

Surah al-Qalam, Chapter 68

(The Pen)

Section (juz') 29

Number of Verses: 52

General Overview of the Chapter

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The Chapter, revealed in Mecca, has 52 Verses. Some Qur'an exegetes have entertained doubts about the Revelation of all the blessed Verses of the Chapter in Mecca, though the Chapter stands in total harmony with Meccan Chapters in terms of tone and content, since above all, it treats of the Noble Prophet's (S) Prophetic call and confrontation with the foes who regarded him as insane, call to patience and steadfastness, and warning the opponents against Divine torments.

All in all, the topics discussed in the Chapter may be epitomized as follows:

1. The blessed Chapter opens with some of the excellences peculiar to the Messenger of Allah (S), particularly his nobilities, and proceeds to lay emphasis on them.
2. The blessed Chapter proceeds with an enumeration of his foes' vices.
3. Making mention of the people of Paradise actually serves as a warning against the evil polytheists.
4. Mention is also made of miscellaneous material regarding the Day of Resurrection and the disbelievers' torments.
5. The Noble Prophet of the Islamic faith (S) is enjoined to persevere and exercise patience against

obdurate foes.

6. Warnings against polytheists.

7. Finally, the blessed Chapter in question closes with the glory of the Holy Qur'an and different conspiracies of enemies against the Noble Prophet (S).

The designation of the Chapter, mentioned by some as Nun, derives from the opening Verse. Though some of the traditions narrated on the merits of the blessed Chapter reflect that the title is Nun wa 'I-Qalam.

The Merit of Reciting the Chapter

In this vein, it is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) that one who recites the Chapter Nun wa 'I-Qalam shall be granted the Divine Rewards in store for those who possess moral nobilities.¹

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) that one who recites the Chapter Nun wa 'I-Qalam in his obligatory or supererogatory ritual prayers shall be safeguarded by God Almighty against indigence for good and shall be secure against the pressures of the grave upon his demise and shall be granted Divine Graciousness.² It is worthy of note, however, that being granted such Rewards is subject to honoring religious obligations rather than paying lip service to the same.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 1-4

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

ن ﴿١﴾ وَالْقَلَمِ وَمَا يَسْطُرُونَ

مَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ بِمَجْنُونٍ

وَإِنَّ لَكَ لَأَجْرًا غَيْرَ مَمْنُونٍ

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

- 1. By Nun, pen and by what they write.**
- 2. You, by the Grace of your Lord, are not insane.**
- 3. And for you shall be a Great and Everlasting Reward.**
- 4. And you possess an exalted character.**

The Chapter in question is the only One opening with the detached letter nun. Mention has been made above as to the detached letter, particularly under the opening blessed Verses of Chapters 2, 3, and 7.

What is worthy of note herein is that some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the detached letter is a hypochoristicon of and an allusion to the Arabic Divine Attribute rahman ("the Most Gracious"), though some have considered it as a metonymy alluding to a river in Paradise.

The blessed Verse 1 contains oaths taken as to two most significant issues in human life, saying:

"By the pen and by what they write."

The oath is quite astonishing, since the object of the oath is seemingly an insignificant point, a piece of reed or something resembling the same and a little black material.

Nonetheless, it is the fountainhead of all human civilizations, advancements, and development of sciences, awakening of thought, formation of religions and schools of thought, and the springhead of human guidance and awareness such that human life thereby falls into pre-historic and historic eras.

Human history begins by the discovery of writing through which man was able to record the story of his life and left behind

"what they write."

The majestic nature of the oath is rendered further evident by according attention to the point that such blessed Verses were revealed when there were no writers in that milieu and the number of the illiterate inhabitants of Mecca, the focal point of devotions, politics, and economy of Hijaz, did not exceed twenty.

Thus, swearing by the pen in such milieu is of a particular majesty.

It would be of interest to make mention of the point that the earliest Verses revealed onto the noble and pure heart of the Noble Prophet (S) on the "Mountain of Light" (Jabal al-Nur) and at the "Cave of Hira" reveal the exalted significance of the pen:

"Recite! In the Name of your Lord Who has created [the world of existence]. He has created man from a clot [a piece of thick coagulated blood]. Recite! And our Lord is the Greatest Who has

taught man by the pen. He has taught him that which he knew not³.

The most interesting point is that an illiterate person recited such Words bearing testimony to the truth that the Holy Qur'an is but Divine Revelation.

Some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the Arabic word qalam ("pen, calamus") herein connotes the pen by which archangels record Divine Revelation or the records of human deeds, though the contextual meaning of the blessed Verse in question is broader in scope and such interpretation may be considered as one of its senses.

Likewise

"what they write"

is also broad in its semantic implications encompassing whatever is recorded of treading the path of guidance and the intellectual, moral, and practical developments of mankind without being restricted to recording Divine Revelation or human deeds.

The blessed Verse 2 treats of the object of the oath, saying that owing to Divine Graciousness, you are not insane, namely those who unfoundedly allege that you are insane are blind in their hearts failing to behold all these Divine Blessings and Bounties conferred upon you, e.g. the Bounties of great intellect and insight, trustworthiness, sincerity, knowledge, Prophetic Call, and infallibility.

They are insane who falsely allege that the possessor of intellect par excellence is insane and thereby distance from the guide and leader of mankind through posing such unfounded allegations.

The blessed Verse 3 is saying that Great and Everlasting Divine Rewards are in store for you, since you persevere on the Straight Path against such unfounded claims and even set your hopes on their deliverance and salvation without experiencing exhaustion consequent to your endeavors made on the path. The Arabic adjectival form mamnun derives from m-n-n ("sever") connoting endless and everlasting Rewards.

