

little reflection and the whole case is set to rest.

The *sūrah* mentions a great variety of God's blessings. Now it comments on this, saying: *"Should you try to count God's blessings, you will never be able to compute them."* (Verse 18) If people are unable even to compute God's blessings, they are much less likely to be able to thank God enough for them. Indeed most blessings remain unnoticed by man, because they are too familiar to him. He is thus oblivious to their importance. He only notices the importance of a blessing that he has taken for granted when it is withdrawn. We need only remember how oblivious we are of the importance of different organs and systems in our bodies. We only remember this when we are ill, because our organs are not functioning properly. Nevertheless, God's forgiveness ensures that man's shortcomings and lack of gratitude are overlooked: *"God is indeed Much Forgiving, Merciful."* (Verse 18)

The Creator knows full well what He has created, what is apparent of it and what is concealed: *"God knows all that you keep secret and all that you bring into the open."* (Verse 19) How can they equate Him with their alleged deities who neither create nor have any knowledge. They are indeed dead, having no life whatsoever. Indeed they have no feelings: *"Those beings that some people invoke beside God cannot create anything; they themselves are created. They are dead, not living, and they do not know when they will be raised back to life."* (Verses 20-21)

The reference here to the resurrection implies that the Creator must, for certain, know its time, because resurrection is complementary to creation. It is then that the living receive their reward for what they have done in life. The deities that do not know when their worshippers are raised to life are only a mockery. A true Creator determines when to resurrect His creation.

2

Divergent Outlooks and Attitudes

Your God is the One God. Those who deny the life to come have hearts that persist in denying the truth. They are full of arrogance. (22)

إِلَهُكُمْ إِلَهُ وَاحِدٌ فَالَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ
بِالْآخِرَةِ قُلُوبُهُمْ مُنْكَرَةٌ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ



God surely knows what they keep secret and all that they bring into the open. He does not love those who are arrogant. (23)

لَا جَرَمَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُسْرُونَ
وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ إِنَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ
الْمُسْتَكْبِرِينَ



Whenever they are asked, 'What has your Lord bestowed from on high?' they say: 'Fables of the ancients!' (24)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ مَآذَا أَنْزَلَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالُوا
أَسْطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ



On the Day of Resurrection they shall bear the full weight of their burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray. Evil is the burden they shall bear. (25)

لِيَحْمِلُوا أَوْزَارَهُمْ كَامِلَةً يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ
وَمِنْ أَوْزَارِ الَّذِينَ يُضِلُّونَهُمْ بِغَيْرِ عِلْمٍ

Those who lived before them also schemed. But God struck their edifice at its foundation, and its roof fell in upon them from above, and suffering befell them from where they did not perceive. (26)

Then, on the Day of Resurrection He will cover them with ignominy, and say: 'Where are those alleged partners of Mine concerning whom you have engaged in dispute?' Those who are endowed with knowledge will say: 'Ignominy and misery shall this day befall the unbelievers, (27)

those whom the angels have gathered in death while they are still wronging themselves.' These will then offer their submission, saying: 'We have done no wrong!' [They will be answered]: 'Yes, indeed. God has full knowledge of all that you were doing! (28)

Enter the gates of hell, where you shall abide.' Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant! (29)

But when the God-fearing are asked: 'What has your Lord revealed?' they say: 'All that is good.' For those who do good in this world, good reward [is assured]; but far better is their abode in the hereafter. Blessed is the dwelling place of the God-fearing. (30)

أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَزُرُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

قَدْ مَكَرَ الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَأَتَى
اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُمْ مِنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ فَخَرَّ عَلَيْهِمُ
السَّقْفُ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَأَتَنَّهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ
حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

ثُمَّ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ يُخْزِيهِمْ وَيَقُولُ أَيْنَ
شُرَكَاءِى الَّذِينَ كُنْتُمْ تُشْتَقُونَ
فِيهِمْ ۚ قَالَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْعِلْمَ إِنَّ
الْخِزْيَ الْيَوْمَ وَالسُّوءَ عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ
﴿٢٧﴾

