to their prayers, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them, and who repel evil with good. Such will have the attainment of the [ultimate] abode. (Verses 19-22)

The unbelievers say: 'Why has no miraculous sign been bestowed on him by his Lord?' Say: 'God lets go astray anyone who wills [to go astray] and guides to Himself those who turn to Him; those who believe and whose hearts find comfort in the remembrance of God. It is indeed in the remembrance of God that people's hearts find their comfort. Those who believe and do righteous deeds shall have happiness and a most beautiful final goal.' (Verses 27-29)

It is He who has spread out the earth and placed upon it firm mountains and rivers, and created on it two sexes of every type of fruit, and caused the night to cover the day. In all these there are signs for people who think. And there are on earth adjoining tracts of land; and vineyards, and fields of grains and date palms, growing in clusters or non-clustered. [All] are irrigated by the same water; yet some of them are favoured above others with regard to the food [they provide]. In all this there are signs for people who use their reason. (Verses 3-4)

Here we have a clear statement indicating that those who do not respond to the truth are, as God Himself testifies, blind, and that they neither think nor use their reason. Those who respond to the truth are the ones endowed with understanding. These find a heartfelt comfort in remembering God. They relate to what they, deep at heart, know to be the truth, finding in it comfort and reassurance.

In fact we find confirmation of this fact in everyone who turns away from the truth, embodied in the divine faith, which is contained in its full and complete form in the message of Muḥammad (peace be upon him). Such people have defective and distorted natures. They suffer from the malfunctioning of their best receptors. Hence they do not react to the message presented by the whole universe as it praises God

and testifies to His oneness, ability and inimitably elaborate planning.

Since those who do not believe in this truth are blind, as confirmed by God, then no Muslim who claims to believe in God's Messenger and accepts that the Qur'ān is God's revelation can follow the lead of a blind person in any matter of importance in life. This particularly applies to matters that relate to the system which governs human life, to the values and standards that must be implemented in human life, and to behaviour, traditions and morals that are acceptable in human society.

This is our attitude to everything that non-Islamic philosophy produces, apart from physical and material sciences and their practical applications. These come under the Prophet's statement when he said to his Companions: "You know the affairs of your own world better." It is not right that a Muslim who knows God's guidance and who is fully aware of the truth preached by His Messenger to become a student learning from someone who has not responded to God's guidance and who does not know it to be the truth. Such a person is, as God says, blind. No Muslim can reject God's testimony and continue to claim to be a Muslim.

We must take this religion very seriously, and accept its clear statements as correct and valid. If we approach this matter in a hesitant, uncertain way, then this means approaching faith itself with uncertainty. On the other hand, it could mean rejecting the testimony of God (limitless is He in His glory). Such rejection means a complete rejection of faith.

This religion is very serious indeed. It admits no frivolity. Every single statement and every word contained in this religion is true. Anyone who entertains doubts about this seriousness, or who finds himself reluctant to accept this truth with full and complete trust should realize that Islam is in no need of him. In fact God is in no need of anyone whomsoever.

It is not right that the pressures of un-Islamic society should weigh heavily on any Muslim so as to make him adopt the standards of such a society in his approach to life. How can he when he knows that the message conveyed by Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is the truth, and that anyone who does not know it to be the truth is blind. How can he follow such a blind person, learning from him, after having heard God's testimony?

Blindness and Life Corruption

A final aspect of faith that the *sūrah* highlights is the close relationship between the corruption that creeps into people's life on earth and their blindness to the message of the truth God has bestowed on people guiding them to what is right, useful and beneficial. Those who do not respond either to the covenant God has made with

human nature or to the truth which has come from Him, knowing it to be the truth, are indeed the ones who spread corruption on earth. By contrast, those who know it to be the truth and respond to it are the ones who work to set matters on the right course and whose work helps life prosper.

Is, then, he who knows that what has been revealed to you by your Lord is the Truth like one who is blind? Only those who are endowed with understanding keep this in mind: those who are true to their bond with God and never break their covenant; and who keep together what God has bidden to be joined; who fear their Lord and dread the terrors of the reckoning; who remain patient in adversity seeking the countenance of their Lord, and attend to their prayers, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them, and who repel evil with good. Such will have the attainment of the [ultimate] abode. (Verses 19-22)

As for those who break their bond with God after it has been established, and cut asunder what God has bidden to be joined, and spread corruption on earth, the curse will be laid upon them; and theirs shall be an evil abode. (Verse 25)

Human life will not be set on the right course unless its leadership is firmly in the hands of those endowed with understanding, who know that what was revealed to Muḥammad (peace be upon him) is the truth. Such people fulfil their commitment which is part of the covenant God has made with human nature on the one hand and with Adam and his offspring on the other. These covenants specify that people must worship God alone, submitting to none other than Him, receiving only His guidance and obeying only His orders. Hence, they keep together what God has ordered to be united. They fear their Lord, which means that they are always consciously trying to avoid anything that may incur God's displeasure. They also fear that they may have an awful reckoning. Hence they are constantly aware of the hereafter, watching their every action. They remain constant to their covenant, bearing the burden of such consistency. They attend regularly to their prayers, give to charity out of their provisions, which God has granted to them, and make their donations in private or openly. They repel evil and corruption with goodness and kindness.