The blessed Verse 4 presents another depiction of the Noble Prophet (S), saying that he possesses great and marvelous nobilities of character, unrivalled purity and sincerity, and indescribable patience, perseverance, steadfastness, and forbearance.

He calls people unto obedience to God Almighty, worships Him more than anyone else, forbid people of committing vices, exercises forbearance, providing those harming and hurting him with admonition.

He invokes God Almighty to forgive the sins of those who slander him. He prays to God Almighty to bestow His Guidance upon those who hit him with rocks and cast hot ashes on his head. He is the focal point of love and the springhead of mercy. The Arabic word khuluq, cognate with khilqat ("creation") connotes the inherent purity of heart which becomes the second nature of man.⁴

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 5-7

فَسْتَبْصِرُ وَيُبْصِرُونَ

بِأَيِّكُمْ الْمَفْتُونُ

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ

5. You shall see before long and they shall see as well,

6. Which of you is afflicted with insanity.

7. Your Lord is the Best Knower of him who has gone astray from His Path and He is the Best Knower of those who are guided.

the blessed Verses 5 and 6 serve as Divine Consolations to His Messenger (S) against his foes, saying that you and they shall see soon which of you is insane. The Arabic past participial form maftun, cognate with fitna ("affliction") herein connotes

"afflicted with insanity."

They ascribed such unfounded accusations unto him so that Allah's servants may distance themselves from you, but people are capable of intellection and they will acquaint themselves with your teachings in time.

Then, it will be manifest that such noble teachings have been revealed unto your pure and brilliant heart by God Almighty and it will be known that He bestowed you a great capacity for intellection as well as great knowledge.

Furthermore, you measures and stances and the rapid spread of the Islamic faith in future will reflect that you are the great source of intellect and insight and insane are those bats standing against sun shine and most assuredly such truths shall be further clarified on the Day of Resurrection.

The blessed Verse 7 lays further emphasis on supporting the Noble Prophet (S), saying:

"Your Lord is the Best Knower of him who has gone astray from His Path and He is the Best Knower of those who are guided."

The point is that God Almighty is Omniscient of His Path and thereby the Noble Prophet (S) is assured that he is on the Path of Guidance and his foes are in error.

It is narrated through a sound transmission chain that when the Quraysh noticed that the Noble Prophet (S) accorded precedence to 'Ali (as) over others, they talked evil of the latter saying that Muhammad was afflicted with insanity because of him. Thus, the Chapter in question was revealed in which God Almighty took an oath that the Noble Prophet (S) was not insane.

Further,

"those who have gone astray from His Path"

alludes to the Qurayshi foes of the Noble Prophet (S) who uttered such unfounded claims.

The clause

"He is the Best Knower of those who are guided"

alludes to 'Ali (as).5

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 8-11

فَلَا تُطِعِ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُدْهِنُ فَيُدْهِنُونَ

وَلَا تُطِعْ كُلَّ حَلَّافٍ مَّهِينٍ

هَمَّازٍ مَشَّاءٍ بِنَمِيمٍ

8. So obey you not the deniers.

9. They wish that you compromised with them, so that they would compromise with you [a compromise adulterated by deviation from the Straight Path].

10. And obey not everyone who swears much and is a liar or is worthless.

11. One very inquisitive of other people's faults, a slanderer,

Making mention of the Noble Prophet's (S) nobilities of character in the preceding blessed Verses, his foes' vices are being treated herein such that a comparison of the two may shed further light on the question, enjoining him not to follow those who deny God Almighty, His Messenger (S), the Day of Resurrection, and the Islamic faith, since they are alluring and erring people transgressing all the Bounds set by the Truth as following such erring people entails but error and misfortune.

The blessed Verse 9 makes mention of their efforts to make the Noble Prophet compromise with them, saying that they wish that you made compromise with them so that they act likewise. Making compromise herein connotes neglecting some of Divine Commands for their sake.

Qur'an exegetes maintain that the blessed Verse was revealed when the chiefs of Mecca called the Noble Prophet (S) to follow the beliefs of their ancestors, namely polytheism and idolatry, but God Almighty forbade him to obey them.⁶

It is also reported that Walid ibn Mughayra, one of the prominent chieftains of Quraysh, offered many possessions to the Noble Prophet (S) and swore that if he forwent his Prophetic Call, the possessions would be his.⁷

The tone of the blessed Verses in question as well as the material incorporated in historical sources clearly reflect that when the blind hearted polytheists noticed the rapid dissemination of the Islamic faith, they made attempts to make compromise with the Noble Prophet (S) and urge him to act likewise, as the followers of falsehood acted accordingly down the centuries, offering great possessions, worldly exalted positions, and beautiful women at times and thereby compared the Noble Prophet (S)'s exalted spirit with their limited and worthless ambitions.

The Noble Prophet (S) is enjoined many a time in the Holy Qur'an to accord no attention to their deviations and empty promises. The blessed Verse 10 enumerates the vices committing each of which leads to disobedience to God Almighty, warning him against following anyone who takes many an oath and is worthless.

The Arabic intensive adjectival form *hallaf* is applied to one who takes many oaths for any significant or insignificant matter and it such people are usually insincere in taking oaths.

The Arabic adjectival form

mahin ("**worthless, lowly**"),

cognate with *mahana* ("worthlessness, lowliness"), is taken by some Qur'an exegetes to imply thoughtless, lying, or evil people.