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّيهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ ظَالِمِي أَنْفُسِهِمْ
ط فَأَلْقَوْا السَّلَمَ مَا كُنَّا نَعْمَلُ مِنْ سُوءٍ
بَلَىٰ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٨﴾

ط فَادْخُلُوا أَبْوَابَ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا
فَلْبِئْسَ مَثْوَى الْمُتَكَبِّرِينَ ﴿٢٩﴾

﴿٣٠﴾ وَقِيلَ لِلَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا مَاذَا أَنْزَلَ رَبُّكُمْ
قَالُوا خَيْرًا ۗ لِلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا فِي هَذِهِ

The Gardens of Eden they will enter; through which running waters flow. There they shall have everything they desire. Thus shall God reward the God-fearing: (31)

those whom the angels gather in death while they are in a state of purity, saying: Peace be upon you! Enter paradise by virtue of what you were doing [in life]. (32)

Are they [who disbelieve] awaiting anything but for the angels to appear before them, or for your Lord's command to come? Those before them did the same. It was not God who wronged them, but it was they who wronged themselves. (33)

The evil consequences of their misdeeds overtook them, and they were overwhelmed by the very thing they used to deride. (34)

Those who associate partners with God say, 'Had God so willed, neither we nor our forefathers would have worshipped any other than Him, nor would we have declared anything forbidden without a commandment from Him.' Those before them said the same. Are the messengers bound to do anything other than to clearly deliver the message? (35)

الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً ۖ وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ ۗ وَلَنِعْمَ
دَارُ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

جَنَّتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا يُجْرَى مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا مَا يَشَاءُونَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ
يَجْزِي اللَّهُ الْمُتَّقِينَ ﴿٣٢﴾

الَّذِينَ تَتَوَفَّاهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ طَيِّبِينَ ۖ
يَقُولُونَ سَلَمٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ادْخُلُوا الْجَنَّةَ
بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ
أَوْ يَأْتِيَ أَمْرُ رَبِّكَ ۚ كَذَلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ
مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ ۚ وَمَا ظَلَمَهُمُ اللَّهُ وَلَٰكِنْ
كَانُوا أَنْفُسَهُمْ يَظْلِمُونَ ﴿٣٤﴾

فَأَصَابَهُمْ سَيِّئَاتُ مَا عَمِلُوا وَحَاقَ بِهِمْ
مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِءُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ أَشْرَكُوا لَوْ شَاءَ اللَّهُ مَا
عَبَدْنَا مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ نَحْنُ وَلَا
آبَاؤُنَا وَلَا حَرَمْنَا مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ

Indeed, We have raised a messenger in every community, [who said to them]: 'Worship God and shun the Evil One.' Among them were some whom God graced with His guidance, while others were inevitably doomed by their error. Go, then, about the earth and observe what was the end of those who denied the truth. (36)

However eager you may be to show them the right way, [know that] God does not bestow His guidance upon any whom He judges to have gone astray. They shall have none to support them. (37)

They most solemnly swear by God that God never raises the dead to life. Yes indeed! That is a promise to which He has bound Himself, even though most people do not know it. (38)

[Thus] He will make clear to them the reality of matters over which they differ, and the unbelievers will know that they were liars. (39)

Whenever We will anything to be, We need only say, 'Be' — and it is. (40)

As for those who forsake their homes for the sake of God after having suffered injustice, We shall most certainly give them a fine abode in this life; yet better still is their reward in the life to come, if they but knew it. (41)

كَذَلِكَ فَعَلَ الَّذِينَ مِنَ قَبْلِهِمْ فَهَلْ
عَلَى الرُّسُلِ إِلَّا الْبَلْغُ الْمُبِينُ ﴿٣٦﴾

وَلَقَدْ بَعَثْنَا فِي كُلِّ أُمَّةٍ رَّسُولًا أَنْ
اعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ وَاجْتَنِبُوا الطَّاغُوتَ فَمِنْهُمْ
مَنْ هَدَى اللَّهُ وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ حَقَّتْ عَلَيْهِ
الضَّلَالَةُ فَسِيرُوا فِي الْأَرْضِ فَانظُرُوا كَيْفَ
كَانَ عَاقِبَةُ الْمُكْذِبِينَ ﴿٣٧﴾

