

MESSAGE OF THE QUR'AN

Translation and Brief Elucidation

By

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Surah Al-Ma'idah

(The Repast / The table laden with food)

(Recap of Surah An-Nisa, Introduction to Surah Al-Ma'idah and exposition of verses 01 - 05 of Surah Al-Ma'idah, inclusive)

Translator's note:

For the sake of continuity and coherent explanation, most of the general discourse has been made by employing the 'male' as a prototype, which is in no way meant to be diminutive of the opposite gender or to disrespect the status of women.

Moreover, each verse (Ayah) has been kept as a continuum in order to prevent the misrepresentation of meanings, which may occur when the verses are broken up and the translation of those verses becomes kaput when done in bits and pieces.

Cross-references taken from other parts of the Qur'an and the Hadith of the Messenger of Allah (SAAW) are provided in italics.

The Translation of the Holy Qur'an done by the Message International – USA (www.FreeQuran.com) and edited by Saheeh International – UK, Dar Al Mountada – Saudi Arabia and Al Qummah – Egypt has been used in order to synchronize the use of modern English Language, which we believe will give a more accomplished sense of understanding to Today's mind.

A comprehensive recap of Surah 4, An-Nisa

The reader would recall that we had concluded our exposition of Surah An-Nisa in the previous issue of Hikmat e Qur'an. A brief recap of the entire Surah follows:

Subject: Consolidation of the Islamic Community

The main object of Surah An-Nisa is to teach the Muslims the ways that unite a people and make them firm and strong as an *Ummah*. In addition, the Surah contains divine instructions for the stability of the institution of 'family', which is the nucleus of the Islamic social fabric and community life. The Surah also urges Muslims to prepare themselves for the defence of their collective whole from the enemies of Islam. Side by side with these, the Surah teaches Muslims about the importance of the propagation of Islam. Above all, the importance of the highest moral character in the scheme of consolidation of the Muslim *Ummah* (community/state) has been ardently impressed upon.

Topics and their Interconnection

In the Surah, just, fair and equitable laws and regulations for the smooth running of family life have been laid down for the husband and wife. Detailed instructions have been given for the division of inheritance and due regard has been paid to the rights of orphans. (Ref: verses 1 – 35)

In order to inculcate the right spirit for the observance of divine rules and regulations, the Muslims have been enjoined to show generosity to every soul around them and to be free from meanness, selfishness and stinginess of mind, these are essential for the consolidation of the *Ummah* (community/state) and necessary for the effective propagation of Islam. (Ref: verses 36 – 42)

The ways of the purification of mind and body for the offering of *Salat* have been taught because the act of worship (prayer) plays a fundamental part in every scheme of moral and social reform. (Ref: verse 43)

After moral preparation, instructions for the defence of the Muslim *Ummah* (community/state) against the enemies of Islam have been

given. First of all, the Muslims have been warned to be on their guard against the cunning machinations and vile practices of the local Jews who were hostile to the New Movement established in Madinah after *Hijrah*. This caution was necessary for removing some possible misunderstanding that might have arisen on account of the pre-Islamic alliance between the people of Madinah and the Jews. (Ref: verses 44 – 57)

Thereafter, Muslims have been enjoined to place their trusts and offices of trust in the custody of honest and qualified persons, and to do what is just and right, and to obey Allah (SWT), His Messenger (SAAW) and those among themselves entrusted with the conduct of their affairs. Muslims are strictly instructed to turn to Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAAW) for the settlement of their disputes. The Muslims have also been warned that any deviation from the paths mentioned above would lead to their disintegration. (Ref: verses 58 – 72)

After this pre-requisite, the Surah then exhorts Muslims in detail the nature of preparation required for their defence against the enemies of Islam and urges them to fight bravely for the cause of Islam, without showing any kind of cowardice or weakness. The Surah also warns Muslims to be on their guard against the hypocrites. In this regard, a line of demarcation has been drawn in the Surah to distinguish the intentional hypocrites from the helpless devotees. (Ref: verses 73 – 100)

The Surah again gives instructions for the offering of *Salat* during military campaigns and actual fighting. This is to emphasise the importance of *Salat* even at the time of fear and danger. (Ref: verses 101 – 103)

Before proceeding on to the next topic, the Muslims have been exhorted to persevere in their fight without showing any kind of weakness, once more. (Ref: verse 104)

In order to make the Islamic Community firm and strong for defence, the Muslims have been enjoined to observe the highest standard of justice. The Muslims are required to deal out strict, fair and honest justice even in case of the enemy with whom they might be involved in war. They should also settle household disputes with absolute

justice and fairness. In order to ensure this, they should keep their beliefs and deeds totally free from every kind of impurity and should become the standard bearers of justice. (Ref: verses 105 – 135)

Resuming the theme of defence, the Muslims have been warned to be on their guard against their enemies, which include the polytheists, the hypocrites and the people of the Book. As belief in Allah (SWT), Devine Revelation on the Prophet (SAAW) and the notion of Life after death are the real safeguards against every kind of enemy, they should sincerely believe in and follow His Messenger, Muhammad (SAAW), in letter and spirit. (Ref: verses 136 – 175)

The final verse of the Surah deals, once again, with the family laws, first referred to in verses 1 – 35 of the Surah. This verse has been added as a supplement at the end of this Surah because it was revealed long after An-Nisa was being recited in the order from verse 1 – 175 and hence the final verse would logically be added at the end. (Ref: verse 176)

An introduction to Surah 5, Al-Ma'idah

Name

This Surah takes its name from verse 112 in which the word 'Mai'dah' (The Repast/The table laden with food) occurs. Like the names of many other Surahs, this name has no special relation to the subject of the Surah but has been used merely as a symbol to distinguish it from other Surahs.