The blessed Verse 11 provides further depiction of such people saying that they are very inquisitive and

slandering. The Arabic intensified adjectival form hammaz, deriving from h-m-z ("backbite, slander") is applied to one who indulges in slandering others. The Arabic phrase mashsha' bi-namim is applied to one who goes about slandering and backbiting people and thereby causes discord and enmity. The intensive forms indicate going to extremes in committing such vices.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 12-14

مَنَّاعٍ لِلْخَيْرِ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ

عَتَلٍ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ زَنِيمٍ

أَنْ كَانَ ذَا مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ

12. One going to extremes in hindering the good, wrong doing, sinfulness,

13. Moreover vengeful, avaricious, coarse in manners, and notorious.

14. May it never come that you follow him owing to his affluence and offspring.

It is incumbent upon believers to disclose all the aspects of the foes so that such disclosure may lead to the people's salvation. Approximately ten characteristics are enumerated in these blessed Verses such that if someone has one of these vices, it is incumbent upon believers to distance from them, let alone those possessing all of these vile traits.

Thus, the blessed Verse 12 enjoins people to distance from one who makes many an effort to hinder the good and he is wrong doing and sinful. Such person not only does no righteous good deed, but also impedes other from doing good deeds. Furthermore, he transgresses Divine Bounds and rights bestowed upon people by God Almighty and his soul is adulterated by all sins such that committing sins is his second nature.

The blessed Verse 13 is saying that such person is gluttonous and notorious. He intends to avail himself of everything but impedes others from the same. Some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the Arabic adjectival form 'utull is applied to one who is bad tempered, vengeful, coarse in manners, and shameless.

The Arabic intensive adjective zanim is applied to someone whose descent is unbeknownst connoting

"born out of wedlock."

The Arabic phrase

ba'd dhalik ("moreover, besides, furthermore")

indicates that these two vices are more abominable than the preceding ones, as suggested by some of the Qur'an exegetes. It is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) as saying that 'utull indicates grave disbelief and zanim is applied to one who is avaricious in his disbelief.⁸

At any rate, God Almighty makes such depiction of the liars and their vices, seemingly unparalleled elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an, reflecting the vile characteristics of the opponents of the Islamic faith, the Holy Qur'an, and the Noble Prophet (S). Such people were liars, worthless, inquisitive, slanderous, disobedient, sinners, and of unbeknownst descent. They may not be expected to be otherwise.

The blessed Verse 14 is a warning saying:

"May it never come that you follow him owing to his affluence and offspring."

The Noble Prophet (S) indubitably never followed them, but these blessed Verses lay emphasis on the point that so long as his doctrines and practices are not revealed to everyone, friends and foes are not expected to do accordingly.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 15–16

إِذَا تُلِّيَ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ

سَنَسِمُهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ

15. When Our Verses are recited unto him, he says: "Tales of the ancients."

16. We shall brand him on the snout!

The former blessed Verse reflects the reaction of such people with such worthless traits against Divine Signs, saying:

"When Our Verses are recited unto him, he says: 'Tales of the ancients.'"

It is under such vile pretext that they distance from Divine Signs and thereby consign them to oblivion and seduces others to deviate from the Straight Path; as a consequence of which it is incumbent upon

the believers to refrain from following such people. It further completes forbidding the believers to follow them.

The latter blessed Verse unveils one of the torments to be inflicted on this group, saying that you shall behold before long that We shall brand them on the snout! Such eloquent expression reflects their utmost humility, since the Arabic word khurtum implies a reference to pigs and elephants.

It is worthy of note, however, that the word nose connotes magnanimity in the Arabic tongue. There is an idiom in the Persian language saying: "rub one's nose against the ground" connoting humiliating someone.

Furthermore, animals are branded but their snouts are not branded even. Such eloquent blessed Verses indicate that God Almighty humiliates such vain, disobedient, and wrong doing people and disgraces them before everyone such that others may take a lesson out of their dire fate.

The history of the Islamic faith bears witness to the same such that such obdurate opponents confronting the dissemination of the Islamic faith were so humiliated and disgraced that their humiliation and disgrace were unparalleled. Furthermore, further disgrace and humility are in store for such people on the Day of Resurrection.

It is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) as saying:

*"Do you want me to inform you of your most vicious people amongst you? Those who go to extremes in slandering and backbiting, cause discord amongst friends, and find faults with innocent people."*⁹

According to another Prophetic tradition, the Noble Prophet (S) enjoined his companions to refrain from quoting him when the quote causes suspicion in any of his companions, since he would like to meet them with a pure heart.¹⁰

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 17-20

إِنَّا بَلَوْنَاهُمْ كَمَا بَلَوْنَا أَصْحَابَ الْجَنَّةِ إِذْ أَقْسَمُوا لَيَصْرِمُنَّهَا مُصْبِحِينَ

وَلَا يَسْتَتِنُونَ

فَطَافَ عَلَيْهَا طَائِفٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ وَهُمْ نَائِمُونَ

فَأَصْبَحَتْ كَالصَّرِيمِ

17. Indeed, We have tried them as We tried the people of the garden when they swore to pluck the fruits of the garden in the morning [without the poor being aware of it],

18. Without leaving anything aside.

19. Then, a [nightly] torment was afflicted on all of their garden while they were asleep.

20. So, the garden became black by the morning like a pitch dark night.

In vein with the discussion raised in the preceding blessed Verses concerning the vain affluent who owing to their affluence and children turn away from everything, the blessed Verses in question serve as an allusion to some affluent people who had a verdant garden, but they trod the path of perdition due to their obduracy. The story was seemingly well-known at the time, hence the allusion to the story.