إِنْ تَحَرَّصَ عَلَى هُدَاهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَهْدِي
مَنْ يُضِلُّ وَمَا لَهُمْ مِنْ نَاصِرِينَ ﴿٣٨﴾
وَأَقْسَمُوا بِاللَّهِ جَهْدَ أَيْمَانِهِمْ لَا يَبْعَثُ
اللَّهُ مَنْ يَمُوتُ بَلَىٰ وَعَدًّا عَلَيْهِ حَقًّا
وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

لِيُبَيِّنَ لَهُمُ الَّذِي اخْتَلَفُوا فِيهِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ
الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّهُمْ كَانُوا كَاذِبِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾
إِنَّمَا قَوْلُنَا لِشَيْءٍ إِذَا أَرَدْنَاهُ أَنْ نَقُولَ لَهُ
كُنْ فَيَكُونُ ﴿٤١﴾

وَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا فِي اللَّهِ مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا ظَلَمُوا

[Such reward is granted to] those who, having been patient in adversity, place their trust in their Lord. (42)

The messengers We sent before you were but men whom We inspired. So, if you have not realized this, ask those who are endowed with knowledge. (43)

[We sent such messengers] with clear proofs and divine books, and We have now bestowed on you the reminder so that you may elucidate to mankind all that has been bestowed on them, and that they may take thought. (44)

Do those who devise evil schemes feel secure that God will not cause the earth to swallow them, or that suffering will not befall them whence they do not perceive? (45)

Or that He will not suddenly take them to task in the midst of their comings and goings; for they can never frustrate His design? (46)

Or that He will seize them when they are alert and apprehensive? Surely your Lord is Most Compassionate, Most Merciful. (47)

Do people not see how every object God has created casts its shadow right and left, prostrating itself before God in complete submission? (48)

لَنْبُوْتَهُمْ فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةٌ ۗ وَلَا جَزَاءُ
الْآخِرَةَ اَكْبَرُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

الَّذِينَ صَبَرُوا وَعَلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يَتَوَكَّلُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾
وَمَا اَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ اِلَّا رِجَالًا نُوْحِي
اِلَيْهِمْ ۚ فَسْئَلُوْا اَهْلَ الذِّكْرِ اِنْ كُنْتُمْ لَا
تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٤﴾

بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَالزُّبُرِ ۗ وَاَنْزَلْنَا اِلَيْكَ الذِّكْرَ
لِتُبَيِّنَ لِلنَّاسِ مَا نُزِّلَ اِلَيْهِمْ وَلَعَلَّهُمْ
يَتَفَكَّرُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

اَفَاَمِنَ الَّذِينَ مَكْرُوا السَّيِّئَاتِ اَنْ يَّخْسِفَ
اللَّهُ بِهِنَّ الْاَرْضَ اَوْ يَأْتِيَهُمُ الْعَذَابُ مِنْ
حَيْثُ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾

اَوْ يَأْخُذَهُمْ فِي تَقْلِيْبِهِمْ فَمَا هُمْ
بِمُعْجِزِيْنَ ﴿٤٧﴾

اَوْ يَأْخُذَهُمْ عَلٰى تَخَوْفٍ فَاِنَّ رَبَّكُمْ
لَرَّءُوْفٌ رَّحِيْمٌ ﴿٤٨﴾

اَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا اِلَىٰ مَا خَلَقَ اللّٰهُ مِنْ شَيْءٍ

*For, before God prostrates itself every living thing
in the heavens and the earth, as do the angels.
They do not behave in arrogant defiance. (49)*

*They fear their Lord, who is high above them,
and do as they are bidden. (50)*

يَتَفَقَّهُوا ظِلَّةً عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَالشَّمَالِ
سُجَّدًا لِلَّهِ وَهُمْ دَاخِرُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

وَاللَّهُ يَسْجُدُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي
الْأَرْضِ مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ وَهُمْ لَا
يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ ﴿٤٩﴾

