

(249) *"When Saul marched forth with his army, he announced: "Allah (SWT) will test you at a certain river; anyone who will drink from its water shall cease to be my soldier, and those who will not drink to quench their thirst with its water except a sip or so from the hollow of their hands shall fight on my side." They all drank from it, in spite of this warning, except a few of them."* The appointed king Saul took a test from the *Israelites* as they crossed the river¹ so that to differentiate between those who are the real followers of the path of submission and truth, and those who are not. If they cannot resist themselves to quench their thirst for a while, how can they be disciplined enough to fight such a strong enemy. But the *Israelites* defied the commandment and quenched their thirst freely and only a few of them were found to be faithful. We should also mention here the virtue of the Companions (RAA) of the Prophet (SAW), when they were given a similar test by Allah (SWT) before the battle of *Badr*. There were given two alternatives at that time as Allah (SWT) said: *"Remember, Allah (SWT) promised you victory over one of the two enemy parties and you wished for the one which was unarmed but Allah intended to prove the truth to be true according to His words and to cut off the roots of the unbelievers."*² One was that they attack the *Quraysh* caravan led by Abu Sufyan carrying great wealth amounting to 50 thousand gold Dinars guarded by only 40 armed men. This was the most safest and the most productive option from a worldly point of view. The other was to fight the well-equipped and well-armed *Quraysh* army of 1000 men coming from *Makkah*. But unlike the *Israelites* the Companions (RAA) showed the spirit of sacrifice and fidelity at this critical juncture and asked Allah's Messenger (SAW) to lead them to the battlefield. *"When he and those with him who believed crossed the river, they said: "This day we cannot cope against Goliath and his warriors." But the believers, who knew they would meet Allah (SWT), replied: "It has often happened that a small group, by the grace of Allah (SWT), has vanquished a mighty army. Allah (SWT) is with those who endure with patience.""* Even amongst those who were faithful there were some who were struck with fear when they saw the size and the strength of the army of Goliath, but there were also some who were determined to face all odds and fight the enemy because they had faith that Allah (SWT) will help them and strengthen them against their enemy. Indeed He is with the steadfast.

(250) *"When they advanced to face Goliath and his warriors, they prayed: "Our Lord! Fill our hearts with steadfastness, make our steps firm, and help us against the unbelievers." Amongst the army of Saul, those who had faith in Allah (SWT) prayed to Him to make them steadfast and not make them run away from the battle.*

(251) *"By Allah's (SWT) will they routed them: and David slew Goliath, and Allah (SWT) gave him power and wisdom and taught him whatever else He willed."* When the two armies faced each other, Goliath challenged any soldier from King Saul's army to single combat. Hearing this the *Israelites* were dismayed and daunted. King Saul offered the hand of his daughter in marriage but still no one came forward to fight. Then, to everyone's surprise, a youth stepped forward. A roar of laughter echoed from the enemy's side, and even Saul's men shook their heads. The young man was David, from the city of *Bethlehem*. As he was the youngest one, he was asked not to fight but help the army in other ways. Saul did not agree at first but when David (AS) persisted, he gave him the permission. When Goliath saw he despised him for his youth and laughed at him but to everyone's surprise David (AS) killed him with his slingshot and Allah (SWT) with this battle gave the *Israelites* the glory and honor they had lost for a long time. Then as promised Saul gave his daughter to David (AS) and later the kingship was also transferred to him in addition to the prophethood and wisdom granted to him by Allah (SWT). *"And did not Allah (SWT) check one set of people by means of another the earth would indeed be full of mischief but Allah (SWT) is full of bounty to all the worlds."* i.e. when some nations or groups transgress the limits set by Allah (SWT) and make mischief on earth, then He replaces them by others as a counterweight.

(252) *"These are the revelations of Allah (SWT). We recite them to you in truth. Surely you are one of Our Prophets."* This *ayah* categorically states the truth of the prophethood of Muhammad (SAW) and that which is revealed to him by Allah (SWT) i.e. the *Qur'an*.

