

Part 14 Surah 15 Al-Hijr Verses 1-15

1 - 15 Preserving the Qur'an

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

Alif Lām Rā. These are the verses of the Book, a clear discourse. (1) Little do those who disbelieve wish that they were Muslims. (2) Let them eat and enjoy themselves, and let their hopes beguile them. For they will surely come to know [the truth]. (3) Never have We destroyed any community unless divine revelations have been made known to it. (4) No community can ever forestall its term, nor can they delay it. (5) They say: 'You to whom this reminder has been bestowed from on high! You are truly mad. (6) Why do you not bring the angels before us, if you are truthful?' (7) We never send down angels except in accordance with the truth. And then, [the unbelievers] would be given no further respite. (8) It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact. (9) Indeed We have sent before you messengers to communities of old, (10) but whenever a messenger came to any of them they mocked at him. (11) Thus do We cause it [i.e. this scorn of the revelation] to slip into the hearts of the guilty, (12) who do not believe in it, although the ways of ancient communities have gone before them. (13) If We opened for the unbelievers a gateway to heaven and they had ascended higher and higher, (14) still they would surely say: 'It is only our eyes that are spellbound! Indeed, we must have been bewitched.' (15)

1 - 5 Unbelievers Indulge in Wishful Thinking

This opening passage speaks about the nature of the book which the unbelievers reject as fabrication, adding a threat that they will soon witness a day when they wish they had submitted themselves to God and become Muslims. It tells them that that day has a fixed time, and that is the reason for its delay. It mentions the challenges they make and how they demand that angels be brought to them. It threatens them by stating that when God sends down angels to unbelievers, He destroys them altogether. Finally the *sūrah* speaks of the real reason for their unbelieving attitude. It is certainly not for lack of evidence, but rather due to their entrenched stubbornness.

*"Alif Lām Rā. These are the verses of the Book, a clear discourse." (1) The three separate letters with which this *sūrah* starts and similar ones that occur at the beginning of some Qur'anic *sūrahs* make up the book, i.e. the Qur'an. They are available to all. They make the sublime verses, which are inimitable in*

aiming to wake them up so that they could see their hope for what it is: a beguiling hope that causes them to overlook their inevitable fate.

But the laws God has set in operation for the world and for human life will continue along their respective courses. The end of each nation will come at the time appointed by God. Then it is the practices of each community that determine how these laws and how God's order will operate: *"Never have We destroyed any community unless divine revelations have been made known to it. (4) No community can ever forestall its term, nor can they delay it. (5)*

Therefore, they must not be deluded by the fact that God's punishment has not taken them. God's law will take its well-marked course and operate as God wants it to operate. As for them, they will certainly come to know.

That clear book and appointed term are given by God to every nation and community so that they will do their work. What they do in this life determines their fate in the hereafter. When a community believes in God, does good works, allows human life to proceed and prosper, and implements justice then God will extend its life until it deviates from these rules and becomes devoid of all goodness. That determines the end of its life, either with total loss and ruin, or with a temporary general weakness.

It may be said that there are communities which do not believe or do any good works or implement justice, but they continue to thrive and prosper. But this is nothing but delusion. Such communities must have a fair residue of goodness, even if it is limited to building a good life on earth, dealing justly among its own citizens and taking measures to ensure material prosperity within their own territories. They owe their continued existence to this residue of goodness. When it is exhausted, they face their inevitable destiny. God's law will always operate, and every community has its time: *"No community can ever forestall its term, nor can they delay it." (5)*

6 - 8 A Promise That Will Never Fail

The *sūrah* then describes their bad manners in the way they addressed the Prophet, when he had only presented to them the Qur'an which is a clear reminder of the truth. It helps to reawaken them to face the facts instead of running after beguiling hopes. He also reminded them of God's law and its operation. But they ridiculed him and spoke to him with extreme impudence. *"They say: 'You to whom this reminder has been bestowed from on high! You are truly mad. (6) Why do you not bring the angels before us, if you are truthful?' (7)*

composition and argument. These letters do not have an intrinsic meaning in themselves, but they make up the Qur'an, which is very clear in its meaning.