Human life is not set aright unless it has such a wise leadership which follows God's guidance, and which moulds life in accordance with His guidance and the code of living He has laid down. It does not follow the right course when it has blind leadership which does not know that the truth is what was revealed to the Prophet Muḥammad. Such leadership follows systems that differ from that laid down by God for His good servants. Human life does not follow the right course under a feudal, capitalist or communist system, or indeed under what is termed 'scientific socialism'. Nor does it take a healthy form and style under theocracy, dictatorship or

democracy. All of these are systems devised by the blind who appoint themselves lords beside God. Such lords devise systems and enact legislation that are not sanctioned by God. They also impose their authority on people, forcing them to submit to such legislation, instead of submitting to God.

Based on the Qur'ānic text, the evidence for what we say is seen in the corruption, the *jāhiliyyah* that has spread throughout the world in the twentieth century. It is seen in the misery under which mankind writhe, both in the East and in the West, under capitalist, communist or socialist systems, and under both dictatorship and democracy. Under all such systems people suffer corruption, loss of moral values, misery and anxiety. That is because all these systems are devised by people who are blind, not knowing that what God has revealed to His Messenger, Muḥammad, is the only truth. Hence, they do not fulfil their covenant with God. Nor do they implement the code of living that is based on His guidance.

By virtue of his faith, and his knowledge that the truth is embodied in what was revealed to Muḥammad, a Muslim rejects every code of living other than that devised by God. He also rejects any social, economic or political doctrine other than what has been legislated by God, who devised it for His good servants.

The mere acceptance of the legitimacy of any code or system devised by any authority other than God's means a break from submission to God, as such submission means in practice complete surrender to Him alone. Accepting such legitimacy is not only in conflict with the central concept of Islam; it also hands over on earth to the blind who break their covenant with God after it has been confirmed. These are the ones who cut asunder what God has bidden to be united and who thus spread corruption on earth.

Throughout history mankind has suffered untold misery, as it tried, without proper guidance, a great variety of systems, laws and regimes under the leadership of blind people assuming the guise of philosophers, theoreticians, legislators and politicians. Never did mankind experience real happiness, elevate human standards, or reach the standard worthy of their role as God's vicegerents on earth except under the Islamic system.

These are some of the prominent features of this *sūrah*. Our discussion merely points to them although it can explain them but inadequately. Praise be to God who has guided us to this. It is only through His guidance that we can make the right choice.

SŪRAH 14

Ibrāhīm

(Abraham)

Prologue

This *sūrah* is a Makkan revelation. Its subject matter, namely faith, revelation and the divine message, God's Oneness, resurrection, reckoning and reward permeate Makkan *sūrahs*. Just as every *sūrah* in the Qur'ān has its distinctive character, this *sūrah* adopts a unique approach in presenting its material, with highlights and shading that accentuate the principles and issues it tackles. These may not be different from the principles and issues other *sūrahs* illustrate, but they are tackled here from a different angle so as to generate special effect and emphasis. Furthermore, certain aspects are added and others omitted, giving the reader and the listener the overall impression that they deal with new issues and principles.

The general ambience of the *sūrah* derives from its title, namely Abraham, the father of all prophets who came after him. He was a blessed man, most grateful to God, most clement, tender-hearted, and devout. All the connotations of these attributes are felt throughout this *sūrah*, in its main issues, general approach, mode of expression as also in its rhythm.

The *sūrah* addresses a number of issues relating to faith, but two of these permeate the whole *sūrah*. These are the two issues most relevant to Abraham himself. The first is the unity of the divine message and God's messengers, and their united stand, despite their different times and places, as one community against the state of ignorance, or *jāhiliyyah*. The other is God's favours bestowed on mankind, the increase He grants to those who are grateful and the fact that most people remain ungrateful. The *sūrah* definitely includes other issues, but these two give the *sūrah* its

special ambience.

