

ANSWER

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ وَأُنْثَىٰ وَجَعَلْنَاكُمْ شُعُوبًا وَقَبَائِلَ لِتَعَارَفُوا إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتَقَنُّ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلِيمٌ خَبِيرٌ

O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female and made you into races and tribes, so that you may identify each other. Surely the noblest of you, in Allah's sight, is the one who is most pious of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware [49:13]

COMMENTARY

All of Mankind are the Children of Ādam and Hawwā' 'alayhimā salām

In the preceding verses, six social evils in connection with human and Islamic rights were prohibited, and principles of good manners were laid down to be observed in social life. The current verse proceeds to set down the basis of an all-comprehensive and all-pervading principle of human equality. It has firmly laid the axe at the false and foolish notions of superiority, born of racial arrogance or national conceit. All men have been created from a single male [Ādam 'alayhis salām] and a single female [Hawwā'] as human beings. Therefore, all people are the descendants of Ādam and Hawwā' 'alayhimā salām and have been declared equal in the sight of Allah. No one is allowed to take pride nor to degrade others on the basis of pigment of his skin, the amount of wealth he possesses or by his rank or by his social status, descent or pedigree, but by his moral uprightness and the way he discharges his obligations to Allah and man. The entire human race is but one family. Division into nations, tribes and sub-tribes of all sizes, and races is meant only to give a better identification of one another.

Circumstances of Revelation

This verse was revealed on the occasion of the conquest of Makkah. When it was time for prayer, the Holy Prophet ﷺ asked Sayyidnā Bilāl radi'allāhu 'anhu to call the *adhān*. One of the pagan Quraish cynically remarked: *Thank God that my father died before this happened, and he did not have to see this bad day.* Hārith Ibn Hishām remarked: *Could Muhammad not find anyone better than this black crow to sound the adhān in the Sacred Mosque!* Abū Sufyān said: *I do not wish to utter anything for fear that the master of the heavens will inform him.* Thus Jibra'īl 'alayhis salām came down and informed the Holy Prophet ﷺ about this conversation. The Holy Prophet ﷺ called them and asked them about it. They admitted. At this, the current verse was revealed.

Taqwā of Allah is the basis of Honour

This verse made it plain that human beings can earn honour on account of their faith and righteousness. The immediate application of the verse was to Sayyidnā Bilāl radi'allāhu 'anhu, and therefore the Holy Prophet ﷺ said to those people: *"You are empty (i.e. you have no moral leg to stand on.) Sayyidnā Bilāl radi'allāhu 'anhu, on the other hand, is equipped (with high moral qualities); and he is better and more*

abonourable than any of you." [Baghawī, as cited in Mazharī]. Sayyidnā ‘Abdullāh Ibn ‘Umar *radi’allahu ‘anhu* reports that on the day when Makkah was conquered, the Holy Prophet ﷺ performed *tawāf* (circumambulation of Ka’bah) in the state of riding on his she-camel, [so that all the people could see him]. Then having completed his *tawāf*, he delivered a sermon in which he said: “O people! Allah has removed from you the pride of Jāhiliyyah and its arrogance. People are of two types: a man who is righteous, fearful of Allah and he is honourable to Allah; or a man who is sinful, wretched, and he is disgraced and little to Allah [Tirmidhī and Baghawī].”

Then he recited the current verse.

Sayyidnā Ibn ‘Abbās *radi’allahu ‘anhu* says: For people “honour” lies in wealth, whilst in the sight of Allah it lies in righteousness.

Analysis of Important Words in the Verse

The word *Shu’ūb* is the plural of *Sha’b* which refers to a large group of persons of the same origin, (like a nation). Then it consists of clans and tribes. The largest group in this arrangement is called *sa’b*, and the smallest is called *‘ashīrah*. Abū Ruwāq says that the words *Shu’ūb* and *Sha’b* refer to non-Arab nations whose lineage is not preserved, whilst *qabā’il* refers to Arabs whose lineage is well-preserved. The word *ashāt* is used to refer to the children of Israel.

Lineal, National and Linguistic Division of Mankind: The Underlying Divine Wisdom is identification

The Qur’ān in this verse has made it clear that Allah has created all mankind from a single mother and a single father, and made them into a single brotherhood. But he has divided them into different tribes, nations, races, lineage and language-speakers/linguistic groups. The underlying Divine wisdom in such a division is mutual identification. For example, if there are two persons bearing the same name, they could be differentiated by family name. It can also show the near and remote relations. Their Shar’i rights can be fulfilled on the basis of near and distant lineage. It is incumbent to determine the near and remote agnate heirs when applying the law of succession or dividing the estate of a deceased. In short, reference to one's lineage for the purpose of identification is not deemed to be pride and conceit.

End.

