

Part 13 Surah 14 Ibrahim Verses 1-4

1-4 One Message for All Mankind

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

Alif Lām Rā. 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, (1)

to God, to whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs. Woe to the unbelievers; for theirs will be a severe suffering. (2)

These are the ones who love the life of this world preferring it to the life to come, and who turn others away from God's path and try to make it appear crooked. They have gone far astray. (3)

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. But God lets go astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills. He is Almighty, truly Wise. (4)

1 – 3 From Darkness into Light

"Alif Lām Rā. This is a book which We have bestowed on you from on high..."

(1) This book which consists of words made up of letters like these is one which you certainly have not authored. It has been revealed to you for a definite purpose, "so that you might bring forth all mankind, by their Lord's leave, from darkness into the light..." (1) Your role is to take mankind out of the depths of darkness into which they have sunk, the darkness of superstition, conflicting systems and traditions; the darkness of believing in alleged deities, and false concepts, values and standards. You are to bring them, i.e. all of mankind, into the real light which removes all darkness. Not only does this light dispel all darkness from people's consciences and minds, it also affects their lives generally, setting for them new values and traditions.

Faith based on God's oneness is a light that shines within the human heart, to make the whole human being shine as well. Man is created out of cold clay in which God has blown of His spirit. Should he abandon the light of this breath of spirit, he turns back into dark clay, and becomes a mass of flesh and blood like an animal. It is indeed the flesh and blood alone that are made of the earth's clay. It is with this breath from God's spirit that light spreads over it. Then faith makes it appear in its full glory. With it the mass of flesh and blood blooms.

"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." (1) The phrase, "the path of the Almighty," means His way and law which governs the whole universe, and the code which governs life. Linguistically speaking, it is used here as a substitute for 'light'. This means that the 'light' guides to 'the path of the Almighty', or that the light is His path. The second meaning is however stronger and richer. The light that illuminates the human soul is the light that illuminates the whole universe. It is the way, the law and the code of living. A soul which lives in this light will never be in error, or entertain misconceptions, or opt for wrong behaviour. It follows the straight path, "the path of the Almighty, the One to whom all praise is due." He is the One who has absolute power in the universe, and who is praised by all creatures.

His might is highlighted here as a threat to the unbelievers, while the fact that He is worthy of praise is mentioned as a reminder to those who express gratitude to Him.

Then follow some of God's attributes. He is notably mentioned as the One to whom everything in the heavens and on earth belong, who is in need of no one, and who controls the universe and all creatures therein: "God, to whom all that is in the heavens and all that is on earth belongs..." (2) Whoever, then, comes out of darkness into light and follows guidance does well. The *surah* does not mention anything about such a person here. Instead, it goes on to warn the unbelievers against woeful suffering. This is inflicted on them as a result of their rejection of the greatest blessing God has bestowed on humanity, that is, sending them a Messenger whose task is to bring them out of darkness into light. That is an act of God's grace for which we cannot show enough gratitude. Yet some people reject it outright. Hence, "woe to the unbelievers; for theirs will be a severe suffering." (2)

The *surah* then mentions a quality that tells us the reason for their rejection of the blessing God bestows on mankind through His noble Messenger: "These are the ones who love the life of this world preferring it to the life to come, and who turn others away from God's path and try to make it appear crooked. They have gone far astray." (3) Giving preference to the life of this world puts a person in a position of conflict with the requirements of faith, and on a collision course with the 'path of God'. The situation is reversed when preference is given to the life to come. For then, this life is set on the right course. People enjoy it with moderation, always keen to earn God's pleasure. Hence there is no conflict between their preference for the life to come and their enjoyment of this life and the pleasures it offers.

Faith is a light that illuminates the soul so that it can see the way leading to God, clear without any confusion caused by superstition or desires, and without any misleading fancy or greed. When the human soul sees the way so clearly ahead of it, it proceeds with steady steps, and without hesitation.

The light of faith illuminates the whole of life, making all mankind equal servants of God, united together by their bond of faith. They submit themselves to none other than God, which means that they are never divided into slaves and tyrants. With the universe around them they establish a bond based on knowledge of the great law that sets the whole universe and all its forces into operation. This brings them peace with the universe and with all creatures that live in it.

Faith is the light of justice, freedom and knowledge. It is the light of a bond with God based on compassion. It is a bond that gives us reassurance of God's justice, grace and wisdom in situations of ease and hardship. Such reassurance requires that we adopt an attitude of patience in adversity and gratitude in happier circumstances. It also adds the light of understanding that adverse situations occur for a definite purpose.