(253) *"These are the Prophets, We have exalted some above others. To one of them Allah (SWT) spoke directly, others He raised to a lofty status. To Jesus (AS) the son of Mary (AS), We gave clear signs and strengthened him with the Holy Spirit."* Allah (SWT) honors some Prophets

over others but it is not for us to differentiate between any of them and thus argue and dispute with others in favor of one or the other. Rather it is only up to Allah (SWT) with His infinite knowledge and Wisdom to decide which Prophet is better, as they are all His creations. Here Allah (SWT) mentions Prophet Moses (AS) and Jesus (AS) to point out their distinguished positions. Moses (AS) was directly addressed by Allah (SWT), and Jesus (AS) was aided by miracles and assisted by the holy spirit. *“If Allah (SWT) had so willed succeeding generations would not have fought among each other after clear signs had come to them but they chose to wrangle some believing and others rejecting. If Allah (SWT) had so willed they would not have fought each other.”* i.e. Allah (SWT) has sent man on earth as a trial and He does not force His people to follow a fixed path nor does He impose guidance on any individual, otherwise if he had taken away the free will of action from His people then the trial would have become meaningless. Allah (SWT) sent His Messengers to guide the people, some believed and others rejected. If Allah (SWT) had willed, He could prevent His servants from going astray but as He says: *“but Allah (SWT) does what He wills.”*

(254) *“O you who believe! spend out of the sustenance which We have provided for you before the arrival of that Day when there will be no bargaining, friendship or intercession.”* Allah (SWT) commands His servants to strive to spend in His way out of the bounties that He has given them lest the day of Judgment arrives when no ransom will be accepted and no friendship will benefit them. *“It is the unbelievers who are wrongdoers.”* i.e. those who defy Allah’s (SWT) commandments and reject His Messengers are truly the wrongdoers.

(255) *“Allah! there is no ilah (god) but He the Living, the Eternal.”* This *ayah* is known as *Ayat Al-Kursi* i.e. the *ayah* of the Throne. The Prophet (SAW) said that it is the greatest *ayah* of the *Qur’an*. In another hadith it is narrated from Ubayy bin Ka`b that the Prophet (SAW) asked him which verse in the Book of Allah (SWT) was the greatest. He said, *“Allah and His Messenger know best.”* He repeated it several times, then he said, *“Ayat Al-Kursi.”* The Prophet (SAW) said, *“Congratulations upon your knowledge, Abul-Mundhir. By the One in Whose hand is my soul, it has a tongue and two lips, and it glorifies the Sovereign (i.e. Allah) at the foot of the Throne”* ³

Allah (SWT) states that He is the Only Lord of all creation, who has no partner whatsoever. He is Ever Living Who Sustains the whole universe. Every living creature relies on Him while He The Most High is in need of nothing. *"Neither slumber nor sleep overcomes Him."* He is aware of everything and nothing is hidden from His knowledge. This *ayah* is also a refutation of the beliefs of the Christians who think that Allah (SWT) created the heavens and the earth in six days and rested on the seventh day. In truth Allah (SWT) is free of such weaknesses and He is neither affected by slumber nor sleep. *"To Him belongs all that is in the Heavens and the Earth."* i.e. everything in the heavens and the earth and what is in between them is under His authority and control. *"Who can intercede with Him without His permission."* i.e. none can intercede or help on behalf of anyone else except if Allah (SWT) permits them. Therefore, neither the Prophets nor the angels or saints will dare to utter a word without the permission of the Lord of the Universe. *"He knows what is before them and what is behind them. They cannot gain access to any thing out of His knowledge except what He pleases."* i.e. nothing is hidden from Allah (SWT) and He has perfect knowledge of all His creations. And None of the creatures can attain His knowledge except what He conveys to them as He is the real source of all knowledge. As the angels said: *"Glory to You," they replied, "we have no knowledge except what You have taught us: in fact You are the One who is perfect in knowledge and wisdom."*⁴ Further Allah (SWT) said: *"His throne extends over the heavens and the earth."* The word 'Kursi' is translated into Throne as well as Authority. If we take it as authority then it will mean that Allah's (SWT) authority extends over the heavens and the earth. On the other hand, most of the Salaf⁵ treated the attributes of Allah (SWT) as they are without knowing the how of it, so it will mean that His throne extends over the heavens and the earth. Further Allah (SWT) said: *"and guarding of these both does not fatigue Him."* i.e. the preservation and the protection of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them is very easy for Allah (SWT) and it does not burden Him. And *"He is the Exalted, the Supreme."* Their guarding does not strain Him and He is the High, the Great.

