

Chapter 3

Verses 5–7

Indeed, there is nothing on this Earth or in the universe that is hidden from God. He is the One who shapes you in your mother's womb [arham] in whatever form He wishes!¹⁶³ He is the One Who has revealed the book to you. Some of its verses are foundational and decisive [Mohkamat], forming the basis of the book while other verses are allegorical, given as examples [Mutashabihat].¹⁶⁴ But those whose hearts are steeped in perversity and seek to misguide, attempt to give meanings to these verses according to their own interpretation. Only God and those who have developed deeper knowledge [Ar-Rasikhuna fil elm] understand these meanings, who say, "We believe in it, and it is all from our Sustainer." Only people of understanding will take note of such guidance.¹⁶⁵

163. When one reads such verses from the Qur'an and notes the clarity and forcefulness of how these self-evident facts are stated, one has no alternative but to accept the fact that only God can make such statements—the fact that nothing in this universe escapes His surveillance and care and that each one of us is shaped in our mothers' wombs in the way that He dictates and molds. Yet we continue to marginalize God in our lives and fail to respond to His call for servitude to God and mutual commitments to fellow human beings.

164. This is one of the most powerful verses of the Qur'an, whereby God gave guidance on how to read and understand the Qur'an and how to implement Qur'anic guidance in our human societies. The Prophet was a living example, and his contemporaries were a living experiment on how to translate Qur'anic guidance into transforming lives and societies—indeed, the whole world! There are verses in the Qur'an that are fundamental and foundational and are independent of time or place, such as belief in God, truth and justice, moral and ethical values, human rights and human obligations, and so forth. Yes, the form and shape of their expression and codification in our social constructs might be colored by geography, climate, social norm, ethnicity, and human conditions, but in essence they continue to exist as fundamental truths defining our

existence and our relationships. It is like a light ray; when it moves through a prism, it shows up in different color spectrums to the visible eye. It is aesthetically beautiful, and this makes it more relevant to our daily experience, but the core of it stays true to the light that gets dispersed into a beautiful rainbow of colors or thoughts or expressions bound to a common and universal truth about God and His creation.

These verses also provide a basis and a boundary within which other sets of Qur’anic instructions and suggestions need to be framed and adjusted over time, over geographic differences, and over various human conditions. Family laws, inheritance, civil-society norms, clothing, eating habits, prayer times, civil defense, governance, religious and social celebrations, and so on can be adjusted based on prevailing norms, physical conditions, geographic locations, cultural nuances, level of education, mode of economic lives, and so forth, as long as they do not conflict or contradict the fundamental aspects of God’s creation and our common humanity.

165. Too often, we fail to live up to the foundational aspects of Qur’anic teachings and give too much importance to other aspects, such as what sect we belong to (e.g., Shia or Sunni), what school of thought we follow (e.g., Hanafi or Maliki), how to clothe ourselves, whether to have a beard or no beard, should we wear the hijab, and so on. These types of conflicts of priorities and trivialization of faith and practices create disunity among Muslims and disable them from unifying their lives and societies. Such disunity creates opportunities for competing ideologies and civilizations to overpower them and marginalize them while at the same time creating an atmosphere of mistrust and exclusion that prohibits people from coming together to create a pluralistic society where all forms of faith in God are practiced and valued. Our focus should be to unite humanity around a set of fundamental values of godhead and human rights and obligations as espoused by the great teachers like Abraham, Moses, Jesus, and Mohammad and their torchbearers in various religions, ideologies, and civilizations throughout human history—ancient as well as contemporary.

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REFLECTION

These verses draw attention to two fundamental aspects of Qur'anic teachings: our lives are nurtured and controlled by God, and the Guidance of the Qur'an needs to be taken in proper perspective to fully benefit from God's teachings.

ACTION

Individual Muslims and Muslim communities have a serious obligation to organize their lives and their societies in light of true understanding of the Qur'anic teachings where priorities are defined according to what is foundational and not what is peripheral, and unity of thought and unity of the purpose become the core priorities that can lead to the fullest human development.

Key Arabic Terms

- 1. Arham:** Means “womb” (mother’s womb) that all mammals are conceived, nurtured, and born from. The root word is *rhm* or mercy, the same root word for God’s major attributes of mercy and compassion. Mother’s womb is the vessel of mercy for each human being, and the mother is the most merciful human being to a child, by all measures. All blood relationships stem from the womb and define our family and, to a large extent, cultural and social structure. The womb is the place where God initiates the creative process of a human fetus, breathes His essence into the child, and brings forth a human child with his or her unique look, features, and all necessary building blocks for brain functions and body functions, along with his or her mental and spiritual capabilities, to continue to evolve into a grown human being. What happens inside the womb is a living miracle that is being repeated millions of times a day, yet we hardly reflect on it, and worse yet, women are not given the honor that God has blessed them with. No man should dare say that he is better than his mother!
- 2. Mohkamat and Mutashabihat** (foundational versus allegorical): Two key words that perhaps are most profound in their meaning and interpretation yet are mostly misunderstood and misused, especially the second word. Mohkamat is derived from the word *Ahkama*, meaning “he or she prevented or judged or gave decision (something or

some ideas),” whereas Ahkama implies he or she made things stable, firm, secure (i.e., prevent from change, alteration, or differing opinions). In other words, some verses in the Qur’an are foundational in nature and should be treated as inherently true and a part of the natural world that God has created—realities such as God as the Creator, truth regarding our existence and purpose, natural laws, human nature, historical narratives, requirements regarding rituals, and so on. This does not mean that our understanding and awareness of these sometimes self-evident and at times very subtle concepts would not continue to evolve (hopefully in a better direction) so that human beings can better align ourselves with the nature in which God created us—“*the nature of God in which He shaped the human nature*” (30:30).

Mutashabihat: Derived from *shibh*—likeness or resemblance or analogy—meaning these verses provide guidance and explain certain topics, ideas, or rules either using analogy, resemblance that we can relate to from our contemporary human experience, or analogy that can be extended and continuously refined with human evolution and progress. The books of revelations have undergone revisions from the Torah to the Bible to the Qur’an as was necessitated by evolution and progress of human societies. The same is left open for future generations, where we need to accept the foundational aspects of our belief in God and core human values and societal principles, but we should exercise continuous intellectual and spiritual pursuits to refine and develop rules and regulations (especially social, political, and economic). Rules and regulations that were articulated in the Qur’an and put into practice by earlier Muslims were done as best efforts and attempts to be consistent and responsive to prevailing social, moral, and economic constructs. They were careful not to violate the foundational principles and values while at the same time moving the society in the right direction in a way that gradual change is possible and beneficial. Please see the key concept section for further elaboration on this very important verse (3:7) in the Qur’an, which has serious implications for the millennium Muslims as well as the global community of faithful people.

- 3. Ar-Rasikhuna fil elm** (deeper foundation in knowledge and wisdom): Those who are deeply rooted with knowledge and wisdom, not necessarily pure scholars who may have

factual knowledge or literal understanding of the Qur'an but do not necessarily comprehend the underlying values and principles and realities of life, which sometimes are more easily found in a common but thoughtful human being. A simple analogy would be the role of healing in the maintenance of our bodies. Much of our medical education and technology is geared toward diagnosis of abnormality and treatment intervention, which are necessary but very little time and research are devoted toward understanding the true essence of healing and the self-regulating healing power that our bodies are equipped with already. At some level, clerics and religious scholars have done more harm than good, especially when ordinary people blindly follow them and relinquish their individual and collective responsibility to understand faith and how to be a better human being (as opposed to a better person of religion).

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