

Part 8 Surah 6 Al-An'am Verses 151-153

Say: Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not associate partners with Him; [do not offend against but, rather,] be kind to your parents; do not kill your children because of your poverty — We provide for you and for them; do not commit any shameful deed, whether open or secret; do not take any human being's life — which God has made sacred, except in the course of justice. This He has enjoined upon you so that you may use your reason. (151)

Do not touch the property of an orphan before he comes of age, except to improve it. Give just weight and full measure. We do not charge a soul with more than it can bear. When you speak, be just, even though it be against one of your close relatives. Be true to your covenant with God. This He has enjoined upon you so that you may bear it in mind. (152)

Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way. All this He has enjoined upon you so that you may remain God-fearing. (153)

Detailed Commandments for Human Life

Having challenged the unbelievers to produce their witnesses and rejected their claims concerning what they considered as forbidden, the *surah* gives a detailed outline of what God has truly forbidden. Side by side with the list of prohibitions, we find some positive commandments that must be observed. Failure to act on these is also forbidden. The list begins with the most important prohibition of all, namely, associating partners with God. Indeed, the first article of faith which establishes the principle of God's oneness provides the foundation for all prohibitions.

Say: Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you: Do not associate partners with Him; [do not offend against but, rather,] be kind to your parents; do not kill your children because of your poverty — We provide for you and for them; do not commit any shameful deed, whether open or secret; do not take any human being's life — which God has made sacred, except in the course of justice. This He has enjoined upon you so that you may use your reason. (151)

Do not touch the property of an orphan before he comes of age, except to improve it. Give just weight and full measure. We do not charge a soul with more than it can bear. When you speak, be just, even though it be against one of your close relatives. Be true to your covenant with God. This He has enjoined upon you so that you may bear it in mind. (152)

Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way. All this He has enjoined upon you so that you may remain God-fearing. (153)

When we reflect on these commandments, we find that they provide an outline of our religion as a whole. They form the most essential element in the life of

This guiding principle, then, purges human conscience of all traces of associating partners with God, purges the human mind from all traces of superstition, human society from the traditions of ignorance and purifies human life from people's submission to one another.

All forms of associating partners with God are included under the first and most important thing to be forbidden, because they lead to every objectionable thing. It is the practice which should be most forcefully denied so that people can acknowledge that God is their only God, Lord, King and Sovereign. Hence, they address all their acts of worship to Him alone. Believing in God's oneness is, thus, the most important rule which cannot be replaced by any type of worship, moral value, human quality or action. Hence, the list of commandments begins with it: *"Do not associate partners with Him."* (151)

It is important that we should consider what this Qur'anic passage tells us before it details these commandments. In other words, we should know exactly what is meant by associating partners with God, which is the first of all forbidden things. The whole drift of this *surah* focuses on a single issue, which is God's sovereignty and authority to legislate. The verse preceding these three verses challenges the unbelievers to produce their witnesses. It begins with this instruction to the Prophet: *"Say: 'Bring forward your witnesses who will testify that God has forbidden this'. If they so testify, do not you testify with them; and do not follow the wishes of those who deny Our revelations, and those who do not believe in the life to come and who consider others as equal to their Lord."* (Verse 150)

We need to remember this verse and what we said earlier in order to understand what is meant by associating partners with God. It is indeed the association of partners with respect to Godhead and to God's sovereignty.

We need this constant reminder because Satan and his disciples' strenuous efforts to split this faith from its most essential concept have unfortunately resulted in the separation of two intertwined questions, namely sovereignty and faith. This is the reason that makes some well-meaning people who are keen to serve Islam focus their efforts on establishing the proper form of a particular act of worship or denouncing a certain moral aspect or legal violation. They seldom speak about the concept of legislation and to whom it belongs or its central position in the Islamic faith. They give importance to malpractices of secondary importance, but little do they care about the most important violation of God's law which seeks to establish human life on a principle different from the one that assigns to God alone the whole authority to legislate.

the human conscience as they establish the principle of God's oneness. They are also most essential for the life of the human family and human community since they ensure mutual security within society and make cleanliness an important quality of all social transactions. They are indeed pivotal for human life, since they guarantee the rights of every individual, linking them to the need to fulfil the covenant that exists between God and His servants. This keeps these commandments on the right course outlined by the starting principle of believing in God's oneness.

When we look at the comment made at the end of these commandments, we find that God, limitless is He in His glory, states that they constitute the right path leading to Him. All other routes and tracks are deviant, leading away from Him.

It is an especially important issue that these three verses tackle. They follow immediately after the discussion on what may appear to be only a side issue regarding the practices of *jathiliyyah* society. But this issue relates, in fact, to the most fundamental question of faith. Hence why it is linked to this most important list of commandments.