Period of Revelation

The theme of this Surah indicates, and traditions support it, that it was revealed after the treaty of *Hudaibiyah* at the end of 6 A.H. or in the beginning of 7 A.H. That is why it deals with those problems that arose from this treaty.

The Holy Prophet (SAAW) with 1400 Muslims went to Makkah in *Zil-Qaadah* 6 A.H. to perform *Umrah*, but the *Quraish* spurred by their enmity, prevented him (SAAW) from its performance, though it was utterly against all the ancient religious traditions of Arabia. After a

good deal of hard and harsh negotiations, a treaty was concluded at *Hudaibiyah* according to which it was agreed that he (SAAW) could perform *Umrah* the following year. That was a very appropriate occasion for teaching the Muslims the right way of performing a pilgrimage to Makkah with true Islamic dignity, and enjoining that they should not prevent the disbelievers (of that time) from performing pilgrimage to Makkah as a retaliation for their misbehaviour. This was not difficult at all as many disbelievers had to pass through Muslim territory on their way to Makkah. This is why the introductory verses deal with the things connected with pilgrimage to Makkah and the same theme has been resumed in verses 101-104 of the Surah. The other topics of this Surah also appear to belong to the same period.

It can be said with certainty that verse 3 of the Surah was revealed on the 9th of *Zilhijjah* during the Farewell Pilgrimage (*Hajjah Tul Wida*) of the Holy Prophet (SAAW). The said verse is also believed to be the last verse of the Qur'an revealed unto the Holy Prophet (SAAW), as far as verses that ordain commandments and edicts are concerned. To put it in perspective, with the revelation of verse 3 of this surah in the holy city of Makkah, all edicts and commands from Allah (SWT) to human beings (Muslims and non-Muslims alike) were completed. Having said that, there appears to be not the least bit of gap or even the slightest appearance of disjoint anywhere in the Surah to suggest that it might have comprised two or more discourses.

Occasion of Revelation

This Surah was revealed to suit the requirements of the changed conditions which were now different from those prevailing at the time of the revelation of Surahs *Aal-e-Imran* and *An-Nisa*. Back then, the shock of the setback at *Uhd* had made the very surroundings of Madinah dangerous for the Muslims, but now Islam had become an invulnerable power and the Islamic State had extended to Najd on the east, to the Red Sea on the west, to Syria on the north and to Makkah on the south. The setback which the Muslims had suffered at *Uhd* had not broken their determination. It had rather spurred them to action. As a result of their continuous struggle and unparalleled sacrifices, the power of the surrounding clans, within a radius of 200 miles or so, had been broken. The Jewish menace which was always threatening

Madinah had been totally removed and the Jews in the other parts of Hijaz had become tributaries of the State of Al-Madinah. The last effort of the *Quraish* to suppress Islam had been thwarted in the Battle of the Ditch (Trench). After this, it had become quite obvious to the Arabs that no power could suppress the Islamic movement. Now Islam was not merely a creed which ruled over the minds and hearts of the people but had also become a State which dominated over every aspect of the life of the people who lived within its boundaries. This had enabled the Muslims to live their lives without let or hindrance, in accordance with their beliefs.

Another development had also taken place during this period. The Muslim civilization had developed in accordance with the principles of Islam and the Islamic viewpoint. This civilization was quite distinct from all other civilizations in all its details and distinguished the Muslims clearly from the non-Muslims in their moral, social and cultural behaviour. Mosques had been built in all territories, prayer had been established and *Imam* (leader) for every habitation and clan had been appointed. The Islamic civil and criminal laws had been formulated in detail and were being enforced through the Islamic courts. New and reformed ways of trade and commerce had taken the place of the old ones. The Islamic laws of marriage and divorce, of the segregation of the sexes, of the punishment for adultery and calumny, etcetera, had cast the social life of the Muslims in a special mould. Their social behaviour, their conversation, their dress, their very mode of living, their culture and traditions had all taken a definite shape of its own. As a result of all these changes, the non-Muslims could no longer expect that the Muslims would ever return to their former fold.

Before the treaty of *Hudaibiyah*, the Muslims were so engaged in their struggle with the non-Muslim, the pagans of *Quraish* in particular, that they got little or no time to propagate their message openly and elaborately. This hindrance was removed by what was apparently a defeat but in reality a victory at *Hudaibiyah*. This gave the Muslims not only peace in their own territory but also respite to spread their message in the surrounding territories. Accordingly, the Holy Prophet (SAAW) addressed letters to the rulers of Persia (Iran), Egypt, the

Roman Empire and the chiefs of Arabian Peninsula, inviting them to Islam. At the same time, the missionaries of Islam spread among the clans and tribes and invited them to accept the Divine Way of Allah (SWT). These were the circumstances at the time when Al-Ma'idah was revealed.

