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# Message of Devotion

The Story of Anna, Mary and Jesus  
According to the Quran

Mustafa İslâmođlu



DÜŞÜN YAYINCILIK



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## Introduction

*Praise is to God, who molded man from earth, and then breathed life into his body and bestowed upon him consciousness, intelligence, and comprehension so as to elevate those who strive for blessings through sincere faith. He brought humans into existence whereas there were none before, and established His authority over the creatures that inhabit the earth for an appointed term.*

*Peace be upon Muhammad, the messenger of God. His life exemplifies the epitome of divine guidance through which he left behind the legacy of final revelation, the Quran. Thus, God ordained that divine revelation be offered to all people after Muhammad, as a miracle for eternity. He is the last prophet whom God sent with revelation to man, in the chain of prophets that begins with Adam and includes Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus.*

Peace, love, and respect to you, my readers, who are at this moment contemplating these words and who are my brothers and sisters in faith or my equals in acts of humanity.

The original name of this work is "Message of Devotion." We have now chosen to present it in English with additional sub-title of "The Story of Anna, Mary and Jesus According to the Quran." This sub-title provides a brief summary of the book we authored. It's likely that some readers will react with surprise when they ponder the sub-title, thinking, "It is expected for the Quran to mention Jesus, but is Mary in the Quran as well?" For readers who are foreign to the subject, there is an additional surprise in the answer to the following question:

“How many verses are there in the Quran about the mother of Muhammad?”

The answer to this question is none. Yes, there is no verse in the Quran about Amina, the mother of Prophet Muhammad. There is nothing to be amazed at in this for the true believers who have faith in Quran, accepting it as being the divine word of God. After all, the Quran is a divine revelation originating from God and transmitted through Prophet Muhammad, who has no role in the creation of it. The Quran is independent from the private life and historic personification of Prophet Muhammad. For this reason, the saddest and happiest events in the life of Prophet Muhammad are not mentioned in the Quran. Examples include the deaths of his beloved wife, Khadijah, and his uncle, Abu Talib, who had extended his protective wings over him after his mother and father had died; the sufferings he went through during the three years of boycotts by his own tribesmen; his trip to Taif, where he was ridiculed by the people and stoned by the children; his marriages to his other wives; the loss of his daughters, who died one after the other; the births of his beloved grandchildren; the birth and – only two years later – the death of his son Abraham ... none of these events, which left very deep wounds in his life, took place in the Quran.

While there is not even a single verse about Amina, the mother of Prophet Muhammad, how many verses are there about Mary, mother of Jesus, in the Quran?

There is a complete chapter in the Quran named Mary, consisting of 98 verses. Furthermore, she is mentioned in the following chapters and verses: chapter 21, verse 91; chapter 23, verse 50; chapter 2, verse 253; chapter 3, verses 35-37 and 42-47; chapter 4, verses 156 and 171; and chapter 5, verses 75 and 110. If we include the expression “son of Mary,” then the number of times Mary is mentioned in the Quran increases considerably.



It is also quite meaningful that the Quran refers to Prophet Jesus with the title “son of Mary.” Through this, the Quran conveys three messages: 1) It elevates Mary as the mother of a prophet and a symbol of chastity, rejecting the slander made by some of her contemporaries who called her unchaste after she became pregnant with no husband; 2) It rejects the concept of Jesus as the son of God in Christian trinity, emphasizing that he was son of Mary and no one else; and 3) It rejects the male-dominated culture of Rome, in which only men were rulers and absolute rulers at that. The emphasis on referring to Jesus as the son of Mary had to be accepted after he made a remarkable influence on history and he was born of a woman without the aid of a man.

The conclusion that results from this limited comparison is thus: the Quran’s content is determined by its goal. The intended goal is nothing other than divine guidance.

Life is a road and mankind is the wayfarer. There is a great need for guidance and direction for mankind while traveling on this road. The divine revelation is that guidance. Without the existence of this guidance, human beings may get lost in this unending and perilous ocean of life. Surely, the one who knows the weaknesses and qualities of mankind is his creator. A creator who possessed the power to create magnificent creatures like man and did not care for him would be completely inept. The Quran asks this question: “How could it be that He who has created [all] should not know [all]?” (Chapter 67, verse 14) Because He does know His creation, He also knows qualities and weaknesses of His creation. He sets up the infrastructure that suits the existential foundations of His creation. God teaches about this infrastructure via revelations through prophets. The revelation of the Quran is the pinnacle of all previous divine revelations, carrying the unchanging values of them all, and Prophet Muhammad is the last ring on this chain of the prophets.

Revelation is a divine construction project. The recipient of this divine construction is mankind. This is true because mankind is responsible for constructing a life that suits the goals of creation and existence on earth. Here is a scenario of questions: Although it is fine to acknowledge man's capabilities, who is going to ensure his construction is suitable for such a life? Can one be a master without first serving as an apprentice? If a man can become a master of life, should he then be practicing mastery? How can man achieve these difficult tasks?

Divine revelation is the answer to these questions. The goal of revelation in the Quran is to build mankind. The Quran makes its construction a reality through various means. The Quran builds the imagination of each recipient with its map of concepts. It correctly defines the concepts that we build our lives on, such as good-bad, right-wrong, real-unreal, justice-injustice, improvement-decline, advancement-regression, enduring-fading, gain-loss, and victory-failure. Whoever constructed the meanings of these concepts for man would be the Lord of man. If the revelation clearly establishes these concepts and man utilizes them from a lofty perspective, then God increases the person's knowledge and wisdom.