The blessed Verse 17 is saying that we tried them as we did the owners of the garden. Qur'an exegetes are not unanimous regarding the location of the garden, whether it was in the Yemen close to the populous city of San'a, or in Ethiopia, amongst the Children of Israel, or in Syria or in Ta'if, though the majority of the exegetes maintain that it was in the Yemen.

According to the story, the garden belonged to a believing old man who made use of its revenues to meet his needs and gave away the rest in charity. Nonetheless, after his demise, his children said that they were further entitled to the revenues since they had numerous children failing to follow their father's practice of expending the surplus on charitable means.

Thus, they intended to deprive the needy of the produce and their dire fate is reflected in these blessed Verses, saying that we tried them when they swore to pick the fruits early in the morning unbeknownst to the needy.

The blessed Verse 18 is saying that they did not leave anything for the needy. Such decision reflects that they did not act according owing to their need, but they thereby reflected their niggardliness and weak belief, since inasmuch as one happens to be in need, he may allocate a portion of the produce of a lucrative orchard to the needy.

The blessed Verse 19 proceeds to say that when they were asleep at night, they were afflicted by an encompassing Divine torment, such that a deadly lightning and a burning fire consumed the verdant orchard and darkened it like pitch black nights leaving behind but some ashes.

The Arabic word ta'if, cognate with tawaf ("circumambulation") denotes one who circumambulate something and at times connotes some affliction inflicted on someone at night. The Arabic word sarim denotes "separating" but herein connotes "pitch black night; fruitless tree; black ashes."

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 21-25

فَتَنَادَوْا مُصْبِحِينَ

أَنْ ائْغْدُوا عَلَيَّ حَرْثِكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَارِمِينَ

فَانطَلَقُوا وَهُمْ يَتَخَفَتُونَ

أَنْ لَّا يَدْخُلَنَّهَا الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَسْكِينٌ

وَغَدَوْا عَلَيَّ حَرْدٍ قَادِرِينَ

21. Then, they called out one to another as soon as the morning broke.

22. [Saying:] "Go to your tilth in the morning, if you would pluck the fruits."

23. So they departed, conversing in secret low tones [saying]:

24. "No poor man shall enter upon you into it today."

25. And they went in the morning with a strong intention, thinking that they have power [to prevent the poor taking anything of the fruits therefrom].

The blessed Verse 21 is saying that at any rate the owners of the garden, imagining that the fruits of their orchard are ripe to be picked, called onto one another. The blessed Verse 22 says that they asked each other to proceed if they intend to pick their fruits. The Arabic word aghdu, cognate with ghadwa, implies the break of the day and the word breakfast is applied to the food eaten in the morning.

The blessed Verse 23 is saying that they proceeded toward their orchard whispering onto one another.

The blessed Verse 24 says that they said onto one another:

"Be careful lest a man in need approaches you!"

They whispered onto each other lest the needy might hear them and ask them for some meager amount

of fruit to quench their hunger. The needy seemingly expected some fruit every year owing to the charity of their father. Nonetheless, such niggardly and unworthy children moved so furtively that no one learns that it was time to pick up fruits.

The blessed Verse 25 is saying that that proceeded toward their orchard at day break with all their might to turn away from the needy. The Arabic word hard connotes impeding wrathfully. Thus, they raged at the expectations of the needy and made up their minds to exercise all their might to ward off their requests. The Arabic word is also applied to the years when there is no precipitation.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 26-30

فَلَمَّا رَأَوْهَا قَالُوا إِنَّا لَضَالُّونَ

بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ

قَالَ أَوْسَطُهُمْ أَلَمْ أَقُلْ لَكُمْ لَوْلَا تُسَبِّحُونَ

قَالُوا سُبْحَانَ رَبِّنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا ظَالِمِينَ

فَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَلَوْمُونَ

26. But when they entered the garden and beheld it, they said: "Indeed, we have gone astray."

27. [Then they said:] "Nay! We are totally deprived of everything!"

28. The wisest among them said: "Did I not tell you: why do you not glorify Allah.

29. They said: "Glorified is Our Lord! Verily, we were wrong-doers."

30. Then, they turned to each other, blaming one another.

These blessed Verses proceed with the story of the owners of the orchard as mentioned in the preceding blessed Verses. Aspiring to pick up their fruits unbeknownst to the needy, they intended to impede them from availing themselves of Divine Bounties.

They departed at daybreak, unaware of the lightning that had turned the orchard into ashes when they were asleep at night time. The blessed Verses reflect that when they beheld their orchard, they found it in such a mess that they thought it were not their orchard and they had lost their way.

The Arabic plural adjectival form

dhallun ("the astray")

may connote that they had seemingly lost their way to the orchard or to the Truth, as suggested by some Qur'an exegetes, though the former sense seeming further befitting herein.

The blessed Verse 27 reflects that they regarded themselves as the true needy who aspired to deprive those in need from the produce. Their attempt at such impediment led to their deprivation from the material gains as well as the spiritual blessings accrued through expending in Cause of Allah and helping those in need.

The blessed Verse 28 is saying that the wisest of them at the time said:

"Did I not ask you to glorify Allah and remember His Majesty and refrain from disobeying Him and give thanks by helping the needy by expending your possessions. However, you failed to hearken to my words and met such dire fate.

The blessed Verse reflects that one of them believed in God Almighty and warned them against niggardliness and avarice, but others failed to listen to him. However, following the incident he reproached them with further convincing logical arguments.

According to the blessed Verse 29, they experienced a rude awakening and confessed to their sins, saying that God Almighty is glorified and they were indubitably wrong doers and wronged themselves as well as others. The Arabic word *awsat* in the preceding blessed Verse connotes one who is moderate in terms of reason and sensibility.