Topics

The Surah deals with the following three main topics:

1- Commandments and instructions about the religious, cultural and political life of the Muslims.

In this connection, a code of ceremonial rules concerning the journey for *Hajj* has been prescribed; the observance of strict respect for the emblems of Allah (SWT) has been enjoined; and any kind of obstruction or interference with the pilgrims to the *Kaabah* has been prohibited. Definite rules and regulations have been laid down for what is lawful and unlawful in the matter of food, and self-imposed foolish restrictions of the pre-Islamic age have been abolished. Permission has been given to take food with the people of the Book and to marry their women. Rules and regulations for the performance of *Wudu* (ablutions), *Ghusal* (bath) and *Tayammum* (dry ablution) have been prescribed for the sake of purification. Punishments for rebellion, disturbance of peace and theft have been specified. Drinking and gambling have been made absolutely unlawful. Expiation for the breaking of oath has been laid down and a few more things have been added to the law of evidence.

2- Admonition to the Muslims of remaining but Allah's (SWT) rightful and representative Ummah on earth.

Now that the Muslims had become a ruling body, it was feared that power might corrupt them. At this period of great trial, Allah (SWT) has admonished them over and over again to stick to justice and to guard against the wrong behaviour of their predecessors, the people of the Book. They have been enjoined to remain steadfast to the Covenant of obedience to Allah (SWT) and His Messenger (SAAW), and to observe strictly their commands and prohibitions in order to save themselves from the wrath which befell the Jews and the Christians who had violated them. They have been instructed to

observe the dictates of the Holy Qur'an in the conduct of all their affairs and warned against the attitude of hypocrisy.

3- Admonition to the Jews and the Christians for their wrongdoings and invitation to accept Islam.

As the power of the Jews had been totally weakened and almost all their habitations in north Arabia had come under the rule of the Muslims, they have been warned again about their wrong attitude and invited to follow the Right Way.

At the same time a detailed invitation has also been extended to the Christians. The errors of their creeds have been clearly pointed out and they have been admonished to accept the guidance of the Holy Prophet (SAAW).

Incidentally, it may be noted that no direct invitation has been made to the *Majusis* (Zoroastrians) and idolaters/polytheists living in the adjoining countries, because there was no need for a separate address for them as their condition had already been covered by the addresses to the *mushriks* (polytheists) of Arabia.

Subject: Consolidation of the Islamic Community

In continuation of the instructions about the consolidation of the Islamic Community given in Surah An-Nisa, the Muslims have been directed to observe and fulfil all their obligations and further regulations have been prescribed to train the Muslims for that purpose.

They have also been particularly warned as rulers to guard against the corruption that generally comes with power and authority, and have been directed to observe the Covenant of the Qur'an. They have been directed to learn lessons from the failings of their predecessors, the Jews and the Christians, who in their turn have been admonished to give up their wrong attitudes towards the Right Way and accept the guidance taught by Prophet Muhammad (SAAW).

Topics and their Interconnection

The Believers have been ordained to fulfil scrupulously all of their obligations and follow the regulations prescribed by the Divine Law about food, sex, *Salat*, justice, etcetera. (Ref: verses 1 – 10)

The Muslims have been warned to guard against the errors of their predecessors; they should follow the Right Path and avoid the bad example of the Jews and the Christians, who broke their Covenants and went astray into evil ways. They, in their turn, have been admonished to give up their wrong ways and accept Islam. (Ref: verses 11 – 26)

The story of the two sons of Prophet Adam (AS) has been related to reproach the Jews for their plot to kill the Holy Prophet (SAAW) and his Companions (RA). (details in verse 11). The story has also been used to emphasize the sanctity of human life. (Ref: verses 27 – 32)

To achieve this object, punishments have been prescribed for those who create chaos in the Islamic State, and the Believers have been urged to exert their utmost to establish the Right Way; the sanctity of property has also been emphasized. (Ref: verses 33 – 40)

The Holy Prophet (SAAW) (and through him the Muslims) has been reassured that he should not mind the enmity, the evil designs and the machinations of the Jews, but continue exerting his utmost to establish the Right Way in accordance with the Guidance of the Quran; for nothing else could be expected from those who had forsaken their own Torah. He (SAAW) should deal with the Christians likewise, for they, too, had forsaken their Gospel. (Ref: verses 41 – 50)

In view of the degenerate moral condition of the Jews and the Christians, the Believers have been warned not to make them their friends, allies and confidants. Likewise, they should be on their guard against the evil designs of the hypocrites, the disbelievers and the like and should rely on the true Believers alone. The people of the Book have, in their turn been exhorted to give up their enmity and adopt the right attitude, for they cannot get salvation without this. (Ref: verses 51 – 69)

The Christians have been especially reprovved for their errors in regard to the doctrine of *Tauhid*, the Oneness of Allah (SWT). At the same time, however, they have been preferred to the hard-hearted Jews, for there are among them some who are more inclined towards the Truth. (Ref: verses 70 – 86)

In the portion of the Surah that follows, further regulations about the lawful and the un-lawful, in addition to those contained in verses 1 – 10, have been given. (Ref: verses 87 – 108)

