

"They ask you concerning the new moons (Literally: crescents). Say, "They are fixed times for mankind, and (for) the Pilgrimage." And benignancy is not to come up to the homes from their backs; but benignancy is for man to be pious; and come up to the homes by their doors, and be pious towards Allah, so that possibly you would prosper " (2: 189).

Allah (SWT)¹ replies to the inquiry about the crescent giving us details about the moon. Ancient Arabs did not have information about the moon except for benefiting from it in their lunar calendar.

Contemporary scientists explained that the sun is a million and quarter times the size of earth. The moon is smaller than the earth. When the earth comes between the sun and the moon, despite the huge size of the sun, the earth covers part of the moon as big as the earth. Thus, we see this part dark.

The moon is constantly there, yet it is the earth that blocks its view at times. Moon light increases according to the alignment of the earth with the sun and moon. Then it becomes a full moon and continues in its phases until it is eventually unseen. When the moon, earth, sun are aligned in a certain position we do not see the moon, even though it is still there. This phenomenon does not occur with the sun due to its huge size, except for the phenomenon of solar eclipses.

When the Arabs wondered about the moon, Allah responded to them with what could be intelligible to them at the time; that they are means of basing the lunar calendar. The rest of the knowledge regarding the moon and its phases was left to unravel throughout the time. Allah gave the answer that was useful in the Shari'a (Islamic Law). For example, in old times they claimed that the earth is round. Later, science proved the authenticity of this fact and it was observed by satellites.

Time and place are associated with events. Unless there is time and place, there won't be any occurrence of events. Allah (SWT) created time, hence Allah is eternal. Through the crescent we know the advent of the month of Ramadan and Eid (festival of breaking the fast), and many other occasions such as hajj (pilgrimage). The sun is our means for indicating times throughout the day, as well as defining seasons of cultivation and the weather changes. Allah said what can be

1 Subhanahu wa ta'ala (Glorified and Sublime be He)

translated as, " **He is The (One) Who has made the sun an illumination, and the moon a light "** (10: 5)

Observe the precise expression in describing the light in the Qur'an. It referred to the fact that the sun is a source of light, while the moon's light is derived from the sun. It is like the piece of stone that reflects the light of sun. In another verse Allah said, "**...and He has made therein a luminary and an enlightening moon.**" (25:61)

Furthermore, Allah has made the sun moving through the zodiac, and the moon goes through different phases. Allah says, "**...the moon as a light and measured out for its stages that you might know the number of years and the reckoning.**" (10:5) Thus, the number of years and calculating them is based on the moon which is indeed much more meticulous than solar reckoning.

Let's shed light on the difference between the phases of the moon and the sun's apparent motion through the constellations of the zodiac. The zodiac is the Syriac term for the twelve constellations known as: Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. Seasons and times of cultivation and weather are affected by them. Allah (SWT) referred to the constellations in the Qur'an saying, "**And (by) the heaven comprising the constellations"** (85:1).

The duties of worship are marked by the moon. The lunar year is used in defining the date of the Arabic months. Allah said, "**Surely the (right) (i.e. fixed) number of the months in the Providence of Allah is twelve months (ordained) in the Book of Allah the day that He created the heavens and the earth.**" (9: 36). Although some of the Islamic acts of worship are defined by the moon, they are affected by the sun and the seasons, just as well. For example, the fasting of the month of Ramadan does not always occur in summer nor in winter all the time. Allah (SWT) alternates the times of worship acts throughout the year. Hajj season could occur in winter making it easy for those who live in cold areas to perform hajj.

It is out of Allah's wisdom to make the acts of worship alter through the year to facilitate worship for all people in different climates. Hence, some scholars interpreted that The Night of Decree alternates in different dates, year round. That is due to the sun's movement in the ecliptic through the course of the year.

In addition to the sun constellations and moon phases, there are the sites of the stars. Allah (SWT) swore by the locations of the stars, "**Then no! I swear by the sites of the stars- And surely it is indeed a tremendous oath, if you only know (it)-**" (56: 75-76).