The interrogative clause

"Why do you not glorify God Almighty"

alludes to the point that all righteous good deeds stem from belief in God Almighty, knowing and glorifying Him. However, some exegetes maintain that the Arabic verbal noun *tasbih* herein connotes giving thanks for the Bounties.

The blessed Verse 30 reflects that the brothers addressed each other and censured one another. Apparently, while confessing to his flaws, each of them tried to hold others accountable and severely rebuked others regarding others as the main cause of the calamity as he was not that unaware of God Almighty and justice.

That is the fate of all the wrong doers who get entangled with Divine torment, confessing to their sins but holding others responsible for their own afflictions. Nonetheless, it is goes without saying that they are all accountable for the misdeeds and vices.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 31–33

قَالُوا يَا وَيْلَنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا طَاغِينَ

عَسَى رَبُّنَا أَنْ يُبَدِّلَنَا خَيْرًا مِّنْهَا إِنَّا إِلَى رَبِّنَا رَاغِبُونَ

كَذَلِكَ الْعَذَابُ ۚ وَالْعَذَابُ الْآخِرَةُ أَكْبَرُ ۚ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

31. They said: "Woe to us! We were disobedient.

32. We hope that our Lord will [forgive us and] give us in exchange something better. Truly, we turn to our Lord.

33. Such is Divine chastisement, but truly that of the Hereafter is greater if they but knew.

The blessed Verse 31 is saying that when they noticed the depth of their dire fate, they cried:

"Woe unto us!"

They had previously confessed to their wrong doing, since wrong doers may acknowledge the principle, though he may do wrong owing to being overwhelmed by his concupiscent desires. Au contraire, the disobedient never follow the rules nor does he acknowledge it. Wrong doing may herein connote doing wrong to oneself and disobedience may imply transgressing the rights of others.

It is worthy of note, however, that when arabs face a grave affliction, they say

wayla ("woe").

According to the blessed Verse 32, upon such rude awakening and confessing to their sins, they turned toward God Almighty saying that may their Lord forgive their sins and provide them with a better orchard, since they have turned towards Him, set their hopes on His Pure Essence, and invoke Him to render them Assistance in their hardships. It is narrated in some traditions that they sincerely repented and God Almighty pardoned them and provided them with a better orchard.

The blessed Verse 33 draws a general conclusion saying that thus is Divine torment and that in the hereafter is more severe than that if but they knew. Furthermore, the story reflects that there is an intimate relationship between committing sins and being deprived of Divine Sustenance and Provision.

In this vein, it is narrated from Imam Baqir (as) as saying:

"Man at times commits a sin and is thereby deprived of his Divine Provision."

Then, the noble Imam (as) recited the blessed Verse in question. 11 It is narrated from Ibn 'Abbas as saying that the relationship between committing sins and being deprived of Divine Provision is crystal clear such that God Almighty makes mention of the same in the Chapter in question. 12

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 34–38

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٍ النَّعِيمِ

أَفَنَجْعَلُ الْمُسْلِمِينَ كَالْمُجْرِمِينَ

مَا لَكُمْ كَيْفَ تَحْكُمُونَ

أَمْ لَكُمْ كِتَابٌ فِيهِ تَدْرُسُونَ

إِنَّ لَكُمْ فِيهِ لَمَا تَخَيَّرُونَ

34. For the God fearing are gardens abounding in Bounties with their Lord.

35. Shall We then treat the believers like the disbelievers?

36. What is the matter with you? How do you judge?

37. Or do you have a book wherein you learn,

38. What you choose belongs to you.

The accounts of the good and the evil are juxtaposed in the Holy Qur'an such that such comparisons

may help people with a better understanding of their fates. Such method is quite impressive in terms of education.

Likewise, following an account of the dire fate of the owners of the orchard in the preceding blessed Verses, mention is made of the exalted position of the God fearing and the Bounties in store for them.

The blessed Verse 34 is saying:

"For the God fearing are gardens abounding in Bounties with their Lord."

Such gardens abound in whatever imaginable Bounty.

However, some polytheists and the vain affluent claiming that they are quite at comfort in this world and will enjoy the same state in the Hereafter are addressed in the blessed Verse 35 saying:

"Shall We then treat the believers [obedient to Allah] like the disbelievers?"

The following blessed Verse says:

"What is the matter with you? How do you judge?"

Anyone sound in mind readily acknowledges that the fates the just and the wrong doer, the obedient and the sinners, the sacrificing and the vain are not on a par before God Almighty Whose Acts are Wise and Well-Measured. Such vain people imagine that the world and the Hereafter belong to them.

The blessed Verse 37 further adds that if your reason failed to lead you to such understanding, could you produce any argument to substantiate your claim. Do you have a book to learn something from it?

The blessed Verse 38 says:

"Does your choice belong to you?"

Do you expect wrong doers like you to be on a par with the believing Muslims? Your false claim is neither reasonable nor is it mentioned in any authoritative book.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 39-41

أَمْ لَكُمْ أَيْمَانٌ عَلَيْنَا بِاللَّغَةِ إِلَى يَوْمِ الْقِيَامَةِ ۚ إِنَّ لَكُمْ لِمَا تَحْكُمُونَ

سَلُّهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ بِذَلِكَ زَعِيمٌ

أَمْ لَهُمْ شُرَكَاءُ فَلْيَأْتُوا بِشُرَكَائِهِمْ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ

39. Or have you oaths from Us, reaching to the Day of Resurrection that yours will be what you choose?

40. Ask them which of them will guarantee such thing?

41. Or have they partners whom they associate in partnership with Allah who intercede with Allah on their behalf? Then, let them bring their partners if they are truthful!