At the end of the Surah, the mention of the conversation that will take place between Allah (SWT) and His Prophets (AS) on the Day of Judgment, has been made for the benefit of the erring people to serve as a corrective to their creeds. The conversation with Prophet Jesus (AS) has been cited as a specimen to warn particularly the Christians, who profess to believe in him (AS), and generally all those people who put false hopes in their Prophets (AS). (Ref: verses 109 – 119)

Conclusion: The entire focal point of the Surah is concluded in the final verse in which Allah (SWT) says, "O mankind! The Sovereignty of the heavens and the earth belongs to Allah (alone): therefore, you should become His true servants and fear Him, for He has full powers over everything." (Ref: verse 120)

Exposition of verses 01 to 05 of Surah Al-Ma'idah

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ ط

In the name of Allah, the Most Gracious (Beneficent), the Most Merciful.

Verse 01

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَوْفُوا بِالْعُقُودِ ۖ أُحِلَّتْ لَكُم بَهِيمَةُ الْأَنْعَامِ مَا لَا يَأْتِي عَلَيْكُمْ غَيْرُ مُحِلِّي الصَّيْدِ وَأَنْتُمْ حُرْمٌ ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَحْكُمُ مَا يُرِيدُ ۝

“Believers! Honour your bonds! All grazing beasts of the flock are permitted to you except those which are recited to you hereinafter, but you are not allowed to hunt in the state of Ihram (a state of pilgrim sanctity). Indeed, Allah decrees as He wills.”

The opening statement of the Surah enjoins that people ought to abide by the limitations and prohibitions laid down in this Surah and elsewhere in the law of Allah (SWT). This brief introductory statement is followed by an enunciation of those prohibitions which people are required to observe.

The Arabic word *an'am* (cattle) denotes camels, oxen, sheep and goats, whereas the word *bahimah* means all grazing quadrupeds. Had Allah (SWT) said that *an'am* had been made lawful for them, this permission

would have included only those animals to which the term *an'am* is applicable. But the terms in which the injunction is conveyed are *bahimat al-an'am* (all grazing beasts of the flock). Hence the permission is of wider import and embraces all grazing quadrupeds of the cattle type, i.e. which do not possess canine teeth, which feed on plants rather than animals, and which resemble the cattle found in Arabia in other characteristics. This implies that the flesh of those animals which have canine teeth and are carnivorous is not permissible. This implication was elucidated by the Prophet (SAAW) and is embodied in a tradition in which he (SAAW) prohibited those beasts which kill and eat other animals. Likewise, the Prophet (SAAW) also prohibited birds with claws and those that feed on carrion. According to a tradition transmitted by Ibn Abbas (RA), "The Messenger of Allah (SAAW) prohibited all beasts with canine teeth and all birds with claws." (*Bukhari, Muslim, Abu Da'ud, Nasa'i, Tirmidhi, Ibn Majah, etc.*)

Ihram is the name of the simple apparel worn at the time of Pilgrimage. In every direction around the *Kaabah*, there are certain fixed points beyond which no Pilgrim may proceed without donning this special Pilgrim's garment in place of his normal clothes. This apparel consists of two sheets of untailored cloth, one of which is wrapped around the lower part of the body while the other is thrown over the upper part. This manner of dressing is termed *ihram* because once a man has assumed it he must treat as prohibited a number of things which are ordinarily lawful, for example either shaving or trimming the hair, or using perfumes and other items of toiletry and the gratification of sexual desires. These restrictions also extend to both killing and hunting, and to leading anyone else to either kill or hunt an animal. For women, the *ihram* is their ordinary household clothes.

Allah (SWT) is the absolute sovereign and has absolute authority to issue whatever command He might will. His creatures do not have the right to complain about any of these orders. Even though wisdom (*hikmah*) underlies the ordinances of Allah (SWT), a true believer does not obey them because he considers them either appropriate or conducive to his best interests. He obeys them simply because they

are the ordinances of his Lord (SWT). He holds unlawful all that Allah (SWT) has declared unlawful, because Allah (SWT) has so decreed it; whatever He has declared lawful is regarded as such for no other reason than that Allah (SWT), the Lord of all, has allowed His servants the use of it. Hence the Qur'an establishes very firmly the principle that nothing except permission from the Lord (SWT) - or lack of it - is to be taken into consideration in deciding what is lawful and what is not.

It must be noted here that whatever has been made lawful or unlawful by the Messenger of Allah (SAAW) also falls under the same category, as Muhammad (SAAW) came as the prophet, vicegerent and representative of Allah (SWT) in this world.

(And Allah (SWT) knows Best!)