"Say: 'Come, let me tell you what your Lord has forbidden to you...'" (151)

The Prophet is here instructed to speak to people and tell them what their Lord has forbidden to them, not what they allege to have been forbidden. It is their Lord who has made the following items forbidden, because His alone is the position of Lordship which includes the aspects of fostering and directing, as well as issuing legislation. Hence, He is only exercising His authority, because He is the Lord. God alone is the one who enjoys all rights of Lordship.

"Do not associate partners with Him..." (151)

This is the foundation upon which the structure of faith is built. It is to this rule that all duties and obligations should refer and from which all rights and privileges are derived. It must be properly established before any discussion of commandments, prohibitions, obligations, systems and laws can take place. The first and most important requirement is that people should acknowledge that God is their Lord who governs their lives in the same way as they believe in His oneness. No partner can be associated with Him either as a deity or as a Lord. People must acknowledge that God alone controls the universe and conducts its affairs, as He indeed holds them accountable on the Day of Judgement for what they have done in this life and rewards them accordingly. They must also acknowledge at the same time and in the same measure that He alone has the authority to provide the law which human beings must administer and enforce.

Before giving man any order, God states His commandment that partners must not be associated with Him. He states this at a point in the *surah* which demonstrates precisely what is meant by such an association. This is the rule which provides enlightenment between human beings and God, and provides the life of the community with a standard to which it must refer in all situations. It imparts to human life its basic values, so that it is no longer subject to human whims or to traditions based on such whims.

"Be kind to your parents; do not kill your children because of your poverty — We provide for you and for them." (151) This highlights the family tie between human generations. God knows that He is more kind and compassionate to human beings than their parents or children. Hence, He enjoins upon children to be kind to their parents and on parents to be kind to their children. He links this commandment to the recognition of His absolute Godhead and the acknowledgement of His unique Lordship. He tells them that He alone provides for their sustenance. Hence, they must not impose any severe conditions on parents in their old age or on children in their tender years. They must not fear poverty, because God provides sustenance for parents and children alike.

Forbidden to People of Sound Mind

"Do not commit any shameful deed, whether open or secret." (151) Since God has urged His servants to take good care of their families, He has also impressed upon them the need to maintain the family foundation, which is also the basis of society. This equates with purity, decency and chastity. Hence, they are forbidden to commit all types of indecency, whether openly or secretly. This prohibition is then closely related to the commandment immediately preceding it and to the first commandment.

No family can survive and no community can prosper if they sink into shameful indecency, whether open or secret. Purity, cleanliness and chastity are the basic essentials for the healthy living of both the family and the community. Those who like to see indecency spread throughout the community are the ones who try to weaken the structure of the family and to bring about society's collapse.

The Arabic term translated here as 'shameful indecency' refers, from the linguistic point of view, to everything that goes beyond its proper limits. The term is also frequently used to denote a particular type of indecency, namely adultery and fornication. It is most probably in this sense that the term is used here. The present context is one of enumerating certain forbidden beliefs and practices. Adultery is the one particularly meant here. If we were to take the general meaning of the word, we should remember that, murder and the squandering of an orphan's property are both indecencies, but associating

partners with God is the greatest indecency of all. Hence, giving the term 'indecency' the narrower sense of adultery in this context is perhaps more fitting to the general drift of the *sūrah*. It also explains why the plural form is used here. The crime of adultery is normally preceded by actions and circumstances that are also indecent. Clothing which is too revealing, wanton behaviour, uninhibited flirtation with the opposite sex, shameless behaviour, speech and laughter, deliberate temptation and inviting adornments are all indecencies, leading to the ultimate one of adultery. All these may be brought into the open or kept secret. Some may be entertained within oneself, while others are expressed in words and actions. They all work together to destroy the structure of the family and to weaken the community from within. In addition, they leave their stains on people's consciences and limit their concerns to what is petty and abject. Hence, this prohibition follows immediately upon the commandments concerned with the relationship between parents and children.

Because all these indecencies have their own attraction and temptation, the *sūrah* tells us not to go near them. Staying away from them is the best way to avoid the preliminaries and attractions which could weaken one's resolve. Hence, to cast a second, penetrative look at a woman, after the first casual one, is forbidden, while mixing between men and women is kept within the limits of what is necessary. Wearing too many adornments, even using perfumes when going out are forbidden for women. Tempting movements and loud laughter are also disallowed in a pure Islamic social life. Islam does not like people to expose themselves to attraction as it only makes resistance harder. Islam believes in taking protective measures before there is any need to inflict punishments. It protects consciences, feelings and senses. God knows His creation best and He helps protect them, for He is compassionate and all-knowing.

Those who provide all types of temptation and attraction, trying to unleash wild desires, utilizing verbal expression, pictures, films, stories, mixed camps as well as other methods of communication have a certain objective in mind. We know the purpose of their schemes, and we know what they would love to do with this religion and what they try to do to the life of the family and the community.

