



NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF MODERN LANGUAGES

BY Dr Mohsin Khan Abbassi

Chapter no 2

(Surah Al-Baqarah)



(IN THE NAME OF ALLAH, THE BENEFICENT, THE MERCIFUL)

Introduction

Surah Al-Baqarah (The Cow)

Background

The Cow or Surah al-Baqarah (Arabic: سورة البقرة, "The Cow") is the second and longest chapter (Surah) of the Qur'an. It is a Medinan surah (revealed to Muhammad when he was at Medina), with the exception of verse 281 which Muslims believe was revealed during The Farewell Pilgrimage. It is also considered to be one of the first chapters revealed after the Hijrat from Mecca to Medina. The chapter comprises 286 verses (ayah) according to the division of Ali, the most widely accepted count among all Muslim

denominations, and includes the single longest verse in the Qur'an (2:282). The surah's name references verses 66–72 which recall the story of a heifer sacrificed by the Israelites. Surah al-Baqarah enjoins fasting on the believer during the month of Ramadan.

The surah addresses a wide variety of topics, including substantial amounts of law, and retells stories of Adam, Abraham and Moses. A major theme is guidance: urging the pagans (Al-Mushrikeen) and the Jews of Medina to embrace Islam, and warning them and the hypocrites (Munafiq) of the fate God had visited in the past on those who failed to heed his call. The stories in this chapter are told to help the reader understand the theological conception of truth in Islam. Condemnation of alcoholic beverages and gambling is also first found in the chapter, and it is one of only four chapters in the Qur'an to refer to Christians as Nazarenes instead of the more frequent terms People of the Book or "Helpers of Christ."

Al-Baqarah contains several verses dealing with the subject of warfare. Verses 2:190-194 are quoted on the nature of battle in Islam. The chapter also consists of five stories regarding God giving life to the dead, one story of God giving life to a dead animal (donkey) and one story regarding giving life to a bird.

The surah includes a few Islamic rules related to varying subjects, such as: prayers, fasting, Holy War on the path of God, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the change of the direction of prayer (Kiblah) from Jerusalem to Mecca, marriage and divorce, commerce, debt, and a great many of the ordinances concerning usury.

1. There are some discussions about Monotheism and gaining knowledge of Allah, especially by way of studying the mysteries of creation.
2. There are many statements about the Resurrection and life after death with a few tangible examples, like the story of Abraham (as) and how the birds became restored to life, and the story of Ezra.
3. There are some facts about the inimitability of the Qur'an and the significance of this Heavenly Book.
4. There are long discussions and explanations concerning the Jews and hypocrites and their peculiar positions against Islam and the Qur'an, evidenced by their various mischievous hindrances against them.

5. There are some narrations about the history of the Great Prophets, including Abraham (as) and Moses (as) in particular.

6. There are some passages that contain a few Islamic rules related to varying subjects, such as: prayers, fasting, Holy War on the path of Allah, the pilgrimage to Mecca, the change of the Kiblah (the direction of prayer) from Jerusalem to Mecca, marriage and divorce, commerce, debt, and a great many of the ordinances concerning usury.

Donation for the sake of Allah is abundantly discussed. The problem of retaliation, the banning of different kinds of forbidden meat, and also gambling and wine drinking are discussed, in addition to a few other ordinances related to the subjects of writing wills, testaments, and the like.

The appellation 'Al-Baqarah' (the Cow), the title of this Surah, is taken from the story of the Israelites' Cow, mentioned in verses 67 to 73 of this Surah.

The Virtue of Studying this Surah

There are some significant traditions and narrations on the virtue of studying this Surah, cited in Islamic literature, including the followings:

The Late Tabarsi has so cited in Majma'-ul-Bayan that once the Prophet (S) was asked: "Which Surah of the Qur'an is the best?" He (S) answered: "Al-Baqarah". They asked: "Which verse of the Surah (is the best)?" He replied: "Ayat-ul-Kursi, the Verse of the Throne', (verse 255)".

The superiority of this Holy Surah is, apparently, due to its comprehensiveness, and the preference of the 'Verse of the Throne', (verse 255) is because of its special monotheistic content. It is not contrary to the fact that some other Surah's of the Qur'an are considered superior in other aspects. All the Surah's of the Qur'an have been considered from different points of view.

Again, it is narrated by Ali ibn al-Hussain (as) that the Prophet (S) said:

"He who recites the first four verses of Surah Al-Baqarah, the 'Verse of Throne' (verse 255) with its next two verses (256,257) together with the last three verses of the Surah, will not meet any trouble in himself; in his family members, and in his wealth; and Satan will not approach him, and he (having paid attention to the Qur'an in his life) will not forget the Qur'an".