Verse 02

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا تَحْلُوا شَعَائِرَ الْأَوَّلِ الشَّهْرِ الْحَرَامِ وَلَا أَوَى الْقَلَائِدِ وَلَا أَمِينَ الْبَيْتِ الْحَرَامِ يَبْتَغُونَ فَضْلًا
مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ وَرِضْوَانًا وَإِذَا حَلَلْتُمْ فَاصْطَادُوا وَلَا يَجْرِمَنَّكُمْ شَنَا قَوْمٍ أَنَّ صَدَّ عَنِ كُمُ الْمَسْجِدِ الْحَرَامِ أَنْ تَعْتَدُوا
وَتَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْبِرِّ وَالتَّقْوَىٰ لَا وَى تَعَاوَنُوا عَلَى الْإِثْمِ وَالْعُدْوَانِ اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ

“Believers! Neither desecrate the symbols of (devotion to) Allah, nor the holy month, nor the animals of offering, nor the animals wearing collars indicating they are for sacrifice, nor ill-treat those who have set out for the Holy House (Kaabah) seeking from their Lord His bounty and good pleasure. But once you are free from Pilgrimage obligations, you are free to hunt. Do not let your wrath against the people who have barred you from the Holy Mosque (Masjid Al-Haraam) move you to commit undue transgressions; rather, help one another in acts of righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in sin and transgression. Fear Allah. Surely Allah is severe in retribution.”

Whatever characteristically represents either a particular doctrine, creed, way of thought or conduct is recognized as its symbol. For example, official flags, uniforms of the armed forces, coins, notes and stamps are symbols used by governments so that their subjects - in fact all those who live within their sphere of influence - treat them

with proper respect. Cathedrals, altars and crosses are symbols of Christianity. A special bunch of hair on the head, a special kind of bead-rosary and the temple are symbols of Hinduism. A turban, bracelet and *Kirpan* (a special dagger kept by the Sikhs) are symbols of the Sikh religion. The hammer and sickle are the symbols of Communism. The swastika has been the symbol of Aryan racialism. The followers of these ideologies are required to treat these symbols with respect. If a man insults any symbol associated with a particular ideology it is regarded as an act of hostility; and if the person concerned is himself a follower of that ideology then that insult is considered tantamount to an abandonment of, and a revolt against it.

The expression '*sha'a'ir Allah*' refers to all those rites which, in opposition to polytheism and outright disbelief and atheism, are the characteristic symbols of an exclusive devotion to Allah (SWT). Muslims are required to respect these symbols, regardless of the people among whom they are found, provided their underlying spirit is one of Allah's (SWT) *Tauhid* and that they have not been tainted by either polytheistic or pagan associations. Hence, whenever a Muslim encounters something in either the creed or practice of a non-Muslim, which embodies any element of devotion and service to the One True Allah (SWT), he will identify himself with it and show respect to the symbols which represent it. For this true element in their religious life constitutes the point of agreement between them and the Muslims. The point of dispute and departure is not that they serve Allah (SWT), but that they associate others in that service.

It should be recalled that this directive to treat the symbols of Allah (SWT) with due respect was given at a time when a state of belligerency existed between the Muslims and the polytheists of Arabia, and Makkah was under the occupation of the latter. Polytheistic tribes from all over Arabia used to visit the Kaabah for Pilgrimage, and the routes of many of these tribes were within the reach of the Muslims if they decided to attack. It was in such circumstances that the Muslims were told that, even though those people were polytheists, they should not be molested if they were proceeding towards the '*House of Allah (SWT)*'; that they should not

be attacked during the months of Pilgrimage; and that the animals which they were carrying for sacrificial offering should not be touched. The element of the *Tauhid* of Allah (SWT) which persisted in their otherwise distorted religious life deserved to be respected.

Following a general directive that the symbols of Allah (SWT) should be treated with proper respect a few such symbols are mentioned specifically lest war-phobia lead even to the desecration of religious rites and symbols. The enumeration of these particular symbols does not mean that respect is due to these alone.

Ihram is also one of the symbols of Allah (SWT) and violation of any of the prohibitions which should be observed in that state is an act of sacrilege. The prohibition of hunting while in the state of *ihram* is mentioned in connection with the desecration of the symbols of Allah (SWT). When *ihram* is over, the prohibitions become void, and one is permitted to hunt.

The unbelievers had prevented the Muslims from visiting the *Kaabah*. In fact, in violation of the ancient usage of Arabia they had even deprived them of their right to make Pilgrimage. As a result, the Muslims felt inclined to prevent the pagan tribes from making their pilgrimage by not letting them pass along the routes to Makkah which lay close to the Islamic domains, and to attack their trading caravans during the time of Pilgrimage (*Hajj*). Allah (SWT) prevented them from carrying out this plan through this revelation.

(And Allah (SWT) knows Best!)

Verse 03

حُرِّمَتْ عَلَيْكُمُ الْمَيْتَةُ وَالدَّمُ وَلَحْمُ الْخِنْزِيرِ وَمَا أَهَلَ لِغَيْرِ اللَّهِ بِهِ وَالْمُنْخَنِقَةُ وَالْمَوْقُوذَةُ الْمُتَرَدِّيَةُ وَالنَّطِيحَةُ وَمَا أَكَلَ السَّبُعُ إِلَّا مَا ذَكَّيْتُمْ وَمَا ذُبِحَ عَلَى النُّصُبِ وَأَنْ تَسْتَقْسِمُوا بِالْأَزْلَامِ ذَلِكُمْ فُسْقٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْكَافِرِينَ لَّذِادٍ مِّنْ يُّنْكُمُ فَلَا تَخْشَوْهُمْ اَخْشَوْنَ يَوْمَ الْكَلْتِ يَلْكُمُ يَنكُمُ وَأَتَمَّمْتُ عَلَيْكُمْ نِعْمَتِي وَرَضِيتُ لَكُمُ الْإِسْلَامَ دِينًا فَمَنِ اضْطُرَّ فِي مَخِصَّةٍ غَيْرِ مَتَجَانِفٍ لِإِثْمٍ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَّحِيمٌ

“Forbidden to you are carrion (dead and decaying flesh of an animal), blood, the flesh of swine, the animal slaughtered in any name other than Allah's, the animal which has either been

strangled, killed by blows, has died of a fall, by goring or that devoured by a beast of prey - unless it be that which you yourselves might have slaughtered while it was still alive - and that which was slaughtered at the altars. You are also forbidden to seek knowledge of your fate by divining arrows. All these are sinful acts. This day the unbelievers have fully despaired of your religion. Do not fear them; but fear Me. This day I have perfected for you your religion, and have bestowed upon you My bounty in full measure, and have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion. (Follow, then, the lawful and unlawful bounds enjoined upon you.) As for he who is driven by hunger, without being wilfully inclined to sin, surely Allah is All-Forgiving, All-Compassionate."

This verse begins by stating certain things that are forbidden to be used as food. The term 'Carrion' signifies the animal which has died a natural death. Blood and swine have also been prohibited as food. The verse also refers as *haram* to the practice of pronouncing the name of anyone or anything other than Allah (SWT) and dedicating the animal, as an offering, to either a holy personage, false god or goddess before slaughtering.

It is lawful to eat the flesh of an animal which may have suffered from an accident, provided that it was still alive until slaughtered. This verse also makes it clear that the flesh of an animal becomes lawful only by slaughtering ritually, and that no other method of killing is valid. The words *dhabh* and *dhakah* belong to the technical terminology of Islam and denote slitting the throat so that the blood is completely drained from the animal's body. The disadvantage of killing an animal by either guillotine or strangulation is that the greater part of the blood remains within the body, and at various places it sticks to the flesh and forms congealed lumps. If an animal is slaughtered by slitting the throat, on the other hand, the connection between mind and body remains intact for a short while, with the result that the blood is thoroughly drained out from all the veins and the flesh becomes fully cleansed of blood. We have just come across the injunction prohibiting the eating of blood. So only that flesh which has been purged of blood is declared lawful.

The word *nusub* signifies all the places consecrated for offerings to others than the One True Allah (SWT), regardless of whether they are images of wood, stone or something else.

It must be noted that the division of objects of eating and drinking into lawful and unlawful in this verse is based on their moral rather than their medicinal properties. Allah (SWT) has left matters relating to the physical world to be tackled by man's own effort and striving. It is for man himself to discover by his own efforts which items of food and drink provide him with healthy nourishment and which are useless and harmful. The Law (*Shari'ah*) does not take upon itself to guide man in such matters, except for giving a general guideline. Had it undertaken such a task, perhaps one of the first things for it to do would have been to pronounce the prohibition of arsenic oxide. But one will notice that the Qur'an and the Ahadith mention neither arsenic oxide nor other things which either singly or jointly are fatal for man. The underlying considerations of the Law (*Shari'ah*) with regard to the various items of eating and drinking are their possible effects on man's morals and on the purity of his soul. This is in addition to the judgements that the Law (*Shari'ah*) makes with regard to the various means adopted by man in his quest for food - whether they are appropriate according to Islamic standards or not. It is impossible for man to determine what is beneficial and what is harmful for his morals; he has not been endowed with the capacities needed to arrive at sound conclusions on these matters, and so he frequently stumbles into error. Hence the Law (*Shari'ah*) undertakes to guide him in these matters and these matters alone. Whatever has been prohibited by Islam has been prohibited because of its bad effects on human morals, because of its repugnance to spiritual purity, and because of its association with false beliefs. Things which have been declared lawful have been so declared because they are untainted by these evils.

It may be asked why Allah (SWT) did not specify the considerations underlying the prohibition of various things for this would have afforded us very valuable insights. In reply, it must be pointed out that it is impossible for us to fully grasp such considerations. The kind

of questions we face are for instance: What are the corrupting effects of the consumption of either blood or the flesh of swine and carrion on our morals? The extent to which this corruption affects our morals, and the way in which certain things affect our morals is a matter that we are incapable of investigating, for we do not possess the means of weighing and measuring the moral properties of various things. To mention some of these bad effects would carry little weight with the sceptic, for how could he test the soundness of statements on such questions? Hence, Allah (SWT) considers faith rather than man's own judgement as the main basis for observing the standards of lawfulness and prohibition. Whoever is fully convinced that the Qur'an is the Book of Allah (SWT), that the Prophet (SAAW) was designated by Him, and that Allah (SWT) is All-Knowing and All-Wise, will necessarily commit himself to observe the restrictions enjoined by Allah (SWT) regardless of whether he is able to grasp the wisdom underlying them or not. Whoever lacks this basic conviction will avoid only those evils which are fully evident to human beings, and will remain a prey to all those which have not yet become apparent but which in fact are intrinsically harmful.

