

Surat Al-Ankaboot

Every Surah of the Koran gets its name from an incident or a fact that is mentioned in this Surah. For example Surat Al-Bakara is named after the story of the people of Al-Bakara. The story of Al-Bakara highlights an important principal, which is the punishment of those who nag about the orders of Allah. Instead of listening and say we listen and we obey, like what Allah mentions at the end of the Surah “وَقَالُوا سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا”. No, they keep nagging because they do not want to comply and as a result, Allah makes it harder and harder on them to punish them. At the beginning it was easy, any cow will be sufficient, but as a result of nagging, they ended up with a unique cow that they had to pay an amount of gold equal to its weight as a price for this cow. A very important lesson highlighted just by the name of the Surah.

Today we would like to explore surat Al-Ankaboot together. Following the same rule, we find that Surat Al-Ankaboot is named after Ayah 41 of the Surah

مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ اتَّخَذُوا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ أَوْلِيَاءَ كَمَثَلِ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ اتَّخَذَتْ بَيْتًا وَإِنَّ أَوْهَنَ الْبُيُوتِ لَبَيْتُ الْعَنْكَبُوتِ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

The example of those who resort for support to other than Allah is like the example of the spider that resort to its house for shelter. Indeed the weakest house ever is the house of the spider if they have any knowledge.

Indeed the house of spider does not provide any kind of shelter or protection to the spider. If the spider is stupid enough to resort to its house for shelter,

then the spider will discover quickly that his house is a false deceiving house. It does not provide any kind of shelter or protection to the spider. The name is a house, but the actual reality is that it is nothing.

This highlights a very important concept, that any civilization, nation or structure that is build on other than what Allah SWT has sent is nothing but a house of spider.

It is interesting to know that modern science has proven that the weakest house ever for any living being is the house of the spider. Obviously the example of spider here is very miraculous meaningful illustrative example that makes perfect sense. But at the time of the Koran revelation, the non believers had a big laugh on this. They made lots of fun of the Prophet Mohamed saying what kind of God is yours who talks about spiders, bees, ants, mosquitoes and flies. Doesn't your God know better examples than these worthless insects. The answer came directly from Allah in Surat Al-Bakara:26

إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَسْتَحْيِي أَنْ يَضْرِبَ مَثَلًا مَا بَعُوضَةً فَمَا فَوْقَهَا فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا فَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهُ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ
وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فَيَقُولُونَ مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا يُضِلُّ بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَيَهْدِي بِهِ كَثِيرًا وَمَا يُضِلُّ بِهِ إِلَّا
الْفَاسِقِينَ

Allah does not shy away from giving the example of a mosquito and even smaller than the mosquito, for believers know that this is the truth from their Lord, but non believers say what kind of example is this. Indeed Allah uses these examples to guide many and misguides many, and only the rebellious ones are misguided by this example.

Believers benefit from this example because they are smart enough not to get stuck on the cosmetic value of the example. They go deeper than that, they go beyond that to the meaning and lessons to be learned from the example, they benefit from it and it guides them to the straight path. But non believers are ignorant enough to focus on the cosmetic value of the example and they do not see beyond the outside surface.

The big lesson to learn from the example of spider is that if we build our life, if we build our civilization, if we build our existence, if we build our government, if we build our organization, if we build our life on other than what Allah SWT has revealed, the resulting building will be nothing more than a false deceiving house that does not provide any shelter or protection such as the house of the spider. Indeed it is such a powerful lesson to learn if we do not get stuck on the cosmetic value of the spider example.

The very next Ayah in Surat Al-Ankaboot, Ayah 42 Allah confirms this concept by saying

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَعْلَمُ مَا يُدْعُونَ مِنْ دُونِهِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ

Allah knows that the ones they are counting on and seeking help from are nothing, absolutely nothing, and indeed he is the most honorable and the most wise.

And then the following verse, Ayah 42, confirms the purpose of these examples and how they should be handled

وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ وَمَا يَعْقِلُهَا إِلَّا الْعَالِمُونَ

These are useful examples that we give to people, but only the knowledgeable ones are going to benefit from it.

Now, back to the house of spider example given by Allah, what makes people fall down in such a mistake; building their protection and security on such a weak structure such as the house of spider. The answer is simple, because they have fallen into fitnah and the entire surah is dedicated to explaining this concept of fitnah that makes people fall into such a mistake and walk the path of misguidance.

The word fitnah means test and trial to the human being by Allah SWT. Allah has created this life for this purpose so that we can prove ourselves to him worthy of his mercy that leads us to Jannah. And Allah test us to separate the people who deserve his mercy from the ones who don't, and to grade people into different level as he said in Surat Al-Omran: 163

هُم دَرَجَاتٌ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَاللَّهُ بِصِيرٍ بِمَا يَعْمَلُونَ

People have different levels in the eyes of Allah, the one who is very aware of their deeds.