(Why the name?) **AL-BAQARA**

(The Cow) has been so named from the story of the Cow occurring in this Surah (vv. 67-73). It has not, however, been used as a title to indicate the subject of the Surah. It will, therefore, be as wrong to translate the name Al-Baqarah into "The Cow" or "The Heifer" as to translate any English name, say Baker, Rice, Wolf etc., into their equivalents in other languages or , because this would imply that the Surah dealt with the subject of "The Cow". Many more Surah's of the Quran have been named in the same way because no comprehensive words exist in Arabic (in spite of its richness) to denote the wide scope of the subject discussed in them. As a matter of fact all human languages suffer from the same limitation.

Sequence

Though it is a Surah, it follows naturally a Surah Al- Fatihah, which ended with the prayer : "Show us the straightway". It begins with the answer to that prayer, "This is the Book (That) . . . is guidance. . ."MadaniMakki

The greater part of Al-Baqarah was revealed during the first two years of the Holy Prophet's life at Al-Madinah. The smaller part which was revealed at a later period has been included in this Surah because its contents are closely related to those dealt with in this Surah. For instance, the verses prohibiting interest were revealed during the last period of the Holy prophet's life but have been inserted in this Surah. For the same reason, the last verses (284-286) of this Surah which were revealed at Makkah before the migration of the Holy Prophet to Al-Madinah have also been included in it.

Historical Background

In order to understand the meaning of this Surah, we should know its historical background:

At Makkah the Quran generally addressed the Quraysh who were ignorant of Islam, but at Al- Madinah it was also concerned with the Jews who were acquainted with the creed of the Unity of Allah, Prophet Hood, Revelation, the Hereafter and angels. They also professed to believe in the law which was revealed by Allah to their Prophet Moses (Allah's peace be upon him), and in principle, their way was the same (Islam) that was being taught by Prophet Muhammad (Allah's peace be upon him). But they had strayed away from it during the centuries of degeneration and had adopted many un- Islamic creeds, rites and customs of which there was no mention and for which there was no sanction in the Torah. Not only this: they had tampered with the Torah by inserting their own explanations and interpretations into its text.

They had distorted even that part of the Word of God which had remained intact in their Scriptures and taken out of it the real spirit of true religion and were now clinging to a lifeless frame of rituals. Consequently their beliefs, their morals and their conduct had gone to the lowest depths of degeneration. The pity is that they were not only satisfied with their condition but loved to cling to it. Besides this, they had no intention or inclination to accept any kind of reform. So they became bitter enemies of those who came to teach them the Right Way and did their worst to defeat every such effort. Though they were originally Muslims, they had swerved from the real Islam and made innovations and alterations in it and had fallen victims to hair splitting and sectarianism. They had forgotten and forsaken Allah and begun to serve mammon. So much so that they had even given up their original name "Muslim" and adopted the name "Jew" instead, and made religion the sole monopoly of the children of Israel. mushrik

This was their religious condition when the Holy Prophet went to Al-Madinah and invited the Jews to the true religion. That is why more than one third of this Surah has been addressed to the children of Israel. A critical review of their history, their moral degeneration and their religious perversions has been made; side by side with this the high standard of morality and the fundamental principles of the pure religion have been put forward in order to bring out clearly the nature of the degeneration of the community of a prophet when it goes astray and to draw clear lines of demarcation between real piety and formalism, and the essentials and non-essentials of the true religion.

At Makkah Islam was mainly concerned with the propagation of its fundamental principles and the moral training of its followers. But after the migration of the Holy Prophet to Al-Madinah, where Muslims had come to settle from all over Arabia and where a tiny Islamic State had been set up with the help of the Ansaar (local supporters), naturally the Quran had to turn its attention to the social, cultural, economic, political and legal problems as well. This accounts for the difference between the themes of the surah's revealed at Makkah and those at Al-Madinah. Accordingly about half of this Surah deals with those principles and regulations which are essential for the integration and solidarity of a community and for the solution of its problems.

After the migration to Al-Madinah, the struggle between Islam and un-Islam had also entered a new phase. Before this the Believers, who propagated Islam among their own clans and tribes, had to face its opponents at their own risk. But the conditions had changed at Al-Madinah, where Muslims from all parts of Arabia had come and settled as one community, and had established an independent city state. Here it became a struggle for the survival of the Community itself, for the whole of non-Muslim Arabia was bent upon and united in crushing it totally. Hence the following instructions, upon which depended not only its success but its very survival, were revealed in this Surah:

The Community should work with the utmost zeal to propagate its ideology and win over to its side the greatest possible number of people. It should so expose its opponents as to leave no room for doubt in the mind of any sensible person that they were adhering to an absolutely wrong position. It should infuse in its members (the majority of whom were homeless and indigent and surrounded on all sides by enemies) that courage and fortitude which is so indispensable to their very existence in the adverse circumstances in which they were struggling and to prepare them to face these boldly.