The *sūrah* begins with an outline of the mission of God's Messenger and the book revealed to him: *"This is a book which We have bestowed on you from on high so that you might bring forth all mankind, by their Lord's leave, from darkness into the light, to the path of the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due."* (Verse 1) It concludes with the same point, highlighting the truth of God's oneness which is at the heart of the divine message: *"This is a message to all mankind. Let them be warned thereby, and let them know that He is the One and only God. Let those who are endowed with insight take heed."* (Verse 52)

In between, the *sūrah* mentions that Moses was sent to do the same task as Muḥammad, using practically the same wording: *"We have sent forth Moses with Our revelations, saying, lead your people out of darkness into the light."* (Verse 5) It also explains that the general purpose behind sending God's messengers was to make things clear: *"Never have We sent a messenger otherwise than speaking the language of his own people, so that he might make [the truth] clear to them."* (Verse 4) In addition, it explains that because God's Messenger is human, this inevitably provides the parameters for his mission: he is to inform, explain and give warning and good counsel. He cannot, however, perform a miracle except by God's permission, and at a time God determines. Neither he nor his people have any say in this. Nor can he oblige his community to follow guidance or sink into error, for these things follow a certain rule God has set in operation according to His own free choice.

That God's messengers were all human was a matter objected to by all past ignorant communities. The *sūrah* sums up all these objections and the reply given by God's messengers, as if the objections and the reply were made all at the same time: *"They replied: 'You are but mortals like ourselves. You want to turn us away from what our forefathers used to worship. Bring us, then, a clear proof' Their messengers replied: 'We are indeed but mortals like yourselves. But God bestows His grace on whomever He wills of His servants. It is not within our power to bring you any proof except by God's leave. It is in God that all believers must place their trust.'"* (Verses 10-11)

The *sūrah* also explains that taking mankind from darkness into light can only be accomplished 'by their Lord's leave'. Every messenger makes the issues clear to his people, then: *"God lets go astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. He is Almighty, truly Wise."* (Verse 4)

These are the main lines defining the nature of a messenger sent by God, and the mission assigned to him. Nothing of the nature of God's messengers or their qualities can be confused with God's nature and attributes. Thus God's oneness is shown in its full light, with no hint of similarity to anyone or anything.

The *sūrah* also speaks about the fulfilment of God's promise to His messengers

and to those who truly believe in them. This promise is fulfilled in this present life when they are given victory and power, and in the life to come with generous reward given to the believers and severe punishment to the unbelievers. This is shown at the end of the scene showing the battle between God's messengers standing together and their different communities also standing together in this world: *"The unbelievers said to their messengers: 'We shall most certainly expel you from our land, unless you return to our ways.' Their Lord revealed this to His messengers: Most certainly shall We destroy the wrongdoers, and most certainly shall We cause you to dwell in the land long after they are gone. This [I promise] to all who stand in awe of My presence, and stand in awe of My warnings.' And they prayed for God's help and victory [for the truth]. And every powerful, obstinate enemy of the truth shall come to grief"* (Verses 13-15) It is also shown in the images drawn from the Day of Judgement: *"Those who believe and do righteous deeds will be admitted to gardens through which running waters flow, wherein they will abide, by their Lord's leave. Their greeting shall be: Peace:"* (Verse 23) *"On that day you will see the guilty chained together in fetters, wearing garments of black pitch, and their faces covered with flames."* (Verses 49-50)

The same fact is also emphasized in the analogies given for both groups: *"Do you not see how God compares a good word to a good tree? Its roots are firm and its branches reach to the sky. It yields its fruits at all times by its Lord's leave. Thus does God set parables for people so that they may reflect. And an evil word is like a corrupt tree, torn up onto the face of the earth. It cannot have a stable position. God will strengthen the believers through the true, unshakeable word in both this life and the life to come; but the wrongdoers God lets go astray. God does whatever He wills."* (Verses 24-27) *"The works of those who disbelieve in their Lord are like ashes which the wind blows about fiercely on a stormy day. They cannot achieve any benefit from all that they might have earned. This [disbelief] is indeed going very far astray."* (Verse 18)

The Message of All Prophets

The first of the two major issues that run through the whole *sūrah* is the unity of the divine message preached by all God's messengers. This is presented here in a unique way. Other *sūrahs* demonstrated this through the fact that every messenger made the same address to his people. Every one of them would state the same truth, complete his work and pass away, to be followed by other messengers, each of whom stated the same truth in the same words, receiving the same reply. The unbelievers who deny the truth suffer whatever they may suffer in this life, although some of them are given respite, so as to face their fate on the Day of Judgement. In those *sūrahs* every messenger was shown in a separate scene, like we see a film playing back different events. The best examples of this method are seen in *Sūrahs* 7 and 11, The Heights and Hūd, respectively.