The things which are prohibited in this verse fall into the following categories:

(1) Polytheistic divination, which is a form of omen-seeking whereby knowledge either about one's future or about matters beyond human perception, is sought from false gods and goddesses. The polytheists of Makkah had consecrated the idol *Hubal* in the *Kaabah* for this purpose. Seven arrows had been placed at its altars and on each of them different words and sentences had been inscribed. Whenever people were faced with the question whether a certain course was wise or not, or they wanted to trace something lost, or sought a judgement in a murder case, or had other similar problems, they would approach the oracle of *Hubal*, present him with an offering as his fee, and pray to *Hubal* to issue a verdict on the question concerned. Then the oracle would draw arrows, and the inscription on the arrow which fell to a person's lot was deemed to represent the verdict of *Hubal*.

(2) Superstitious divination, which has also been prohibited, means

that instead of deciding the problems of life in a rational way one should decide them on fanciful grounds. Or it could mean deciding matters by arbitrary interpretation of accidental events, or to have one's future prophesied by means which have not been reasonably established as adequate for obtaining knowledge about the future. This includes geomancy, astrology, fortune-telling and the numerous other methods adopted to determine omens.

(3) Games of chance are also prohibited and include all those transactions in which what one receives depends on chance and other purely accidental factors rather than on rational considerations such as either due payment or recompense for services rendered. This applies, for instance, to lotteries where the holder of an arbitrarily-drawn number receives a huge amount of money which has been obtained from thousands of other people.

After prohibiting each of these three categories, the only kind of lot-drawing which Islam permits is that which one resorts to when obliged to make a decision either in favour of one of numerous permissible options or in favour of one out of two or more equally legitimate claimants. For instance, two persons have an equal claim over a thing which neither of them is prepared to relinquish, and at the same time there is no reasonable basis for preferring one to the other. In such a case, with the consent of the claimants, the matter may be settled by drawing lots. The Prophet (SAAW) himself used to resort to drawing lots of this lawful nature when he had to make a decision between two equal claimants, and when preferring one of them would cause distress and grievance to the other. (*On the authority of Bukhari, Muslim, Musnad Ahmad bin Hanbal, Ibn Majah, etc.*)

'This day', in the verse, does not signify a particular day or specific date. It refers to that period of time when these verses were revealed. In our own usage, too, expressions like 'today' or 'this day' often have the sense of the 'present time'. 'This day the unbelievers have fully despaired of your religion' refers to the fact that the Muslims' religion (Islam) had developed into a full-fledged system of life, reinforced by the authority and governmental power which it had acquired. The unbelievers who had hitherto resisted its establishment now

despaired of destroying Islam and of forcing the believers back to their former state of Ignorance. The believers therefore no longer needed to fear men: they should fear Allah (SWT) alone instead. Indeed, the Muslims were repeatedly asked to fear Allah (SWT), for they would not be treated lightly if they failed to carry out His commands, especially as there was no longer any justifiable excuse for such failure. If they still violated the law of Allah (SWT), there could be no basis for supposing that they did so under constraint: it must mean that they simply had no intention of obeying Him.

The 'perfection of religion' mentioned in this verse refers to making it a self-sufficient system of belief and conduct, and an order of social life providing its own answers to the questions with which man is confronted. This system contains all necessary guidance for man, either by expounding fundamental principles from which detailed directives can be deduced or by spelling out such directives explicitly so that in no circumstances would one need to look for guidance to any extraneous source.

The bounty referred to in the statement: 'I have bestowed upon you My bounty in full measure', is the bounty of true guidance.

The statement, 'I have been pleased to assign for you Islam as your religion' means that, since the Muslims had proved by their conduct and their striving that they were honest and sincere about the commitment they had made to Allah (SWT) in embracing Islam - the commitment to serve and obey Him - He had accepted their sincerity and created conditions in which they were no longer yoked in bondage to anyone but Him (SWT). Thus the Muslims were not prevented from living in submission to Allah (SWT) out of extraneous constraints just as there were no constraints preventing them from subscribing to true beliefs. Having recounted these favours, Allah (SWT) does not point out what should be the proper response to those favours. But the implication is obvious: the only appropriate response on the part of the believers must be unstinting observance of the law of Allah (SWT) out of gratitude to Him.

According to authentic traditions this verse was revealed in 10 A.H. on the occasion of the Prophet's (SAAW) Farewell Pilgrimage. (Bukhari, Muslim, etc.)

(And Allah (SWT) knows best!)

Verse 04

يَسْأَلُونَكَ مَاذَا أُحِلَّ قُلْ لَهُمُ أَحْلٌ لَكُمْ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَمَا عَلَّمْتُم مِّنَ الْجَوَارِحِ مُكَلِّبِينَ تُعَلِّمُونَهُنَّ مِمَّا عَلَّمَكُمُ اللَّهُ فَكُلُوا
مِمَّا أَمْسَكْنَ وَعَلَيْكُمْ أَذْكُرُوا السَّمَاوَاتِ عَلَيْهِ ۖ اللَّهُ تَتَّقُوا ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ ۝

“They ask you what has been made lawful to them. Say: 'All clean things have been made lawful to you, and such hunting animals as you teach, training them to hunt, teaching them the knowledge Allah has given you - you may eat what they catch for you - but invoke the name of Allah on it. Have fear of Allah (in violating His Law). Allah is swift in His reckoning.'”