Believing in God alone as the Supreme Lord is not merely a personal faith that fills one's conscience and spreads light over one's soul. It is a complete code of living based on the concept of total submission to God alone, discarding all claims of lordship by other creatures, and rejecting any attempt that gives such creatures any form of sovereignty. This code of living fits completely with human nature so as to satisfy all its needs and fill it with happiness, light and reassurance. It is also so stable that it protects people against the sort of upheaval experienced by societies that submit to the sovereignty claimed by others and who follow systems devised by them in politics, government, economics, social structure, morals and social behaviour, as well as in customs and traditions. Furthermore, this code of living preserves and promotes human potential. It prevents people from glorifying and singing the praises of despots. Indeed this short phrase, "so that you may bring forth all mankind, by their Lord's leave, from darkness into the light," covers profound truths relevant to the human mind, as also practical day to day living. It is impossible for human language to do more than point to these horizons.

"So that you might bring forth all mankind, by their Lord's leave, from darkness into the light..." (1) God's Messenger cannot do more than deliver the divine message, and his role is merely to explain it. As for the bringing of mankind out of darkness into light, this is done by God's leave, and according to the laws He has willed to set in operation. The Prophet is only His Messenger.

Those who turn their minds and hearts towards ensuring a happy outcome in the hereafter do not lose the pleasures of this world, as some people with faulty concepts imagine. In Islam, a happy life in this world is a prelude to a happy future life. The fulfilment of man's task as God's vicegerent on earth requires building a happy life. In Islam, there is no denunciation or renunciation of any aspect of this life as people wait for the hereafter. What Islam requires is that life should prosper with truth, justice and sound behaviour by people who seek God's pleasure and a happy life in the hereafter. This is the Islamic outlook.

Those who choose the life of this world in preference to the hereafter cannot monopolize the resources of this world, exploiting, cheating and oppressing people to serve their own interests in a society where the light of faith shines and people follow God's guidance. Hence they turn themselves and others away from God's path and try to make it appear crooked, devoid of truth and justice. It is only when they have done this, and managed to lead themselves away from the straight path of God and justice that they resort to their oppressive ways, cheating people and persuading them to share in their corruption. It is only in this way that they can get what they want of self-aggrandisement, taking for themselves most of the resources God has placed on earth, and behaving arrogantly towards others. People then submit to their authority without resistance.

The way of life advocated by faith protects human life against the selfishness and greed of those who are preoccupied with the life of this world in preference to the life to come. Under this way of life no one person or group can monopolize the earth's wealth and resources.

4 In Their Own Language

"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..." (4) This is a blessing God grants to people with every message He sends to them. For a messenger to be able to bring people out of darkness into light, by their Lord's leave, he must be given his message in his own people's language. This is how he is then able to explain God's message to them. It is how the objectives of the message are fulfilled.

Although the Prophet Muhammad is a Messenger to all mankind, he is given his message in his own people's language, so that he can explain matters to them. They are the ones who would be conveying his message to the rest of mankind. His own life is, after all, limited. Therefore, he is commanded to call first on his own people so that the Arabian Peninsula becomes purely Muslim. It will then

fulfil its role as the place from which the final divine message is carried to the rest of the world. What happened in practice, as God, who knows everything, determined, was that the Prophet passed away when Islam became the religion in the whole of Arabia. The Prophet raised an army under the command of Usamah to be dispatched to areas bordering on Arabia, but the Prophet (peace be upon him) died before the army began its march. It is true that the Prophet sent his letters and emissaries to the heads of countries outside Arabia, calling on them to accept the message of Islam, and making it clear that his message was addressed to all mankind. However, what God determined for him, which fits with the limited duration of human life, is that Muhammad (peace be upon him) delivered his message to his own people in their own language. Then the task was completed by those who carried his message to other communities all over the world. Hence, there is no contradiction between his message being addressed to all humanity, and its being expressed in Arabic, the language of his own people.

"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. But God lets go astray whomever He wills, and guides whomever He wills..." (4) A messenger's task is completed when he has made the truth clear to people. What comes out of it in the form of people following guidance or going astray is not in his power, and does not follow his desire. It is entirely up to God who has subjected human beings to a law of His own making, in keeping with His free-will. Whoever follows the way of error is left to go astray, and whoever follows the way of divine guidance reaches his destination. Both are subject to God's will.

"He is Almighty, truly Wise." (4) He conducts life in accordance with His wisdom and careful planning. Nothing is left haphazard, without guidance or planning.