(256) *"Let there be no compulsion in religion."* i.e. believing in Islam depends upon faith and will of a person and it will be meaningless if it is imposed by force.

Thus Islam does not force anyone to embrace it, rather a person has the liberty to live in an Islamic state as a non-Muslim, but they will have to comply with and submit to the socio-politico-economic system of that Islamic state. *"Truth stands out clear from error."* Allah (SWT) has shown all the evidences and proofs for Islam, thus there should be no doubt in any person's mind about the truth of Allah's *Deen* and the falsehood of what opposes it. *"Whoever rejects Taghut (forces of evil) and believes in Allah (SWT) hath grasped the most trustworthy hand-hold that never breaks."* The *Qur'an* uses the word *Taghut* for the forces of evil which rebel against Allah (SWT) i.e. all that turns one away from the path of Allah (SWT) and lead him into evil. This may be a King, a leader or even a whole system which does not govern according to the laws legislated by Allah (SWT) like capitalism and communism. Therefore no one can be a true believer in Allah (SWT) until and unless he denounces *Taghut*. Such are those who hold firmly to Allah (SWT) and the true religion with the strongest grasp that never breaks. And remember *"Allah (SWT) hears and knows all things."*

(257) *"Allah (SWT) is the Protector of those who have faith, He brings them from the depths of darkness and leads them forth into light."* The Arabic word 'Wali' literally means protector, supporter or helper. A guardian or the one who exercises authority over someone is also called a 'Wali'. Thus here it means that Allah (SWT) is the helper and protector of the believers and an authority over them. He brings them out of the darkness of disbelief and evil into light of Truth. In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) mentioned the light in a singular form while the darkness in the plural, because disbelief comes in different shades of evil while there is only one truth. *"Of those who reject faith their patrons are the Taghut (forces of evil). They bring them from light and lead them forth into the depths of darkness."* While Allah (SWT) is the protector of the believers, the *Taghut* are the helpers of the disbelievers and they bring them out of the light of truth into the darkness of falsehood, and thus Allah (SWT) says: *"They will be companions of the fire to dwell therein for ever."* They are the heirs of Hell and shall abide in it forever.

(258) *"Have you not seen the one whom Allah (SWT) had given kingdom, who argued with Abraham (AS) about his Lord. When Abraham (AS) said: "My Lord is He Who has power to*

give life and to cause death." He replied: "I too have the power to give life and to cause death." Abraham (AS) said: "Well, Allah (SWT) causes the sun to rise from the east; just make it rise from the west." Thus the unbeliever was confounded; Allah does not guide the evildoers." The person referred to here is King Nimrod of Iraq, who disputed with Abraham (AS) about the existence of Allah (SWT). Nimrod denied the existence of Allah (SWT) who gave him the kingdom and instead of being grateful to Him he himself claimed to be the Lord. Abraham (AS) could not accept that and therefore Nimrod summoned Abraham (AS) before him for judgment and asked him to produce proof for Allah's (SWT) existence. When Abraham (AS) gave the evidence of the existence of Allah (SWT), Nimrod tried to refute it. But after the second argument he was perplexed and although the truth became clear to him, he did not accept it because of greed and arrogance. And decreed that Abraham (AS) be thrown into the fire. Indeed Allah does not guide the evil-doers.

