

## DAILY QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

From Juz' 6: Overturning the Verdict of *Jāhiliyyah*

وَأَنِ احْكُم بَيْنَهُم بِمَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعْ أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ... فَإِنْ تَوَلَّوْا فَاعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ أَن يُصِيبَهُمْ بِبَعْضِ دُنُوبِهِمْ ۗ وَإِنَّ كَثِيرًا مِّنَ النَّاسِ لَفَاسِقُونَ أَفَحُكْمَ الْجَاهِلِيَّةِ يَبْغُونَ ۗ وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ مِنَ اللَّهِ حُكْمًا لِّقَوْمٍ يُوقِنُونَ

Judge between them by what Allah has sent down, and do not follow their desires ... But if they turn their backs [on you], then know that Allah desires to punish them for some of their sins, and indeed many of the people are transgressors. Do they seek the judgement of [pagan] ignorance (*jāhiliyyah*)? But who is better than Allah in issuing judgement for a people who have certainty? (Mā'idah 5:49-50)

**Reflections:**

As social creatures, we not only desire to live in community, but often feel a need to do so due to our dependency on each other. One of the challenges we face, however, is our frequent disagreements with each other. When there is a dispute between people, we do not know who is on the right, and when there are multiple perspectives about an issue, we may not know which ones is the best. As a result, we often make our decisions based on our own preferences, our historical customs, or whatever trend seems to be in vogue at the time.

One of the purposes of the Qur'ān (and all the divinely sent books of the past<sup>1</sup>), is to establish a criteria and universal framework to help resolve these differences and uncertainties: "... Allah sent the prophets as bearers of good news and warners, and He sent down with them the Book with the truth, that it may judge between the people concerning that about which they differed."<sup>2</sup>

To accept the verdict of the Qur'ān requires both intelligence and humility: Intelligence to realize that the one who created us is al-Ḥakīm (the All-Wise) and hence His Word, which is also *ḥakīm* (wise), is the best arbitrator to resolve our differences; it is also to realize the limitations of our purely secular structures and systems. But we also need humility to temper our egos and desires so that they do not become the arbitrators in our decisions.

To refuse the verdict of a divine book, then, is to fall into a type of *jāhiliyyah* (whether it is the simple pagan ignorance of the past or the sophisticated modern ignorance of the present). The Qur'ān gives four aspects of *jāhiliyyah* that spans the domains of our beliefs, our practices, our attitudes, and our judgements.<sup>3</sup>

So what is the way out of this *jāhiliyyah*? It is to accept the Qur'ān as a decision-making arbitrator in our individual and collective lives, our social structures, and our institutions. Through it, we can save ourselves from ignorance.

Imam 'Alī (‘a) says, "Make it [i.e., the Qur'ān] your guide towards Allah and seek its advice for yourselves; Do not trust your views against it and regard your desires as deceitful in relation to it."<sup>4</sup>

**To ponder:** How can we increase our reliance on the Qur'ān as an arbitrator in our everyday decision-making?

**References:** Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*.

<sup>1</sup> See 4:105 and 5:44-48

<sup>2</sup> 2:213

<sup>3</sup> See 3:154, 33:33, 48:26, 5:50 respectively

<sup>4</sup> *Nahj al-Balāghah*, Sermon 176