Perhaps, the time will come when man will discover the impact of the star sites on our life. This may take place when the minds will be prepared for this discovery and able to fathom it.

Then Allah mentions a ruling that is related to hajj. In old times, some of the fanatic Arab tribes, called "The Hams", followed a certain ritual after returning from hajj. They used to unusually enter their homes from the back entrance due to their disheveled dusty looks after a hajj trip. This was a rather an extreme act that Allah (SWT) did not ordain as this could result in the husband startling his household. Then, he might see them in a rather undesirable or tattered condition. Thus, Allah said, "**...benignancy is not to come up to the homes from their backs; but benignancy is for man to be pious; and come up to the homes by their doors, and be pious towards Allah, so that possibly you would prosper.**" (2: 189) This verse aims to clarify the essence of benignancy rather than the formalities of it.

The word "*al-birr*" (benignancy) came in the nominative case, regular in declension. This is done to emphasize the importance of *al-birr*; a linguistic Arabic rule. Some orientalist, lacking in knowledge of the Arabic language, claimed that this is a flaw in the Qur'an as the same word came in another verse in an open declension. They are ignorant of the linguistic rule that it is in the oblique case of the Arabic tool "*laisa*". Every word in the Qur'an is meant to be in a specific arrangement and significance, so do not tackle this Revered Book with ignorance. Do not raise problematic issues that only reveal your ignorance.

What is "**benignancy**"? It is, as previously mentioned, all that is good and useful. If Allah left for us the freedom to define it, then everyone would define it according to his view point and inclinations. Therefore, Allah (SWT) relieved us from this burden and outlined for us the forms of benignancy. He (SWT) explained to us that it is to be pious. *Taqwa*, (Piety) indicates shielding oneself against the troubles and difficulties in life through abiding by Allah's orders. As to those who are averse to fearing Allah, Allah referred to them in the following verse, "**But whosoever turns away from My Message, verily for him is a life narrowed down, and We shall raise him up blind on the Day of Judgment.**" (20:124)

Do not think that "*taqwa*" (piety, fearing Allah, protection) is merely protection against hellfire. It has broader indications. Among which is protection against the perils arising from veering away

from Allah's orders. Let everyone know that each misdemeanor he perpetrates will one day be inflicted upon him exactly as he does unto others. Thus, if you do not want to expose yourself to the violations made by others, then do not make any.

Then Allah², The Truth, further reveals another issue. It is something which uniquely characterizes the Muslim Nation: The capacity to punish the transgressors. As Allah has singled out this *Ummah* (Nation) with a straight methodology . Before the advent of Islam, it was heaven that disciplined those who transgressed against Allah's orders. Prophets conveyed the message and when people disobeyed him, they were punished by either a thunderstorm or any sort of torment. Prophets did not force people to believe.

When the children of Israel asked Allah to fight they did not fight for the sake of religion. The noble verse in the Qur'an reveals, " **They said, "How is it that we would not fight in the way of Allah, and we have already been driven out of our residences and sons?"** (TMQ³, 2: 246) Thus, their reason of fighting was that they were forced out of their homes, rather than fending for the religion.

Whereas the Muslim *Ummah* of Prophet Muhammad (SAWS)⁴ are assigned by Allah (SWT)⁵ to adopt a balanced situation to protect the dignity of man. Man has the liberty to choose his religion, there is no compulsion in believing in Allah. Fighting (*jihad*⁶) is ordained to protect this same liberty rather than to impose a religion. Jihad was enjoined to put a stop to the barriers of despotism that hindered man from choosing his religion. Some accuse Islam claiming that it spread by the sword, their arguments are feeble. Moreover, they say that the Muslims imposed *jiziah*⁷ aiming to amass wealth.

We respond to those people by asking, "Who did Islam impose the *jiziah* on?" On the non-Muslims.