(259) "Or like the one who passed by a town in ruin up to its roofs. He said: "How can Allah (SWT) bring it to life after its death?" So Allah (SWT) caused him to die for a hundred years then raised him up. Allah (SWT) asked: "How long did you remain (dead)?" Ezra (AS) replied: "Perhaps a day or part of a day." Allah (SWT) said: "Nay! You have remained here for a hundred years, now look at your food and drink, they have not changed and look at your donkey! And thus We have made you a sign for the people . Look at the bones, how We bring them together then clothe them with flesh." The person referred here is Prophet Ezra (AS) and the city mentioned is *Jerusalem*. After Nebuchadnezzar attacked *Jerusalem* in the late seventh century B.C, he destroyed the city completely along with the temple of Solomon (AS) and killed its people, and took half of them as prisoners. When Prophet Ezra (AS) passed by *Jerusalem* and saw its destruction he wondered if the people of this town could ever be brought back to life again. It should be noted that this question did not mean that Prophet Ezra (AS) did not believe in the resurrection, but he just wanted to see the reality with his own eyes. So Allah (SWT) made him die for a hundred years and then raised him again along with his donkey, so that he could witness how Allah (SWT) brings the dead back to life. That is why Allah (SWT) said: *"When this all was shown clearly to him, he said: "I know that Allah (SWT) has power over everything."*

(260) *"And remember when Abraham (AS) said: "My Lord! Show me how you give life to the dead." He (Allah) said: "Do you not believe?" Abraham (AS) said: "Yes! (I do believe) But I ask this to reassure my heart.""* Prophet Abraham (AS) asked his Lord to show him how He will resurrect the dead in the Hereafter. As we mentioned in the previous *ayah* the Prophets asked Allah (SWT) for these types of miracles, not that they did not believe in the resurrection but rather to make their faith stronger by personal observation. Then *"Allah (SWT) said: "Take four birds; then cause them to incline towards you, (cut their bodies into pieces) and put a portion of them on every hill then call them back, they will come to you in haste. And know that Allah (SWT) is All-powerful and Wise.""* Abraham (AS) took four birds as commanded by Allah (SWT), slaughtered them, mixed them together and placed those pieces on different hilltops. Then he called out to them, their blood and flesh flew to each other until they all came back to life by Allah's will and they came flying to him at fast pace. After witnessing this miracle it became clear to Abraham (AS) that Allah does whatever He wills without hindrance because He is All-Mighty, All-Wise.

Here we return to the subject of spending in Allah's cause, which began with *ayah* 245 of this surah, where Allah (SWT) exhorted the believers to spend in His way if they really have faith in Him and the Last Day.

(261) *"The parable of those who spend their wealth in the way of Allah (SWT) is that of a grain that sprouts into seven ears, each bearing one hundred grains."* In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) gives an example of those believers who spend in His cause i.e. for Allah's *Deen*⁶ that whatever they spend in the way of Allah (SWT) out of what He has provided them, will be returned to them multiplied by seven hundred folds in this world and the hereafter. This *ayah* indicates that Allah (SWT) grows the good deeds of a believer just like He grows the plant for whoever sows it in a fertile land. As Allah (SWT) says: *"Allah (SWT) gives manifold increase to whom He wishes and Allah (SWT) is All-Embracing, All-Knowing."* Allah (SWT) gives abundance to who He wills. He is Munificent and All-Knowing.

(262) *"Those who spend their wealth in the cause of Allah (SWT) and do not follow their charity with reminders of their generosity or injure the feeling of the recipient, shall get their reward from their Lord, they shall have nothing to fear nor or to regret."* This *ayah* indicates that

charity should be only for the sake of Allah (SWT) and the donor should not expect a reward in this world and he should neither remind the recipient of the charity nor cause any harm to him. Even a mention of any favor may put the concerned person to shame or humiliation in the eyes of others so he should refrain from any such acts or words. In sum: one should not follow his/her spending with taunts and insults. Allah (SWT) promises such believers rewards in the Hereafter and they will have no fear on the Day of Judgment nor will they regret anything they have done in the path of Allah (SWT). They shall have nothing to fear or to regret.