"Do not take any human being's life — which God has made sacred, except in the course of justice."

(151) These three offences, associating partners with God, adultery and murder are frequently mentioned in the Qur'an in quick succession as things to avoid. This is because they are, in a sense, crimes of murder. The first, associating partners with God, murders sound human nature, while the second, adultery, is

a murder of the community, and the third is a murder of individuals. When human nature is not nurtured by belief in God's oneness, it becomes dead.⁴⁹ The community which allows adultery to spread is a dead community, heading straight for destruction. We need only to remember the examples of the Greek, Roman and Persian civilizations, which all provide historical evidence supporting this fact. We can also see the beginnings of collapse and the eventual demise of the modern Western civilization after it has allowed this plague to corrupt its very structure and social fabric. Again, a society in which killing and vengeance killing are tolerated is one which is threatened with destruction. Hence, Islam prescribes very severe punishments for all these crimes, because it wants to protect its community from destruction.

⁴⁹ Reference may be made to the comments given on Verse 122, which states: *"Is he who was dead and whom We have raised to life, and for whom We set up a light to see his way among men, to be compared to one who is in deep darkness out of which he cannot emerge? Thus do their deeds seem goodly to the unbelievers."* [Chapter 13, pp. 298- 301].

Killing children by reason of poverty has already been forbidden. This is now followed by a prohibition of killing any human being. The way this prohibition is phrased suggests that every individual crime of murder seeks to kill the human soul in general. This is supported by the verse in the preceding *sūrah* which states: *"If anyone slays a human being, for anything other than in punishment of murder or for spreading corruption on earth, it shall be as though he had slain all mankind; and if anyone saves a human life, it shall be as though he had saved all mankind."* (5: 32) The aggression used in killing is against the right to life and against humanity in general. It is on the basis of this rule that God has guaranteed that human life shall always be considered sacred. In addition, the Muslim community feels safe and secure in the land of Islam. Every individual in that community feels secure as he works and contributes to the life of that community. He is exposed to no risk except by the dictates of justice. Such justice which allows a human being to be killed is clearly explained in God's law. This is not left to anyone's decision or interpretation. Furthermore, its detailed explanation only became law after the Muslim state was established and had acquired enough power to be able to implement its laws.

This last point tells us something about the nature of this religion and how it operates in practical life. These rules which are essential to society were only explained in the Qur'an at the appropriate time.

Before continuing with the list of prohibitions and commandments, the *sūrah* separates what has already been mentioned from what is to come by

highlighting God's directives and commandments: *"This He has enjoined upon you so that you may use your reason."* (151)

This comment is given in accordance with the Qur'anic method which makes it clear that every instruction and every prohibition is given by God. This serves to enhance the impression that the authority which bids and forbids in human life belongs to God alone. This adds much weight to the effectiveness of these instructions and prohibitions.

There is also a reference here to using our reason. Indeed, it is only logical that this authority is the only one to whom people submit. We have already mentioned that this authority belongs to God, the Creator, who provides sustenance and who controls every aspect in human life and in the life of the universe.

One last word remains which is to point out that the first group of commandments are perfectly harmonious within themselves, while the second group also contains its own harmony. Hence, each group is outlined in a separate verse, but the two verses maintain a perfect rhythm.

Maintaining the Path Leading to God

"Do not touch the property of an orphan before he comes of age, except to improve it." (152)

Every orphan feels weak within the community because he has lost his father who is supposed to bring him up well and protect him. His weakness, then, imposes a duty on the Muslim community, on the basis of the principle of mutual social solidarity which is central to the Islamic social system. An orphan used to find himself in total loss in pre-Islamic Arabian society. The frequent and varied Qur'anic directives concerning the care that should be taken of orphans, and the stern warning occasionally added to these directives give us an impression of how orphans used to be badly treated in society. This continued to be the case until God selected an honoured orphan from that community to entrust him with the most noble task of all. He made that orphan, Muḥammad (peace be upon him), the bearer of His final message to mankind. He also made taking proper care of orphans one of the practices encouraged by Islam which gives its followers this kind of directive: *"Do not touch the property of an orphan before he comes of age, except to improve it."* (152)

Therefore, anyone who is looking after an orphan must not touch that orphan's property except in a way which is certain to bring a good return to the orphan. He must protect that property and try to improve it until the orphan comes of age and becomes physically and mentally able to receive his property and make good use of it. Thus, the community adds to its ranks a useful member who obtains his full rights.