تَخَافُونَ رَبَّهُمْ مِنْ فَوْقِهِمْ وَيَفْعَلُونَ مَا
يُؤْمَرُونَ ﴿٥٠﴾

Overview

The first passage of this *sūrah* outlined a great many aspects of God's marvellous creation and His blessings which He bestows on His servants, and His knowledge of what is open and what is secret. The other beings which the unbelievers allege to have a share of divinity do not create anything; indeed they themselves are created. They are devoid of knowledge, dead and unlikely ever to come to life. They do not know when their servants are resurrected in order to face the reckoning. This clearly shows that they cannot be deities worthy of worship. Indeed it shows that all beliefs based on a multiplicity of deities are false. This was the first issue raised by the *sūrah* in connection with the question of God's oneness, with an added reference to the question of resurrection.

The present passage picks up where the last one left off, starting a new round which begins with a clear statement of God's oneness. It makes clear that those who do not believe in the Day of Judgement have hearts that are hardened in their denial of the truth. Blindness has become an essential characteristic that prevents them from admitting the truth to which signs clearly testify. Their arrogance stops them from acknowledging what they feel to be the truth and accepting its message. The passage concludes with a touching scene in which we see all shadows prostrating themselves, together with every living thing in the heavens and earth, as well as the angels, to God. These are free of arrogance. They fear God and obey His command without dissent. This scene of complete obedience contrasts with that of the hardened

unbelievers arrogantly denying the truth at the beginning of the passage.

In between these two scenes, the *sūrah* reports what the arrogant unbelievers say about revelations and about the Qur'ān. They allege that all this is merely fables of the ancients. It also reports their claims about the reasons for their associating partners with God, their prohibition of what God has made lawful, alleging that God wants them to do what is evil and that He accepts it from them. It quotes their assertions about resurrection and judgement, as they emphatically swear that God does not bring back to life anyone who has died. It answers all their claims, portraying them as they face their death, and as they are brought back to life disclaiming their false assertions.

The *sūrah* also paints scenes of the fate of earlier communities which denied the truth like the unbelievers do. It warns them against being seized by God at any moment of the day or night, when they are totally unaware, either moving around on earth, or feeling apprehensive, expecting God's punishment to overwhelm them. In this passage the *sūrah* also reports what the believers say, and what they expect when they are gathered to God, and what awaits them of goodly reward on the Day of Judgement. The passage concludes with a scene of total serenity and complete obedience demonstrated by all, including shadows, living creatures and angels, in heaven and on earth.

Unbelief Compounded by Arrogance

Your God is the One God. Those who deny the life to come have hearts that persist in denying the truth. They are full of arrogance. God surely knows what they keep secret and all that they bring into the open. He does not love those who are arrogant. (Verses 22-23)

The *sūrah* provides a clear link between believing in God's oneness and believing in the Day of Judgement. Indeed it makes the one evidence for the other, as worshipping God alone is closely associated with belief in resurrection and reward. It is in the hereafter that God's wisdom and justice are clearly and fully manifested.

"Your God is the One God." All that the *sūrah* has outlined of great signs of creation and blessing, and also of the signs of His perfect knowledge, lead to this clear truth. A truth with manifest effects seen in the harmony and complementarity of the laws of nature governing the universe.

Those who reject this great truth, and do not believe in the hereafter, are not short of proof and evidence. The fault lies rather with them and their own hardened natures. Their hearts persistently deny the very signs they see. They are arrogant, unwilling to accept clear evidence, submit to God, and believe in His Messenger.

God who has created them knows this. Indeed He knows what they keep secret and what they do and say in the open, and He does not like what He knows of them. They are full of arrogance. *“He does not love those who are arrogant.”* (Verse 23) An arrogant nature is unlikely to be convinced or to submit to the truth. It is their arrogance that makes them unloved by God.