People who do not believe in the revelation of this inimitable book, and describe the Qur'an as fabricated when it is very clear in its import, will come to see a day when they will dearly wish that they had adopted a totally different attitude. They will wish that they had been believers and that their behaviour was in line with the teachings of religion. *"Little do those who disbelieve wish that they were Muslims." (2)*

They may wish so but that will be when no wish is of use. But in fact, *'little do those who disbelieve wish'*. The way this is expressed implies a threat and a touch of derision. It also implies encouragement to make use of the available opportunity and submit to God before it is too late. For if the chance is lost and the day comes when they wish they had submitted themselves to God and accepted Islam, their wishes will be of no avail.

This is followed by another implicit threat: *"Let them eat and enjoy themselves, and let their hopes beguile them. For they will surely come to know [the truth]." (3)*

Leave them to their carnal desires, eating and enjoying, without reflection, contemplation or thought to what is around them. Leave them with their deluding hopes and deceiving temptations, while life passes away and the opportunity is lost. Leave them so that you do not waste your own time with those who have condemned themselves when they lost their way in idle hopes and desires. The temptation shows them that they have a long life to come and that they will achieve what they covet. They think that nothing can stop them from obtaining what they hope for, and that they have to face no reckoning and will be held to no account. They delude themselves by thinking that what they get in this life is enough to ensure their safety in the hereafter.

This image of beguiling hopes is drawn from real human life. Hope always tempts and beguiles man. So much so that he overlooks the facts of God's existence, fate and the certainty of death. Man forgets that there is a duty to be fulfilled and a prohibition to be observed. He goes even further so as to forget God altogether and forget that he himself is going to die and then be resurrected in order to account for his deeds.

This beguiling hope is a fatal one, and it is to this hope that the Prophet is commanded to leave them. *"For they will surely come to know the truth (3)"* but then it will be too late for such knowledge to be of any benefit to them. The command given to the Prophet implies a threat to them, as well as a strong call

Ridicule is apparent in their way of addressing the Prophet. *"You to whom this reminder has been bestowed from on high! ..." (6)* They actually deny the fact of revelation and the Prophet's message altogether, but they make this mocking address.

Their rudeness is carried still further as they insult the Prophet personally: *"You are truly mad!" (6)* This they do in response to his call on them to believe in God, using the Qur'an in all its clarity to address them. They go on to make unreasonable demands, asking for angels to come down to endorse his message: *"Why do you not bring the angels before us, if you are truthful?" (7)* The demand for angels is often repeated in this and other *sūrahs*, and it is put to the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) as it was put to prophets and messengers before him. This reflects man's clear ignorance, for it is he whom God has honoured when He assigned prophethood to a few chosen people.

The reply to such ridicule, impudence and ignorance takes the form of reasserting the rule which is confirmed by the fates suffered by past communities. Angels are sent down to a messenger of God only to destroy the unbelievers of his community when their term is up. At this point there can be no more respite and no further delay: *"We never send down angels except in accordance with the truth. And then, [the unbelievers] would be given no further respite." (8)* Is this what they want and demand?

9 - Preservation of the Qur'an

The *sūrah* then calls on them to look carefully on God's guidance and reflect on it. God only sends down the angels with the truth. He commands them to establish and implement it. In the case of persistent unbelievers, the truth is to destroy them. Not only do they deserve this, but it is also inevitable. Such destruction, then, is a truth in itself and the angels carry it out without delay. God chooses for them what is better than the choice they make for themselves. He gives them the Reminder so that they may reflect on it and follow its guidance. This is much better than sending down the angels with the final truth, if only they would reflect: *"It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact." (9)* It is much better for them, then, to approach it positively, because it will remain intact, suffering no loss or change. It will remain pure, unaffected by falsehood, free of distortion. It guides them to the truth with God's care, if they really want the truth. If they were asking for angels to make sure of it, they should know that God does not wish to send down angels for them, because He wants what is

better for them. Hence, He sent down the Reminder which is preserved intact. That is better than sending angels to destroy them.