The blessed Verse 39 is saying that you may not produce logical and narrational arguments as to the veracity of your claims. Have we made a covenant with you which is valid to the Day of Resurrection that justifies what entails your benefits?

Who may claim to have made a covenant with God Almighty that He obeys to his inclinations and He unconditionally provides him with privileges such that sinners be ranked with believers?

The blessed Verse 40 proceeds with posing such questions to them and thereby leaves no room for such unfounded justifications, saying:

"Ask them which of them will guarantee that God Almighty will provide them with whatever they wish?"

It is in the last stage of such strange investigation that the blessed Verse 41 inquires whether they have objects of worship who intercede with God Almighty on their behalf and render them support. If they are true in their claims, they may present them.

Could they produce any argument to substantiate that such worthless and inanimate objects are associated with God Almighty in partnership?

Thus, the blessed Verses in question lead us to the conclusion that to substantiate their claim as to being a on a par with or even superior to believers, they have to make recourse to one of the four means: to provide arguments based on reason, heavenly Scriptures, Divine Covenant, or intercession and testimony of intercessors and witnesses. Their claims are unfounded since they may not provide affirmative answers to such questions.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 42-43

يَوْمَ يُكْشَفُ عَنْ سَاقٍ وَيُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ فَلَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ

خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهُقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۚ وَقَدْ كَانُوا يُدْعَوْنَ إِلَى السُّجُودِ وَهُمْ سَالِمُونَ

42. Remember the Day when the shin shall be laid bare out of fear and they shall be called to prostrate themselves, but they shall not be able to do likewise.

43. Then, their eyes will be cast down and ignominy will cover them. They used to be called to prostrate themselves, while they were healthy and good; however, they lack such power any longer.

The idiomatic expression

"the shin shall be laid bare" (yukshafu 'an saq-in)

connotes desperation. It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) that the mouths shall be sealed on that Day; one shall be totally enwrapped in fear; eyes shall stare; and souls shall reach the throats. 13

The blessed Verse 42 is saying:

"Remember the Day when the shin shall be laid bare out of fear and they shall be called to prostrate themselves, but they shall not be able to do likewise."

Some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that the expression implies fear and gravity of the matter, since it was common practice amongst the Arabs to lay their shins bare against hard tasks and make their utmost effort to remove the impediments.

Everyone shall be called to prostrate themselves and show humbleness before God Almighty on the Day of Resurrection. Believers shall prostrate themselves, but sinners shall be unable to do likewise, since the vices deeply rooted in them in this world shall reveal themselves impeding them to prostrate themselves before Divine Pure Essence. In this vein, it is narrated from Imam 'Ali (as) that Divine Light shall be unveiled on the Day of Resurrection.

Impressed by its Majesty and Glory, believers shall prostrate themselves, though hypocrites shall be unable to do likewise. 14

The blessed Verse 43 is saying that then, their eyes will be cast down out of shame and regret and ignominy and disgrace will totally enwrap them. Having been tried at the Divine Tribunal, their eyes will be cast down and humility enwraps them.

The blessed Verse proceeds to say that they used to be called to prostrate themselves, while they were healthy and good; however, they lack such power any longer and thus reflect their arrogance and disobedience on the Day of Resurrection.

How may they prostrate themselves on that Day? It is needless to say that people are called in this

world to prostrate themselves through listening to ritual including congregation prayer calls. The Qur'anic Verses as well as the traditions narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) and the Infallible Imams (as) bear witness to such call addressed to all mankind.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 44-45

فَذَرْنِي وَمَنْ يُكذِّبُ بِهَذَا الْحَدِيثِ ۚ سَنَسْتَدْرِجُهُمْ مِنْ حَيْثُ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

وَأْمَلِي لَهُمْ ۚ إِنَّ كَيْدِي مَتِينٌ

44. Then, leave Me Alone with those who belie this. We shall lead them to torment in time from directions they know not.

45. And I will grant them a respite, since My Plans are well-measured and precise.

Addressed to the Noble Prophet (S), the blessed Verse 44 says:

"Then, leave Me Alone with those who belie this Word, namely the Holy Qur'an, so that I chastise them."

In such strong Warning, the All-Invincible Allah is asking His Messenger (as) to leave Him Alone with such obdurate and disobedient deniers so that He afflicts them by the torments which they deserve.

We must bear in mind that such Words are uttered by the Omnipotent Lord. It is also worthy of note that such Warning entails consolation and support for the Noble Prophet (S) and the believers against the conspiracies of the enemies of the Islamic faith. The blessed Verse further adds that God Almighty shall lead them to torments before long while they shall be caught unaware.

It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) as saying that committing sins and leading comfortable lives serve as tokens of Divine torments to be inflicted in time. 15 Belying the Holy Qur'an entails grave torments, since God Almighty asks His Messenger to leave them to Him.

In the blessed Verse 47, God Almighty says that He will grant them a respite and He will not hastily inflict them with torments, since His Plans are well-measured and His torments are excruciating.

The expression

"I will grant them a respite" (umli lahum)

implies that God Almighty never hastily inflict wrong doers with torments, since one who makes haste is

afraid of losing opportunities.

However, the Omnipotent Lord never loses opportunities to fulfill His Will. At any rate, it is a warning to all wrong doers and the disobedient against vanity caused by security and leading comfortable lives, but they have to expect Divine grave torments to be inflicted upon them at any time.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 46-47

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَّغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

46. Or is it that you ask them a wage so that they are heavily burdened with debt?

47. Or that they are aware of the unseen so that they can write it down and pass it onto others?

Resuming the investigations on the wrong doings of the polytheists and sinners, the blessed Verses in question pose two more questions:

"Or is it that you ask them a wage so that they are heavily burdened with debt? Or that they are aware of the unseen so that they can write it down and pass it onto others?"

