

Allah's Great Act of Mercy

We have always sent messages (of guidance) as a mercy from your Lord. He alone is the One who hears all and knows all, the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if only you were firm believers. There is no deity other than Him; He gives life and death. He is your Lord and the Lord of your earliest ancestors. Yet they remain in doubt, playing about. Wait, then, for the Day when the skies shall bring forth a kind of smoke which will make things clear. It will envelope the people. Grievous is this suffering! (They will cry): 'Our Lord! Relieve us from this suffering; for, indeed, we are believers. How will this remembrance benefit them? A messenger who clearly explained things had previously come to them; but they turned their backs on him and said: 'He is taught by others, a madman!'

(Smoke: Al-Dukhan; 44: 5-14)

Nothing manifests God's mercy like the revelation of the Qur'an. With consummate ease, it appeals directly to people's hearts as easily as the blood flowing through their veins. In this way, it transforms man into a noble creature. With Qur'anic guidance, human society becomes more like a dream world, yet it is there for eyes to see.

The faith the Qur'an outlines profoundly engages hearts and minds so as to be loved passionately. The question here is not one of meticulous perfection, goodness and suitability. It is much more than that. It is a scenario in which everyone of these qualities is further enhanced until their perfection attains a beauty that permeates all details and combines and harmonizes them while at the same time maintaining their close links to the main body.

"As a mercy from your Lord;" this is how the Qur'an was revealed on that blessed night. "He alone is the One who hears all and knows all." He hears and He knows. He reveals what He reveals to people on the basis of His knowledge of what they say and do, as well as what is suitable and beneficial for them of laws, regulations and directives. He is the One who is in control of the universe, taking care of all who live on it. He is "the Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if only you were firm believers." The revelations He bestows from on high to mould people's lives is part of His Lordship of the universe and of His laws that operate in the universe.

The reference in this verse to firm belief implies an allusion to the unbelievers' confused beliefs. They recognized God as the Creator of the heavens and the earth but they, nevertheless, associated partners with Him.

This means that the central principle of God's oneness was blurred in their minds, and this precluded them from having firm and reassured beliefs.

God is also the One who gives life and death, the Lord of all generations of creation: "There is no deity other than Him; He gives life and death. He is your Lord and the Lord of your earliest ancestors." Both the initiation of life and its deathly end are witnessed by all and are recognized as being beyond the power of any creature. This is clear at first sight and with simple consideration. The scene of death, like the scene of new life, touches the human heart and leaves a very strong influence on it, making it ready to respond. Hence, they are often mentioned in the Qur'an to attract people's attention to them.

At this point, the surah tells the Prophet that the unbelievers are playing about when the situation requires seriousness, and that they continue to be in doubt about God's confirmed revelations. He is, therefore, instructed to leave them until they face a day of great hardship: "Wait, then, for the Day when the skies shall bring forth a kind of smoke which will make things clear. It will envelope the people. Grievous is this suffering."

Scholars during the early period of Islam differed in their views about what the smoke mentioned in this verse means. Some of them maintained that it will occur on the Day of Judgment, which makes the warning implied here similar to other warnings in the Qur'an about that day. They said that this will surely take place and that the Prophet awaited it. Others said that it actually did take place just as the Qur'an states. It was then lifted after the Prophet prayed to God to remove it.

We, though, are more in agreement with the view expressed by Ibn Abbas and explained by Ibn Kathir making it clear that the smoke will appear on the Day of Judgment. Similar warnings also occur elsewhere in the Qur'an. What it means here is that these people doubt and play. Leave them, then, in anticipation of that terrible day when the skies shall bring smoke that makes things clear. As it envelops people, their suffering will be particularly painful.

Their appeal for help is described thus: "(They will cry): 'Our Lord! Relieve us from this suffering; for, indeed, we are believers.'" They are told that a positive response to their appeal is impossible. It is now too late: "How will this remembrance benefit them?"

A messenger who clearly explained things had previously come to them; but they turned their backs on him and said: 'He is taught by others, a madman!'" They claimed that a non-Arab person or people taught the Prophet the Qur'an, and they further alleged that Muhammad was a madman.