When we look today, after the passage of many centuries, at the fulfilment of God's promise to preserve the Qur'an, we see a great miracle testifying to the fact that it is God's book. We see that the circumstances and situations that it has endured over the centuries could not have left it intact, suffering no change of even a single sentence or a single word, without the interference of a superior power. That power, which is greater than all situations, factors and circumstances, has preserved this book keeping it pure from change or distortion.

There was a time when many sects and groups sought to find support for their ideas in the Qur'an and the *Hadith*. The resulting conflict was fuelled by the Jews, the diehard enemies of this faith, and by those who advocated nationalism. These were known in Islamic history as *Shu'ubiyyin*. These groups sought to introduce foreign elements into the *Sunnah*. Only the colossal efforts of scores of bright, pious and meticulous scholars, over several decades, purged the *Hadith* from that which did not belong to it.

In times of conflict and strife, such sects deliberately misinterpreted Qur'anic verses, twisting Qur'anic texts so that they could cite them in support of their views and rulings. But they were all, even in the darkest and hardest circumstances, totally unable to introduce a single change into the text of the Qur'an, the book God has guaranteed to preserve. Its text has remained exactly as it was revealed by God, providing a challenge to every would-be perpetrator of distortion. This is irrefutable testimony to the fact that this Qur'an is God's own book and He is the One who guarantees its preservation.

A Guarantee for All Time

Muslims generally have gone through a time, which we continue to endure these days, when they have been too weak to defend themselves, or their faith, way of life, land, honour, property, moral values or even their reasoning and intellectual faculties. Their enemies have managed to replace every moral value, sound belief, virtuous practice, and legal standard they have had with something foul and alien. They have tempted Muslims to accept loose morality and shameless behaviour. What is more, such behaviour has been given attractive titles such as progress, advancement, secularism, freedom, breaking one's shackles, revolution and innovation, etc. Muslims have thus become Muslims only by name. They have retained practically nothing of their profound

same story. Just like the unbelievers in the communities of old received what God's messengers told them, the same is the case with the unbelievers in your community. They all show the same attitude. Their hearts, having turned away from God's messages and been hostile to God's chosen messengers, are no longer able to reflect or receive a message as it should be received: *"Thus do We cause it [i.e. this scorn of the revelation] to slip into the hearts of the guilty (12) who do not believe in it, although the ways of ancient communities have gone before them."* (13) We let it sink into their hearts as its truth is denied, subject to ridicule, because their hearts cannot receive it except in this way. This applies to all generations and communities, past, present and future. Those who deny the truth of God's message are of the same nature: *"The ways of ancient communities have gone before them."* (13)

It is not proper evidence of the truth of God's message that they lack. They are stubborn, unwilling to change, no matter what signs and proofs are given to them. At this point, the *surah* gives a particularly rich image of repugnant obstinacy and mean strong-headedness: *"If We opened for the unbelievers a gateway to heaven and they had ascended higher and higher (14) still they would surely say: 'It is only our eyes that are spellbound! Indeed, we must have been bewitched.'"* (15) We can imagine them ascending higher and higher into the sky, going through a special door that opens for them, and they climb physically and see with their eyes the open door. Yet their stubborn attitude remains, whereby they deny the truth of what they see and feel, claiming that someone must have cast a spell over them so that they cannot see clearly. They claim that what they see is mere fantasy: *"It is only our eyes that are spellbound! Indeed, we must have been bewitched."* (15) All we see and feel is mere illusion.

There is no use arguing with such people. They have all the evidence they need to believe. What prevents them is not that the angels have not been sent down to them, because their own ascension is greater evidence and closer to them than the angels descending. Instead it is their shameless obstinacy which causes them to disregard and reject the clearly manifest truth.