2 The word Allah is the Arabic term for God. Although the use of the word "Allah" is most often associated with Islam, it is not used exclusively by Muslims; Arab Christians and Arabic-speaking Jews also use it to refer to the One God. The Arabic word expresses the unique characteristics of the One God more precisely than the English term. Whereas the word "Allah" has no plural form in Arabic, the English form does. Allah is the God worshipped by all Prophets, from Adam to Noah, Abraham, Moses, Jesus and Muhammad.

3 TMQ=Translation of the Meaning of the Qur'an. This translation is for the realized meaning, so far, of the stated (Surah:Ayah) of the Qur'an. Reading the translated meaning of the Qur'an can never replace reading it in Arabic, the language in which it was revealed.

4 *Salla Allah alayhe Wa Salam* [All Prayers and Peace of Allah be upon him]

5 SWT = *Suhanahu wa Ta'ala* [Glorified and Exalted Be He].

6 Any earnest striving in the way of Allah, involving personal, physical, intellectual or military effort, for righteousness and against wrong-doing. "Lesser Jihad": fighting to protect Islam from attack or oppression. In such fighting, no woman, child or innocent civilian is to be harmed, and no tree is to be cut down. "Greater Jihad": internal struggle for the soul (nafs) against evil and temptation.

7 Tax paid by non-Muslims living in a Muslim State. Since the non-Muslims are exempt from military service and taxes imposed on Muslims, they must pay this tax to compensate. It guarantees them security and protection.

This means that it gave people the freedom to be non-Muslims. Islam further protected non-Muslims against anyone who might force them out of their religion. Thus the claim of those people has rebounded on them as they only succeeded in defending Islam.

However, one might ask, "Why did the Muslims launch wars, then?" Replying to this question, we say that Islam wanted to liberate peoples from those who imposed their false beliefs on them. It demanded that such despots lift their hands off the people and let them have the liberty to choose the religion that they saw befitting. Thus, Islam gave them this freedom as it is a fact that if man is free to choose, then he will definitely see the distinct truth only in Islam. Allah says what can be translated as, "**There is no compulsion in the religion...**" and the part that follows of same verse explains why there should be no compulsion in religion. It is because, "**right-mindedness has already been evidently (distinct) from misguidance...**" (2: 256)

Then why should the people be coerced when both truth and falsehood are distinct? You can force the body but not the heart. Therefore, Allah addresses our Master, the Prophet of Allah (SAWS), saying "**In case We (so) decide, We will be sending down on them from the heaven a sign so their necks linger subdued to it.**" (26: 4) Even though Allah (SWT) is Able and no one can escape His decree whether of disease or death, He (SWT) wants yielding HEARTS not subdued necks.

If we look around us, we note that some regimes coerce their subjects and impose their principles with an iron fist. Later when these regimes give up those principles, their people also renounce them. The Qur'an tackled the issue of enjoining jihad. It was not imposed during the Muslims' stay in Makkah. The *da'wah*⁸ in Makkah lasted for 13 years, then the Muslims immigrated to Madinah where jihad was enjoined. This was intended to establish the religion for the Muslims to apply it fully and as such they become an example for others to follow. Allah said what can be translated as, "**...So, be clement and pardon (them), till Allah comes up (i.e., brings) with His Command...**" (2: 109). In another *surah* (chapter) He said, "**And do not obey the disbelievers and the hypocrites; and disregard their hurt...**" (33: 48)

What is the reason for such a graduation in ordainments? Allah (SWT) knows that *da'wah* will enter all Arab houses. Inside a house there will be believers and disbelievers. Hence, if jihad was enjoined at the time, then there would have been a fight in every home. Moreover, Allah (SWT) knows the reckless and rash nature of some of the Arab tribe as they used to fight for the most trivial reasons.

8 The call to Islam.

For example, once a man named Kulaib killed a she-camel with his arrow, sparking off a war that lasted for forty years.