It should also keep them ready and prepared to meet any armed menace, which might come from any side to suppress and crush their ideology, and to oppose it tooth and nail without minding the overwhelming numerical strength and the material resources of its enemies. It should also create in them that courage which is needed for the eradication of evil ways and for the establishment of the Islamic Way instead. That is why Allah has revealed in this Surah such instructions as may help achieve all the above mentioned objects.

During this period, a new type of "Muslims," (hypocrites), had begun to appear. Though signs of duplicity had been noticed during the last days at Makkah, they took a different shape at Al-Madinah. At Makkah there were some people who professed Islam to be true but were not prepared to abide by the consequences of this profession and to sacrifice

their worldly interests and relations and bear the afflictions which inevitably follow the acceptance of this creed. But at Al-Madinah different kinds of (hypocrites) began to appear. There were some who had entered the Islamic fold merely to harm it from within. There were others who were surrounded by Muslims and, therefore, had become “Muslims” to safeguard their worldly interests. They, therefore, continued to have relations with the enemies so that if the latter became successful, their interests should remain secure. There were still others who had no strong conviction of the truth of Islam but had embraced it along with their clans. Lastly, there were those who were intellectually convinced of the truth of Islam but did not have enough moral courage to give up their former traditions, superstitions and personal ambitions and live up to the Islamic moral standards and make sacrifice in its way. munafiqin

At the time of the revelation of Al-Baqarah, all sorts of hypocrites had begun to appear. Allah has, therefore, briefly pointed out their characteristics here. Afterwards when their evil characteristics and mischievous deeds became manifest, Allah sent detailed instructions about them.

Theme: Guidance

This Surah is an invitation to the Divine Guidance and all the stories, incidents etc., revolve round this central theme. As this Surah has particularly been addressed to the Jews, many historical events have been cited from their own traditions to admonish and advise them that their own good lies in accepting the Guidance revealed to the Holy Prophet. They should, therefore, be the first to accept it because it was basically]y the same that was revealed to Prophet Moses (Allah’s peace be upon him).

Surah Al-Baqarah 2:284-286

لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَإِنْ تُبْدُوا مَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَوْ
تُخْفُوهُ يُحَاسِبْكُمْ بِهِ اللَّهُ ۖ فَيَغْفِرُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيُعَذِّبُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۗ
وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢٨٤﴾

“(All that is in the heavens³³³ and the earth belongs to Allah.³³⁴ Whether you disclose whatever is in your hearts or conceal it, ³³⁵ Allah will call you to account for it, and will then forgive whomsoever He wills, and will chastise whomsoever He wills. Allah has power over everything”.

ءَامَنَ الرَّسُولُ بِمَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ ۚ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ كُلُّ ءَامَنَ بِاللَّهِ
وَمَلَائِكَتِهِ وَكُتُبِهِ ۚ وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ لَا نُفَرِّقُ بَيْنَ أَحَدٍ مِنْ رُسُلِهِ ۚ وَقَالُوا
سَمِعْنَا وَأَطَعْنَا ۚ غُفِّرَانَكَ رَبَّنَا وَإِلَيْكَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿٢٨٥﴾

“(The Messenger believes, and so do the believers, in the guidance sent down upon him from his Lord: each of them believes in Allah, and in His angels, and in His Books, and in

His Messengers. They say: "We make no distinction between any of His Messengers. We hear and obey. Our Lord! Grant us Your forgiveness; to You we are destined to return."337

لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا
اَكْتَسَبَتْ رَبَّنَا لَا تُؤَاخِذْنَا إِنْ نَسِينَا أَوْ أَخْطَأْنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تَحْمِلْ
عَلَيْنَا إِصْرًا كَمَا حَمَلْتَهُ عَلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِنَا رَبَّنَا وَلَا تُحَمِّلْنَا
مَا لَا طَاقَةَ لَنَا بِهِ ۖ وَاعْفُ عَنَّا وَارْحَمْنَا أَنْتَ مَوْلَانَا
فَاَنْصُرْنَا عَلَى الْقَوْمِ الْكَافِرِينَ ﴿٢٨٦﴾

(2:286) "Allah does not lay a responsibility on anyone beyond his capacity.338 In his favour shall be whatever good each one does, and against him whatever evil he does.339 (Believers! Pray thus to your Lord): "Our Lord! Take us not to task if we forget or commit mistakes. Our Lord! Lay not on us a burden such as You laid on those gone before us.340 Our Lord! Lay not on us burdens which we do not have the power to bear.341 And overlook our faults, and forgive us, and have mercy upon us. You are our Guardian; so grant us victory against the unbelieving folk."342