He also said in Surat Al-Nisa:95&96

لَا يَسْتَوِي الْقَاعِدُونَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ غَيْرُ أُولِي الضَّرَرِ وَالْمُجَاهِدُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ بِأَمْوَالِهِمْ وَأَنْفُسِهِمْ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ دَرَجَةً وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ وَفَضَّلَ اللَّهُ الْمُجَاهِدِينَ عَلَى الْقَاعِدِينَ أَجْرًا عَظِيمًا. دَرَجَاتٍ مِنْهُ وَمَغْفِرَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا

The are not equal, the believers who do not participate in Jihad and the ones who do Jihad with their wealth and souls. Allah raised the ranks of those who do, though he promises Jannah to both, but he gave magnificent

preference to one over the other. To divide believers into different levels of Jannah, different levels of forgiveness and different levels of mercy, for Allah is most forgiving and most merciful.

وَلِهَذَا قَالَ وَقَدْ تَبَّتْ فِي الصَّحِيحَيْنِ عَنْ أَبِي سَعِيدِ الْخُدْرِيِّ أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ "إِنَّ فِي الْجَنَّةِ مِائَةَ دَرَجَةٍ أَعَدَّهَا اللَّهُ لِلْمُجَاهِدِينَ فِي سَبِيلِهِ مَا بَيْنَ كُلِّ دَرَجَتَيْنِ كَمَا بَيْنَ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ"

This is why it is narrated by Aboo Said Al-Khodri in the two correct books of Bukhari and Muslim that the Prophet SAW said, the Jannah has 100 levels prepared specially for the ones who do Jihad for the sake of Allah, between every two levels is as much as the distance between heavens and earth.

So the whole purpose of these fitnahs that Allah runs us through is to distinguish believers from non believers and to classify believers into different levels and grades.

Now let us look deeply into the meaning of the word fitnah itself. The word fitnah in the Arabic dictionary means to separate gold from other cheap metals mixed with it. It is a mechanical process done using the burning fire so that we can extract the precious metals from the cheap ones. The word is used by Allah to express the same exact meaning but with people instead of gold. Allah runs us through tests as hard as the burning fire just to separate the gold from the dirt and grade us into different levels of quality. You can see people passing through the same fitnah, the same exact test, one falls down in the fitnah and the other avoids the fitnah in a very honorable way.

We used to say in Arabic "الناس معادن" people are made of different metals, some are made of cheap metals and others are made of precious ones. The

trick is, how can we tell who is who? From the outside, they all look the same, but during fitnah time, they do not behave the same. Allah starting the Surah expressing this fact in a very strong way

الم، أَحْسِبَ النَّاسُ أَنْ يُتْرَكُوا أَنْ يَقُولُوا آمَنَّا وَهُمْ لَا يُفْتَنُونَ

Alif, Lam, Meem, do people think that they will be left to claim faith without being tested by fitnahs.

وَلَقَدْ فَتَنَّا الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ فَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ صَدَقُوا وَلَيَعْلَمَنَّ الْكَاذِبِينَ

Indeed we have tested by fitnahs all the ones who came before them for Allah wants to show who is sincere in claiming faith and who is a liar.

أَمْ حَسِبَ الَّذِينَ يَعْمَلُونَ السَّيِّئَاتِ أَنْ يَسْفُتُونَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

Do the people who commit sins think that they can deceive us by claiming faith only by tongue, their minds are so bad to make such a judgment.

How can you think that Allah will fall down for such cheap lips service? If you lie to yourself until you believe yourself and you think that you are a believer of golden quality, would Allah let you meet him without showing you exactly who you are? No, indeed Allah will send you one fitnah after another, one test of submission after another, this is what life is all about?

Every thing in this life is fitnah, even money and children are fitnah as Allah said in Surat Al-Anfal:28

وَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

And in Surat Al-Taghabon:15, Allah repeated it again

إِنَّمَا أَمْوَالُكُمْ وَأَوْلَادُكُمْ فِتْنَةٌ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ أَجْرٌ عَظِيمٌ

Not only that, but any good thing that we have or happening to us, and any bad thing are all nothing but fitnah. Allah SWT said in Surat Al-Anbia'a:35

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبَلُّوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ

Every soul is going to taste death, in the mean time we are testing you with fitnah in both forms; ease and calamities, and you are ultimately going to return to us.

Now this Surah, Suart Al-fitnah or Surat Al-Ankaboot starts with Alif Lam Meem and we do not know for sure what is the meaning of Alif Lam Meem, but one of the strong opinions says that these letters represent a form of challenge.