Before the advent of Islam, the Arabs were motivated by blind bigotry and they fought without even asking why. Nevertheless, they enjoyed good attributes such as chivalry in defending justice. When someone was wronged, they-out of chivalry- punish the oppressive. Hence, Allah willed to stir this chivalry in them at the incident of the blockade. The disbelievers sieged the Muslims starving them. Then the five leading figures in Makkah gathered. They said, "How can it be that we eat and drink and make love to our women while Banul-Muttalib are sieged, in the mountain passes of Makkah, not eating nor trading." They were rejecters of faith, yet their stance was outstanding. They determined to tear the boycott document.

Allah (SWT) knew it was not easy for the Arabs to change their old habits, thus He did it gently and gradually. Some ask why did not the Muslims launch war against their enemies from the start and kill the defiant figures of Makkah? The rresponse to this is that a lot of those whom you think that they should have been killed, are the very ones who spread Islam and upheld its standard.

As an example, Khalid Ibnul-Walid at first a dauntless leader among the ranks of the *Mushriks* (polytheists) against the Muslims, he later became a guided Muslim. He was called, 'The Unsheathed Sword of Allah'. What if such a unique leader had been killed by the Muslims? This would have lead to depriving the Muslims of his talent. Such a talent that contributed to most of the Islamic victories in the Levant and Iraq. Thus, although they opposed Islam at first, Allah's wisdom willed that Khaled and his likes remain alive for they were to play a role in serving Islam. Indeed those who were defiant to Islam in the beginning are the very ones who had the fervor to do good deed hoping for Allah's forgiveness.

Akrimah Ibn-Abu-Jahl was a thorn in the side of the Muslims in the beginning of *da'wah*. He later became a good Muslim with a productive role in Islam. In the battle of 'Yarmuk', when he was injured and on the brink of death, he looked at his commander, Khalid Ibnul-Walid, and said, "Is this an end that would have made the Prophet of Allah pleased with me ? He knew that his actions before his acceptance of Islam had angered the Prophet (SAWS).

Another great figure is Amr Ibnul-'As, the shrewd Muslim. Thanks to his skills,⁹ Egypt was conquered. He was so astute that he gained the Egyptians to his side and they did not fight him

⁹ By Allah's favor.

when he entered Egypt. He debated with them to remove all traces of grudge against the Muslims. He clarified to them that the Prophet (SAWS) recommended that the Egyptians be well-treated because they are people of the scripture and because of their kinship ties. Moreover, the Prophet (SAWS) had sent Amr as an ambassador to some of the Arabs to call them to Islam.

Thus, Islam saved those who were opposed to the faith at first, to play a role in serving the seal of religions. Hence, we understand the wisdom behind delaying jihad; as Allah wanted to try and purify the Muslims at first to guarantee their readiness to undertake the burdens to follow. Such a Muslim would be trusted with making the glory of a nation and with upholding the methodology decreed by Allah. Not everyone is fit for such a mission.

"And fight in the way of Allah the ones who fight you, but do not transgress; surely Allah does not love the transgressors." (2: 190)

The occasion on which this verse descended is that the Prophet and his companions longed for visiting the Sanctified House of Makkah to perform Umrah¹⁰. In the month of Dhul-Qe'dah in 6 A.H.¹¹ they set out for Makkah. On the way to Makkah they were at a place called al-Hudaybiah where Quraysh intercepted them and did not allow them to enter Makkah.

Hence, the two parties conducted negotiations. The Prophet (SAWS) agreed to return this year to Madinah provided that he could come back to Makkah the following year. In the beginning of this trip, the Prophet had already gave the glad tidings to the Muslims that they would enter The Sactified House with their heads shaved and hair cut short. The good news spread and the Muslims were very happy with it. Then they they were shocked that the negotiations resulted in their return to Madinah despite that they were 20 km away from Makkah. The companions were saddened. Even Umar Ibnul-Khattab (RA)¹², was struck by the news.

10 voluntary short pilgrimage that can be performed at any time of the year.

11 After the immigration of the Muslims to Makkah.

12 *Radeya Allah Anhu* (May Allah be pleased with him)