In other words, if they refrain from listening to you under the pretext that acting likewise entails bearing heavy costs and they cannot afford them, they are lying since you, like other Prophets, expect no remuneration for imparting your Prophetic Call.

The Arabic word maghram, cognate with gharama, implies the losses incurred without having committed any wrong doing. The Arabic word mathqal, derived from th-q-l, implies heaviness and gravity. Thus, beliers are denied of further pretexts.

The blessed Verse 47 proceeds with the discussion by asking: "Or that they are aware of the unseen so that they can write it down and pass it onto others?" They claim that such secrets reveal that they are on a par with the believers.

It is a remote possibility to which disbelievers may take recourse. It is in this vein that the Holy Qur'an rejects their unfounded claims as per which they say that they have access to the invisible world through soothsayers and the like of them and they are thereby aware of the secrets of the unseen and they may write them down and pass them onto others.

Thus, they falsely claim that they are on a par with the believers or even superior to them. They apparently produced no such claims and the question is rather rhetorical. Some Qur'anic exegetes maintain that it is an allusion to the Preserved Tablet (lawh mahfuth) and predestination is herein intended by "writing," though such possibility is too remote, since they never claim to have predestination and the Preserved Tablet under their sway.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 48-50

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَكُنْ كَصَاحِبِ الْحُوتِ إِذْ نَادَىٰ وَهُوَ مَكْظُومٌ

لَوْلَا أَن تَدَارَكَهُ نِعْمَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِ لَنُبِذَ بِالْعَرَاءِ وَهُوَ مَذْمُومٌ

فَاجْتَبَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَجَعَلَهُ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ

48. Thus, wait patiently for the Command of your Lord and be not like the Companion of the Fish [Jonah], when he made haste in invoking us to inflict his people with chastisement and was entangled with the chastisement of abandonment of priorities (tark ula) when he cried out unto Lord while he was in deep sorrow.

49. Had not a Grace from his Lord reached him, he would indeed have been cast out [of the stomach of the fish] while he was to be blamed.

50. But, his Lord chose him and made him one of the righteous.

The obduracy and insensibility of the polytheists and the enemies of the Islamic faith imbued the Noble Prophet's (S) heart at times such that he was on the verge of cursing them. God Almighty consoles His Messenger and bids him to be patient and wait for Divine Command to pave the path for his and his companions' victory and the total defeat of his enemies.

He is asked to make no haste and be aware that the respites accorded to them are a kind of chastisement in time. Thus, the Muslims' victory is intended by Divine Command (hukm rabbika). Some Qur'an exegetes, however, maintain that the blessed Verse is bidding the Noble Prophet (S) to be patient and remain steadfast in imparting the Divine Message.

The blessed Verse forbids the Noble Prophet (S) to be like Jonah (as) who made haste in invoking God Almighty to inflict his disobedient people with torment and was thereby entangled with the chastisement

for abandoning priorities calling onto God Almighty while he was in the stomach of the fish and his heart was imbued with sorrow.

The same invocation is reflected elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an16:

"But he cried through the darkness, saying: 'there is no god, but You Alone."

Thus, Jonah (Dhu 'l-Nun) called unto his Lord from the shadows saying:

"Glorified are You! Truly, I have been of the wrong doers,"

thereby confessing to having abandoned the priorities and invoking God Almighty for forgiveness.

It is worthy of note that the Arabic past participial form makthum, derived from k-th-m, denotes throat and the Arabic kathm siqa' is used in the sense of tying the mouth of the leather bottle after its being filled.

The Arabic present participial form kathim is applied to those who suppress their intense anger and sorrow. The word kathm may also connote confinement, thus makthum may herein imply being imbued with anger and sorrow or being confined in the stomach of the fish, though the former sense seems to better fit the context.

The blessed Verse 49 is saying that had Divine Bounty and Grace not reached him, he would have been cast out of the stomach of the fish while he was worthy of being blamed. It is mentioned elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an17 that finally Jonah was cast on a desert, termed as 'ara', while his repentance had been accepted by God Almighty and he was granted Divine Grace and he was never blameworthy.

Thus, the blessed Verse 50 is saying that his Lord chose him and made him one of the righteous and vested him once more with the obligation of guiding his people. He returned to his people and they all believed in him and were granted Divine Bounties for quite some time.

Surah al-Qalam – Verses 51-52

وَإِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ

وَمَا هُوَ إِلَّا نَكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

51. Those who disbelieve would almost cause your death with their eyes when they hear this

Qur'an and they say: "He is insane!"

52. But this Qur'an is but a Reminder to all the worlds.

The closing Verses of the Chapter resumes the point mentioned in the opening of the Chapter regarding the false ascription of insanity to the Noble Prophet (S) by his enemies, saying the disbelievers would almost cause his death with their eyes upon hearing the Qur'anic Verses and falsely claim that he is insane.

The Arabic verbal form *la-yuzliqunaka*, derived from *z-l-q* ("tumble down, fall down") denotes that they would make you slip, namely cause your death. There are some Qur'an exegetes maintaining that upon hearing the Majestic Qur'anic Verses, the Noble Prophet's (S) enemies get into such rage and look daggers at him as if they would intend to make him slip and destroy him.