Allah SWT has started 25 Surahs in the Koran with letters like these and in all of them the Koran was immediately mentioned after them to challenge those who claim that the Koran is made by Mohamed. The logic of the challenge is simple, Mohamed SAW is a man just like you and the Koran made of this simple alphabet that you know and have access to just like Mohamed SAW have. Why do not you combine these letters to make up a Koran similar to the one that he made it up. The logic is if he is a human and you are humans too, and you have the same level of access to the language tools and alphabet that he has, why do not you come up with a small piece of the Koran. I am not asking you for too much, just one Surah, no just 10 Ayahs, no actually, just one Ayah. You can acquire all the educations and

degrees that you can, you can gather all world experts, you can gather all man kind and Jin kind and work hard, and you will not be able to even come up with one Ayah of this Koran. In Surat Al-Isra:88, Allah SWT said that literally.

فَلْ لَّيِّنْ اجْتَمَعَتِ الْإِنْسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَىٰ أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ
ظَهِيرًا

Allah SWT started 25 surahs with these letters followed by a statement about the holly Koran with only three exceptions. The first exception is Surat Marium, the second exception is Surat Al-Room and the third exception is the Surah that we are exploring today, Surat Al-Ankaboot. However, the Surah starts with another challenge, the challenge of fitnah. It is a very hard challenge that you need the Koran for. So, it is still can also be related to the holly Koran.

The opening statement is followed by three important facts for people to be aware of. Fact number one is:

مَنْ كَانَ يَرْجُوا لِقَاءَ اللَّهِ فَإِنَّ أَجَلَ اللَّهِ لَآتٍ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ

Whomsoever is preparing to meet Allah, indeed the time to meet Allah is coming and he is the most knowledgeable and the most able to hear. The second fact is:

وَمَنْ جَاهَدَ فَإِنَّمَا يُجَاهِدُ لِنَفْسِهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَغَنِيٌّ عَنِ الْعَالَمِينَ

Whomsoever is doing Jihad is doing it for his own sake, for Allah is not in need for any Jihad. We are not doing Allah a favor, when we struggle in Jihad, we are doing that to benefit ourselves, not to benefit Allah, for he has

no need to any one or to any Jihad. Very simple but strong fact. Allah is the one who created his own enemies to test us, to run us through the fitnahs of life and death. By doing Jihad, we are saving ourselves from falling down in the fitnah and qualifying ourselves to the mercy of Allah that leads to Jannah.

Allah does not need helpers to do Jihad with him against his own enemies. He is the one who created them in the first place and gave them the brains and muscles to do evil plans, wicked plots and evil designs. If he wants to wipe them away, he can do that in a blink of an eye without our help. He created them so that they can do fitnah to us and we prove ourselves to him worthy of Jannah by doing Jihad against him. Not to mention that if we do Jihad against them, we will ultimately win and live happily in this life and in then hereafter. But if we do not do Jihad, then they will slave us and corrupt our lives, and cause us to have a miserable life in this world followed by the punishment of Allah in the hereafter. This clearly illustrated by the verse that follows:

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُمْ أَحْسَنَ الَّذِي كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Those who believe and do good deeds we will forgive their sins and reward them according to the best of their deeds. And this is really very generous. Just imagine, Allah takes the best prayer that you have ever prayed and multiply it times the total number of prayers you did all your life and reward you generously ten times as much. Not only that he forgive sins. No, it goes way beyond that, he takes the best deed ever done from each kind, multiply it times the total number of deeds from the same kind times another multiplier from 10 to 700 based on the level of sincerity and sacrifice. Then

reward you with a never ending life in Jannah, life of length equal to infinity for whatever finite amount of good deeds done by you, you have infinite reward. This indeed represents the infinite generosity, infinite gratitude and infinite kindness of Allah SWT.

These first seven Ayat represent the introductory paragraph of the Surah. It prepares the human mind into receiving the remaining very powerful message of the Surah.

The second paragraph starts by describing a very hard fitnah that some of us might face and Sa'ad Ibn Aby Waqas may Allah be please with him has faced. It is the fitnah where a person has to choose between the life of his parents and his religion.

وَوَصَّيْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ بِوَالِدَيْهِ حُسْنًا وَإِنْ جَاهَدَاكَ لِتُشْرِكَ بِي مَا لَيْسَ لَكَ بِهِ عِلْمٌ فَلَا تُطِعْهُمَا إِلَيَّ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَأُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

When Sa'ad may Allah be pelase with him became Muslim, his mother got very upset and she said to him I will go on a hunger strike, I am not going to eat or drink until you quit Islam. And if you do not, then I will die because of you and it is going to be big shame attached to you till you die. You will be known as the killer of his own mother. She stayed on the hunger strike for a day and then Sa'ad came back to her and said, oh my dear mother if you have one thousand soul in your body and you die one thousand times by loosing one soul at a time, I will not quit Islam. Then he left her. So she started eating again. After that Allah revealed this verse ordering believers to be kind with their parents but not to obey them in doing what Allah has forbidden us from.

And what would be the reward of doing such a sacrifice, it is

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَنُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ فِي الصَّالِحِينَ

Those who believed and do good deeds are entered the place prepared for righteous believers.