Whenever they are asked, ‘What has your Lord bestowed from on high?’ they say: Fables of the ancients!’ On the Day of Resurrection they shall bear the full weight of their burdens, as well as some of the burdens of those ignorant ones whom they have led astray. Evil is the burden they shall bear. (Verses 24-25)

Those arrogant people with hardened, unresponsive hearts are asked, *‘What has your Lord bestowed from on high?’* (Verse 24) But they do not give the direct and normal answer, quoting some verses from the Qur’ān or stating their import without distortion to prove their honest reporting even though they may not believe in it. They give instead a dishonest answer, saying, *‘Fables of the ancients!’* (Verse 24) A fable is defined as ‘a story not founded on fact, a legend or myth.’ Thus do they describe the Qur’ān which addresses minds and souls, deals with life situations, human behaviour, social interactions as well as people’s conditions, past, present and future. They only describe it as such because it relates some parts of the history of earlier communities. Their denial of the truth thus leads them to bear the burden of their own sins, as well as a portion of the burdens of those whom they lead astray, preventing them from believing in God and the Qur’ān, keeping them unaware of its truth and nature. The Qur’ān describes these sins as heavy burdens. Indeed, they are foul burdens. They weigh heavily on people’s souls like loads weigh heavily on their backs. They trouble hearts like burdens trouble the body. Indeed they are worse and even more troublesome than physical burdens, heavy as these may be.

A Wicked Campaign

Ibn Abī Hātim reports: “The elders of the Quraysh met for consultation. Some of them said: ‘Muhammad is a man of fine argument. If he speaks to a man, he soon gets hold of him. Therefore, select some of your most honourable people, whose lines of ancestry are well known. Let them take their positions at every route into Makkah, at one or two day’s distance, so that they turn away anyone who comes to meet Muhammad.’ People did just that. If any of them met a man sent by his people to find out about Muhammad, he would introduce himself to him, telling him his position among his people. He would then offer to tell him about the Prophet, saying, ‘He is a liar who has been followed only by slaves and ignorant people, and those who are good for nothing. All wise men among his people have taken a clear

stand against him.’ This would be enough to turn many people away. It is to this that God refers in the verse stating: *“Whenever they are asked, ‘What has your Lord bestowed from on high?’ they say: Fables of the ancients!”* (Verse 24)

“On the other hand, if the man sent to find out about the Prophet is one to whom God has given insight, he would say: ‘I am certainly a bad intelligence gatherer if, having reached so close, I am to return now without meeting this man and listening to what he says in order to give my people a true picture of him.’ He would insist on going into Makkah, where he would meet the believers and where they would tell him that all that Muhammad says is good and fine.”

This was a well orchestrated propaganda campaign mounted by the Quraysh against Islam. A similar campaign is organized in every generation by arrogant people who do not wish to submit to the truth despite all the evidence supporting it. Indeed the arrogant among the Quraysh were not the first to deny the truth or to scheme against it. The *sūrah* draws for them a picture of the fate suffered by schemers before them, and their destiny in the hereafter. It shows them what they endure from the moment their souls part with their bodies until they receive their punishment in the life to come. All this is depicted in vivid images, following the inimitable style of the Qur’ān:

Those who lived before them also schemed. But God struck their edifice at its foundation, and its roof fell in upon them from above, and suffering befell them from where they did not perceive. Then, on the Day of Resurrection He will cover them with ignominy, and say: ‘Where are those alleged partners of Mine concerning whom you have engaged in dispute?’ Those who are endowed with knowledge will say: ‘Ignominy and misery shall this day befall the unbelievers, those whom the angels have gathered in death while they are still wronging themselves.’ These will then offer their submission, saying: ‘We have done no wrong!’ [They will be answered]: ‘Yes, indeed. God has full knowledge of all that you were doing! Enter the gates of hell, where you shall abide.’ Evil indeed is the abode of the arrogant! (Verses 26-29)

“Those who lived before them also schemed.” (Verse 26) The *sūrah* paints their scheming as though it was a building with foundations, corners, ceiling and roof, which implies that it was a massive and well designed plot. But nothing can stand up to God’s might: *“But God struck their edifice at its foundation, and its roof fell in upon them from above.”* (Verse 26) This paints a picture of total destruction, overtaking them from beneath their feet and above their heads. The foundations supporting the building collapse, and the roof falls down burying them. *“And suffering befell them from where they did not perceive.”* (Verse 26) Thus the building they very carefully constructed to provide them with shelter becomes their burial ground as they are overwhelmed from every direction. Little did they think that what they built for