This then is an example of human stubbornness which the *surah* paints. It is met only with a feeling of disgust and contempt. This example is neither temporary nor local, nor is it the product of a particular environment at a particular period of time. It is an example of human beings when their nature has been distorted and their faculties of reception impaired. They are cut off from the living universe around them and all the signals it gives. In our own generation, this example applies to atheists who follow materialistic creeds which they claim to

faith. Hence, their power has been sapped, and they have become little more than the scum that floats on the surface of a river.

Yet in spite of all their attempts, the enemies of this religion have not been able to change the text of the Qur'an, or to distort it. This is not due to any lack of motive. They would indeed have loved dearly to alter its text if that were at all possible. But try as hard as they might, they have been unable to achieve their goal.

The enemies of this faith, particularly its Jewish elements, have utilized their great expertise, stretching over four thousand years, in scheming against the divine faith. Indeed, they have even been successful in many ways. For example, they succeeded in introducing some foreign elements into the *Sunnah* and the history of the Muslim nation. They have been able to falsify events and even implant their own people within the Muslim community so that they could play roles they could not otherwise do. They managed to destroy states, communities, systems and laws, and to dress some of their traitors in a heroic guise so that they continued their destructive work against the Muslim community. Although they have done this throughout history, they have been more successful in modern times.

One thing, however, they have not been able to achieve, although circumstances appear to make it seem easy, is tamper with this preserved book, which receives no protection from people who allege to believe in it. This is yet further evidence, if any were needed, that this is God's book. The fact that it has remained free of all distortion in spite of these conditions testifies to the fact that it was revealed by God Almighty. At the time of the Prophet, this promise to preserve the Qur'an intact sounded a mere promise. Today, however, after all these great events and long centuries, it is indeed a great miracle confirming the indisputable fact that it is God's revealed book. No one disputes this fact except a stubborn, ignorant fool. *"It is We Ourselves who have bestowed this reminder from on high, and it is We who shall preserve it intact."* (9) God certainly tells the truth.

10-15 Same Old Denials

God consoles the Prophet (peace be upon him), and tells him that he is not unique in his position among God's messengers who, like him, were the target of much ridicule and rejection. The unbelievers are always wont to show their stubbornness in denying the true faith.

"Indeed We have sent before you messengers to communities of old (10) but whenever a messenger came to any of them they mocked at him." (11) It is the

be 'scientific', when they are far removed from science and knowledge, as well as from insight and inspiration.

Advocates of materialistic doctrines disbelieve in God and deny His existence. They claim that the universe exists without a Creator who controls whatever takes place in it. They then formulate on the basis of their claims and denials social, political, economic and 'moral' creeds, even stating that such are 'scientific'. Indeed, they say that their creeds are the only scientific ones.

This lack of feeling of God's existence despite all the evidence that testifies to His control of the universe clearly indicates that their receptive faculties are impaired. Their persistence in denying God is no less rude and impudent than that painted in the Qur'anic text: *"If We opened for the unbelievers a gateway to heaven and they had ascended higher and higher (14) still they would surely say: 'It is only our eyes that are spellbound! Indeed, we must have been bewitched.'"* (15) The evidence that is available in the universe is so varied and manifest that it is stronger than their ascension to heaven. That evidence addresses every sound nature in an open and private manner, saying what is so powerful that human nature must accept without question.

When we look at the universe we find that it has countless laws working in perfect harmony to maintain its phenomena and existence. Moreover, it has so many complementary aspects which allow life to come into existence in certain parts of it. So to claim that this universe exists without a creator, is something that the human mind cannot accept. It is wholeheartedly rejected by human nature. Not only so, but the better science understands nature and the more deeply it penetrates into the universe and the more of its secrets it uncovers, the notion of self existence and uncontrolled operation seems even more far-fetched. In fact, the greater human knowledge becomes, the more clearly science admits that it is the Creator who controls the universe. Undistorted human nature accepts this truth once it receives the clear signals the universe makes. It has accepted it long before recent scientific evidence supporting it has come to light.