(263) *"Kind words and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury."* A person spends in Allah's cause for self purification, but if it causes injury to the recipient then his charity becomes meaningless. Instead Allah (SWT) exhorts His servants to be kind and gentle in their speech and forgive any shortcomings on the part of the beneficiaries. They should know that, *"Allah is Self-Sufficient, Forbearing."* i.e. He does not need their charities to give provision to His servants because He is not in need of His creation; rather all the creatures are in need of Him. So a kind word and forgiveness are better than charity followed by injury. Allah is Self-Sufficient and Indulgent.

(264) *"O you who believe! Do not make your charity worthless by reminders of your generosity or by injury to the recipients feelings, like those who spend their wealth to be seen by people and believe neither in Allah nor in the Last Day. Such is the behavior of a hypocrite who does not spend for the pleasure of Allah (SWT) but only for men to see, so that he can earn their pleasure and get worldly rewards from them. He neither expects any rewards from Allah (SWT) nor does he believe in the Hereafter. Their parable is like a hard barren rock covered with a thin layer of soil; a heavy rain falls, leaving it just a bare stone. Such people will not gain any reward that they thought they had earned. Allah does not guide the unbelievers."* i.e. as the heavy rain leaves the hard rock completely barren and bare, similarly Allah (SWT) will completely erase the deeds of the hypocrites who give charity just to show off and neither will Allah (SWT) guide them nor will they have any reward in the Hereafter. They shall gain nothing from their works. Allah does not guide the unbelievers.

(265) *"The example of those who spend their wealth to seek the pleasure of Allah and to strengthen their souls"* Allah (SWT) gives another parable for those believers who spend in His cause only to attain His pleasure and for the purification of their souls. *"is like a garden on a high and fertile ground: when heavy rain falls on it, it doubles its yield of harvest, and if no rain falls, a light moisture is sufficient. Whatever you do is in the sight of Allah."* The good deeds of a believer, performed with good intentions and devotion never become barren just like a garden on a hill-side which is always fertile and even if there is no rain, a little moisture is sufficient for it i.e. a believer still produces good works, gives charity and is satisfied with what Allah (SWT) has given him even in lean times.

(266) *"Does any of you wish that he should have a garden with date-palms and vines and streams flowing underneath and all kinds of fruit, while he is stricken with old age and his children are not strong that it should be caught in a whirlwind with fire therein and be burnt up? Thus Allah makes His revelations clear to you so that you may think over them."* Allah (SWT) gives yet another parable in this *ayah* which explains the condition of a person who enters the life after death without any provision for it. Suppose a person plants a garden full of fruits and streams gushing through so that it would provide him with provision in his old age. How unfortunate, then, is he when his beautiful garden is reduced to rubble towards the end of his days, just when he stands in greatest need of it and he does not have the strength to build another one because of his old age. Similar is the condition of a disbeliever on the day of judgment who when returns to Allah (SWT), suddenly finds out that all his earnings are left behind in this world. And there will be no chance for him to earn anything for the Hereafter, just like the old man who lost his garden and his children are also unable to do anything because of their tender age. Thus Allah (SWT) makes plain to us His revelations, so that we may give thought.

Foot Notes

[1] It is the Shari'ah river which flows between Jordan and Palestine according to Ibn Abbas.(At-Tabari 5 : 340)

[2] Surah Al-Anfal (8) : 7.

[3] Musnad Ahmed 5 : 14.

[4] Surah Al-Baqarah (2) : 32.

[5] Literally meaning predecessors or early generations, In Islam it means the people of the past, namely the first three generations of pious Muslims during and after the revelation of the Qur'an, i.e. the Companions of the Prophet (SAW) the *Taabi'een* (followers) and the *Taabi Taabi'een* (followers of the followers).

[6] Refer to the explanation of ayah 245 of this surah.