There is a certain subtlety in how the query is answered in this verse. Religious-minded people often fall into a prohibitionist mentality by tending to regard as unlawful everything not expressly declared as lawful. This makes them excessively fastidious and over-suspicious, and inclined to ask for a complete list of all that is lawful and permitted. The Qur'an's response to this question seems to be aimed, in the first place, at the reform of this mentality. The questioners want a list of what is lawful so they can treat everything else as prohibited, but the Qur'an provides them with a list of what is prohibited and then leaves them with the guiding principle that all 'clean things' are lawful. This means a complete reversal of the old religious outlook according to which everything that has not been declared lawful is considered prohibited. This was a great reform, and it liberated human life from many unnecessary constraints. Henceforth, except for a few prohibitions, the lawful domain embraced virtually everything.

The lawfulness of things has been tied, however, to the stipulation of their being clean so that no one can argue for the lawfulness of things which are unclean. The question which arises at this point is: How are we to determine which things are clean? The answer is that everything is clean apart from those things which can be reckoned unclean either according to any of the principles embodied in the Law (*Shari'ah*) or which are repellent to man's innate sense of good taste or which civilized human beings have generally found offensive to their natural feelings of cleanliness and decency.

The expression 'hunting animals' used in the verse signifies hounds, hawks and all those beasts and birds which men use in hunting. It is a characteristic of animals which have been trained to hunt that they hold the prey for their masters rather than devour it. It is for this reason that while the catch of these trained animals is lawful, provided that it is slaughtered according to the Islamic ritual before death. Islamic jurists, however, disagree on this matter and have varied opinions.

The verse under discussion, however, makes it clear that it is necessary to pronounce the name of Allah (SWT) while dispatching a hound to the hunt. If a man later finds the prey alive he should slaughter it. But if he does not find it alive it will still be lawful to eat it since the name of Allah (SWT) has already been pronounced. The same rule applies with regard to shooting arrows in hunting.

(And Allah (SWT) knows Best!)

Verse 05

الْيَوْمَ أُحِلَّ لَكُمُ الطَّيِّبَاتُ وَطَعَامُ أَيِّنَ لَزَاؤُتُوا لِكِتَابِ حِلٍّ وَلَكُمْ طَعَامُكُمْ حِلٍّ وَلَهُمُ الْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنَاتِ
وَالْمُحْصَنَاتُ مِنَ أَيِّنَ لَزَاؤُتُوا مِنْ لِكِتَابِ قَبْلِكُمْ إِذَا آتَيْتُمُوهُنَّ أَجُورَهُنَّ مُحْصِنِينَ غَيْرَ مُسْفِحِينَ لَا وَمَنْ خَذَى
أَخْذًا مِنْ وَطَنٍ يَكْفُرْ بِالْإِيمَانِ فَقَدْ حَبِطَ عَمَلُهُ فِي هُوَ الْأَخِرَةِ مِنَ الْخَسِرِينَ

“This day all good things have been made lawful to you. The food of the People of the Book is permitted to you, and your food is permitted to them. And permitted to you are chaste women, be they either from among the believers or from among those who have received the Book before you, provided you become their protectors in wedlock after paying them their bridal-due, rather than go around committing fornication and taking them as secret-companions. The work of he who refuses to follow the way of faith will go waste, and he will be among the utter losers in the Hereafter.”

The food of the People of the Book includes the animals slaughtered by them. The rule that 'our food is lawful to them and theirs lawful to us' signifies that there need be no barriers between us and the People of the Book regarding food. We may eat with them and they with us. But this general proclamation of permission is preceded by a reiteration of

the statement: 'All good things have been made lawful to you.' This indicates that if the People of the Book either do not observe those principles of cleanliness and purity which are considered obligatory by the Law (*Shari'ah*) or if their food includes prohibited items, then one should abstain from eating them. If, for instance, they either slaughter an animal without pronouncing the name of Allah (SWT) or if they slaughter it in the name of anyone else but Allah (SWT) it is not lawful for us to eat that animal. Likewise, if intoxicating drinks, the flesh of swine, and any other prohibited thing is found on their dining table we may not justify our partaking of such items on the ground that the persons concerned are People of the Book.

The same applies to those non-Muslims who are not People of the Book, except for one difference - that whereas the animals slaughtered by the People of the Book are lawful provided they have pronounced the name of Allah (SWT) at the time of slaughtering them, we are not permitted to eat the animals killed by non-Muslims who are not People of the Book.

The verse also details that Muslim men are allowed to marry those Jewish and Christian women who have been characterized as *muhsanat* (i.e. 'well-protected women'). There are, however, differences among jurists as to the detailed application of this rule and regarding the definition of '*muhsanat*'.

The declaration that marriage to women of the 'people of the Book' is permitted is immediately followed by a warning which, in effect, means that those who avail themselves of this permission ought to be mindful of their faith and morals. Muslims are urged to beware of infatuation with disbelieving women lest they also become enamoured of the ideas and beliefs which they cherish, thereby allowing their faith to dissipate. They are warned against adopting social patterns and modes of conduct inconsistent with the true requirements of their faith.

In any case, all jurists agree that Muslim women are not permitted to marry the menfolk from the 'people of the Book'.

And Allah (SWT) Knows Best!