Testimony by a Western Scientist

The universe cannot create itself, then create the laws that control its existence. Nor can we attribute the emergence of life to a lifeless universe. Hence neither human nature nor human intelligence accepts the emergence of the universe or life without a Creator who continues to control it. Indeed material science is now rejecting it as well.

Russell Charles Artist, Professor of Biology at David Lipscomb College, Nashville, Tennessee, says:

Many theories have been brought forward in the attempt to derive living cells from inanimate matter. Certain investigators are claiming that life has originated through the protogene, or through viruses, or through an aggregation of large protein molecules, which may leave the impression that at last the gap between the lifeless and the living has been spanned. Actually it must be admitted that all attempts to produce living matter experimentally from inanimate matter have failed utterly.

Furthermore, it is not by direct evidence that the one who denies the existence of God proves to a waiting world that a fortuitous aggregation of atoms and molecules is life, capable of maintaining and directing itself as do the cells described here. Not at all. He accepts this as a *belief*. It is his private interpretation of the facts visible to us all, that an accidental concourse brought the first cell into being. But this is to accept an even greater miracle than to believe that Intelligence called it into being!

I maintain that each of these single cells (each a system so intricate and delicate that its complete functioning has so far escaped our study), and all the trillions of them on this earth, definitely present a justifiable inference — one of Mind, or Intelligence, or Thought, which we call God. Science both admits and accepts this inference.

I believe firmly that there is a God.¹

The author did not start his investigations from a religious standpoint, but instead commented with an objective outlook, reflecting on the laws of nature. Yet he reached a conclusion that supports the truth as outlined by both natural inspiration and innate religious sense. When a truth exists, everyone who seeks it will inevitably come across it, regardless of what route he takes. It is only those whose receptive faculties have stopped functioning that cannot attain to the truth.

Those who deny God's existence are people whose argument is in conflict with the logic of nature, reason and universal existence. They seem to suffer from the malfunctioning of all their receptive faculties. They are blind, as God Himself describes them: "*Is, then, he who knows that what has been revealed to you by*

¹ Russell Charles Artist, "Trillions of Living Cells Speak Their Message", a paper included in *The Evidence of God in an Expanding Universe*, ed. John Clover Monsma, G.P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1958, p. 124.

your Lord is the Truth like one who is blind? Only those who are endowed with understanding keep this in mind." (13: 19)

As this is their true description, it follows that any social, political or economic theory they come up with, as well as any theory they formulate, on the universe, human life and history must be viewed by a Muslim as no more than the groping in the dark of a blind person who has lost all his senses, at least with regard to understanding human life and how it is organized. No Muslim can adopt anything such a person formulates, let alone make it the basis of his view of life or code of living.

This is a matter of faith, not an intellectual argument. A person who argues that the material world has created itself and initiated human life, and makes this concept the basis of his ideology and code of living errs in the starting point of thought and doctrine alike. All structures and rules that have such a basis cannot bring any good. They have no meeting point even with any detail in the life of a Muslim whose basic concepts and code of living start with the belief in God's oneness and His creation of the universe which remains subject to God's will at all times.

Hence, to suggest that so-called 'scientific socialism' is independent of materialism betrays ignorance. Adopting 'scientific socialism', when it has such a basis and line of thinking, constitutes a total turning away from Islam as a faith, concept and code of living. It is not possible to combine scientific socialism and belief in God. To try to do so is to try to combine Islam with unbelief.

People must choose either to believe in Islam or in materialism. If they believe in Islam, they cannot adopt scientific socialism. Islam is much more than a faith and a conviction. It is a system based on an ideology. On the other hand, scientific socialism is based on materialistic philosophy, which believes that life is matter, and denies the existence of God altogether. We simply cannot separate the two. Hence, a choice between the two must be made. Everyone is free to make his or her choice, but everyone must be responsible for their choice.²

² The author wrote his commentary at a time when so-called, "scientific socialism" was in vogue. Hence, he concentrates on this particular doctrine. However, what he says applies to all materialistic philosophy and any system based on it, including capitalism. — Editor's note.