Scholars have different views concerning the stage when a person comes of age. According to 'Abd al-Rahmān ibn Zayd and Imām Malik, it signifies the attaining of puberty. According to Imām Abū Ḥanīfah, a person comes of age when he is twenty-five, while al-Suddī raises that higher to the age of thirty. Scholars of Madinah set two criteria for that stage: attaining puberty and showing maturity. No particular age is specified.

"Give just weight and full measure. We do not charge a soul with more than it can bear." (152)

This clearly applies to commercial transactions and requires people to do their best to ensure that everyone gets what is due to them. The *sūrah* provides a direct link between these transactions and faith, because this is the Islamic attitude. It is God who gives this directive and who urges people to give just weight and full measure.

Commercial transactions thus have a very real link with the question of Godhead and servitude. They are mentioned here in a context which clarifies that faith has a direct relationship with all aspects of life.

Jāhiliyyah societies, past and present, separate faith and worship on the one side and laws and human dealings and transactions on the other. An example of this separation is related in the Qur'an as it tells us about the Prophet Shu'ayb's people who said to him: *"Shu'ayb, does your praying require you to demand of us that we give up all that our forefathers used to worship, or that we refrain from doing whatever we please with our property?"* (11: 87)

Hence, the Qur'an makes this link between the rules governing financial and commercial transactions on the one hand and faith on the other, in order to make it clear that Islam makes both faith and human dealings integral parts of it, firmly established within its constitution.

"When you speak, be just, even though it be against one of your close relatives." (152)

Here the Qur'an elevates the human conscience, already refined through a sense of watching God, to the even higher level of being guided by belief in God and the need to fulfil His commandments. Within the context of blood relations there lies a human weakness. People tend to think that family relations dictate mutual support in all situations. A human being knows that he himself is weak and lives only a limited period of time. With his relatives he finds strength. The wider his relations extend, the more firmly established is his existence. It is through his relations that his presence in this world is extended to future generations. For all this, a man is weak when it comes to testifying for or against his relatives or to making a judgement between them and other people. Hence, the Qur'an provides the necessary support so that a Muslim's conscience prompts him to say words of truth and justice, thinking only of his relationship

with God and watching Him alone. This gives him the strength which outweighs by far any support he may have from his relatives, as he places his obligation towards God above his duties to his relatives.

Again this particular instruction seeks to remind people of their covenant with God: *"Be true to your covenant with God." (152)* It is part of that covenant that people should speak the truth, even when it affects their relatives. This covenant also requires people to give just weight and full measure and that they do not come near the property of an orphan except to improve it, and to treat human life as sacred, killing no one except in the course of justice. But before all this, the covenant which exists between human beings and God dictates that they must associate no partners with Him. This is a pledge made by them and is strongly impressed on their nature by its very constitution. It is God who has made human nature firmly related to its Creator, feeling His presence through the laws that cover its own existence and the existence of the universe.

The Qur'anic comment on all these directives is a most appropriate one: *"This He has enjoined upon you so that you may bear it in mind." (152)* They must always remember this covenant with God in all its details and its binding duties.

These basic rules are made crystal clear. They also provide a summary of the Islamic faith and its social legislation. They start with God's oneness and they conclude with the mention of man's covenant with God. They were preceded by a long discourse on sovereignty and the fact that it belongs to God alone. These rules, then, outline the straight path leading to God. Any path that deviates from this one can only lead to complete loss: *"Know that this is the way leading to Me, a straight path. Follow it, then, and do not follow other ways, for they cause you to deviate from His way. All this He has enjoined upon you so that you may remain God-fearing." (153)*

With this verse, a long part of the *sūrah* is concluded. It starts with the verse saying: *"Is he who was dead and whom We have raised to life, and for whom We set up a light to see his way among men, to be compared to one who is in deep darkness out of which he cannot emerge? Thus do their deeds seem goodly to the unbelievers."* (Verse 122) The conclusion, as we can observe, is highly inspiring and leaves us with a general but profound effect.

Between the outset and the conclusion the question of sovereignty and the authority to legislate is presented in full clarity. As its discussion concentrates on certain points of detail, such as those concerned with agricultural produce, cattle, slaughtered animals and offerings, it is closely linked to the central question of faith in order to make it clear that it is part of it. This is why the Qur'an deals with this question of sovereignty at such length and relates it to all other aspects of the *sūrah* which discusses the whole question of faith and

explains basic issues of Godhead and servitude to God in a most unequivocal way.

God's path is a single one leading to Him. This is the path of maintaining that Lordship belongs only to God and that people must submit to Him alone. People must realize fully that sovereignty belongs only to Him and they must translate this into practice by accepting only His legislation in their practical life. Any path that differs with this can only lead them astray.

"All this He has enjoined upon you so that you may remain God-fearing." (153)

It is being conscious of God and fearing Him that ensures purity of faith and action. It is through remaining conscious of God and fearing Him that people can strengthen their resolve to always turn to God alone.