Some hold that the blessed Verse makes a reference to the evil eye in which some people believe and say that some eyes have certain secret powers through which they may cause ailment and death. Some also maintain that the expression connotes wrathful looks, though such light headed people are unaware of the truth and accord contradictory ascriptions to him.

The last blessed Verse of the Chapter is saying that this Qur'an is but an awakening and a reminder to the worlds whose teachings and warnings are enlightening, its illustrations are meaningful, its encouragements and glad tidings are promising to the spirit and all in all it awakens the neglectful and reminds them of their obligations.

How one may falsely claim that the Messenger of Allah is insane? The Arabic word *dhikr* denotes reminder as the Holy Qur'an serves as a Reminder to all. However, some Qur'an exegetes take it in the sense of *sharaf* ("eminence, dignity, glory, honor") holding that the Holy Qur'an is a source of eminence to all the world, though the former sense seems to better fit into the context.

O Lord! Protect us from the evil of evil doers and the enemies' deceits!

O Lord! Grant us steadfastness and forbearance in whose light we may obtain Your Satisfaction!

O Lord! Bestow upon us the capacity of making use of Your Bounties prior to their being substituted by deprivation consequent to ingratitude!

Amen! O Lord of the worlds!

1. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, vol. 5, p. 387.

2. Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 330.

3. 96:1-5

4. Numerous traditions and narratives may be found in exegetic and historical sources concerning the moral nobilities of the Prophet (S), e.g. his forgiving, love, kindness, sacrifice, and fear of God Almighty treating which lies beyond our exegetic

discussions.

However, mention may be made of a tradition narrated from Husayn ibn 'Ali (as) as saying that his father, the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali (as), had provided him with details on the Noble Prophet's (S) nobilities of character. Some of these nobilities will be mentioned hereunder. The Noble Prophet (S) was of good tempered and of a good disposition.

He always smiled. He was never rough, cruel, aggressive, and vile of speech. He was not a flatterer nor did he found faults with others. He never left anyone in despair but whoever came unto him returned with satisfaction. He neither entered into disputes nor was he prolix in speech nor did he reproach anyone. He was neither inquisitive nor did he uttered any words unless he had set his hopes on Divine Rewards.

His speech was so impressive that others were silent and they never uttered a word unless he became silent. People never entered into disputes before him. If a stranger who did not know him talked coarsely asking for something, he exercised patience and toleration and said unto his companions to meet the demands of the needy.

He never interrupted anyone unless he stopped talking.

(Ma'ani al-Akhbar, p. 83)

Without such moral nobilities and excellences, those backward pre-Islamic Arabs with their coarseness and inflexibility would never embrace the Islamic faith, but they would abandon him. It would be befitting to revive such Islamic moral nobilities and all Muslims be a beam of light reflecting the Noble Prophet's (S) moral excellences.

Numerous Islamic traditions have been narrated in this respect as to the Noble Prophet (S) and the obligations incumbent upon all Muslims, though for the sake of brevity, we content ourselves with making mention of a few traditions.

It is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S), saying:

"It is my Prophetic Call to perfect moral excellences".

(Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 333)

Thus, one of the goals behind the Prophetic Call is to perfect moral nobilities.

According to a prophetic tradition, it is through moral excellences and the believers attain to such degree that they worship God Almighty at night and fasts during the day.

(Majma' al-Bayan, ibid.)

According to another Prophetic tradition, nothing shall be rewarded on the Day of Resurrection like good temper (ibid.).

It is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) that the most beloved of you before God Almighty are those who are of good temper and disposition, those who are humble, associate with others and people are also willing to associate with them and the most detested of you before God Almighty are the slanderers who separate the brethren and are inquisitive to find faults with the sinless (ibid.).

It is also narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) that above all, fear of God Almighty and having a good disposition leads people to Paradise.

(Safinat al-Bihar, vol. 1, p. 410)

It is narrated from Imam Baqir (as) that the best of the believers are those who excel in faith through possessing noble excellences.

(Wasa'il al-Shi'a, vol. 8, p. 50)

It is narrated from Imam 'Ali ibn Musa al-Ridha (as) as saying that the Noble Prophet said:

"it is incumbent upon you to improve your nobilities, since they lead you to Paradise and refrain from possessing an evil tempter, since it leads to the Fire."

(Ruh al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 108)

The traditions narrated in this respect clearly reflect that possessing a good temper is the key to Paradise, leading to Divine Satisfaction, serving as a token of the power of faith, and on a par with daily and nightly prayers and devotions. Traditions narrated in this respect abound in Islamic sources.

The author of Tafsir al-Mizan devotes approximately 27 pages (vol. 6, p. 183) to the Noble Prophet's (S) moral virtues, excellences, and nobilities as reflected in his biographical accounts. Further traditions and details in this respect are to be found in tradition sources.

5. Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 334, where Tabarsi narrates the tradition on the authority of a transmission chain attested in the Sunni sources.
6. Fakhr Razi's exegetic work, vol. 30, p. 85; Maraghi's exegetic work, vol. 29, p. 31.
7. Tafsir Qurtubi, vol. 10, p. 671.
8. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, under the blessed Verse in question.
9. Usul Kafi, vol. 2, Bab al-Hamir ("Chapter on Conscience"), tradition 1.
10. Abu Da'ud's Sunan; Tirmidhi's Sahih; Tafsir fi Hilal al-Qur'an.
11. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, vol. 5, p. 395, tradition 44.
12. Tafsir al-Mizan, vol. 20, p. 37.
13. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, under the blessed Verse in question.
14. Ibid, vol. 5, p. 397.
15. Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, under the blessed Verse in question.
16. 21:87
17. 37:49

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