The Quran builds the mind of the recipient by its propositions. A mind that works properly is to be constructed over an imagination that in turn is constructed by the correct definitions of concepts. In order for the statements of "This is good ... That is bad," to be correct propositions, the concepts of "good" and "bad" have to be defined correctly. A proposition whose concepts are correctly defined is instrumental for constructing the mind of its recipient. For instance, the Quran does such construction with examples like those that follow:

“Your Sustainer has willed upon Himself the law of grace and mercy.” (Chapter 6, verse 54)

“There is nothing like unto Him.” (Chapter 42, verse 11)

“But if they desist, then all hostility shall cease, save against those who [willfully] do wrong.”

(Chapter 2, verse 193)

“All believers are but brethren.” (Chapter 49, verse 10)

3. The Quran does build the character of its recipient through its examples. It presents good ones as role models and bad ones as admonitions to learn from. It teaches the nature of the struggle between good and bad. Each of its stories sheds light on a different dimension of life. Here are some examples:

The story of Adam and Satan is mentioned in seven places in Quran, each stressing a different point about choices and consequences of transgression. Both Adam and Satan had committed sin. However, Adam repented for his sin and became a redeemed man; Satan defended his sin and became a rejected soul.

The story of the great flood of Noah’s time is the story of a man who made a ship on land as ordered by God. The message to him was, “You do what is commanded upon you, and when the day comes that a sea is needed, then the Lord of the sea will bring it to your feet.” The story shows that where there is transgression, it is natural for there to be a deluge of rain, so we should strive to be the island of good deeds in the middle of the ocean of sins. Floods are a calamity for the unbelieving ones and an opportunity for the believers.

The story of Abraham confirms the protection of God and that no fire of Nimrod can burn such a faith as Abraham’s. The story of sacrifice is the story about willingly facing death.

Giving for the sake of God ultimately means receiving a greater amount than what was given. If you sacrifice your most beloved Ishmael just for the sake of God, then God will not only grant him back to you but also will give you Isaac in addition.

And the story of Yusuf conveys the message, "Do not underestimate what one person can do." A person with virtue, honesty, knowledge, wisdom and understanding can change the fate of a whole society. Furthermore, remember the wisdom of paying attention to which part of your shirt is torn?

The story of Moses gives the message that every Pharaoh has a Moses assigned to him. It says when the injustice of Pharaoh reaches the wombs of mothers, look for Moses right in Pharaoh's palace.

Now Jesus...

This book in your hands deals with the message of the Quran regarding the story of Jesus. The passage of Quran that is dealt with in this book takes place in chapter 3, verses 33-47. In these passages, there are actually two interwoven stories that are significant. Anna, Mary, and Jesus (grandmother, mother, and son) make up the family trio in this story. The second story is the narration of Prophet Zachariah and his son, Prophet John. This story is in fact narrated within the context of the first.

All these righteous persons are spoken about within the context of their contribution to the process that is the advent of Jesus. At the center of the interwoven events is Jesus himself. Everyone who has a role in this process that affects Jesus makes their presence known only to the extent of their contribution.

In this book, we call this process the devotional process in three generations because the concept of devotion best expresses the completeness of these events as they are retold. In

fact, the event itself is an act of devotion. This makes it easy to understand what is meant by being raised up amongst the family of Imran as mentioned in verse 33, which takes place at the beginning of the story.

God does not randomly select anyone for His intended purpose. This selection made by God is not a secret known only to Him, but rather there is an explanation for each selection found, within the laws of cause and effect. The relationship between cause and effect forms the backbone of divine universal laws.

The message of devotion that is told here should be understood in the context of relations between cause and effect and should be pondered upon by those possessing a heart that thinks with remembrance, contemplation, and analysis, all of which lead to reasoning.

The results of these actions of reasoning should be carried forth as solutions for problems that originate in our lifetime. Only then will we liken ourselves to the virtuous heroes spoken of in Quranic verses. If we are not doing so, then this would mean that we are treating the Holy Scriptures as dead texts. In this case, the holy books in turn would treat as dead those who refuse to acknowledge their glorious creation message and would punish them with their own self-doubting attitudes.

No person should ever forget that, "for the one who reads with due attention the meaning of Quranic revelations," as stated in chapter 4, verse 82, the Quran shall continue to reveal its wisdom. Only certain people would realize this fact, because the Quran is a divine message – its text is revealed only once, but its meaning is revealed countless times.

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Here I would like to mention that there are many people and communities that contributed in the process of making our book, "The Message of Devotion," available in English.

First, I should say thanks to the friends of WISDOMNET, which shouldered the project of making our works available in English by translation, beginning with "Kingdom of Heart" and "The Message of Devotion."

Without Sakir Yucel, Ph.D., who took the responsibility of organizing this challenging task of completing the English translation, it could not have become a reality.

I also owe thanks to our friend Murat Guzel, Ph.D., who supported this project with his financial contributions.

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At last, I would like to mention dear Mr. Bilgin Erdogan with the prayer, "May God accept your service," as he is a student of Quran who served with volunteerism in every step of the publication of "The Message of Devotion" in English.

Wishing that you will be entrusted to the owner of your heart ...

Mustafa Islamoglu

February 9, 2009

Istanbul, Turkey

# SECTION ONE





## Devotion

Devotion is about being conscious of what you own.

Something dedicated to God is not lost. Instead, its value is compounded, and the one who dedicated it receives its benefits multiplied many times over.

What does it mean to own something?

Do we have things we don't pay attention to? And do we really own the things we think we own?

Does everything belong to someone? Who do we belong to?

Are there things we think we own – but we are actually enslaved to them instead?

These questions are not mere literary exercises. They are rather vital quests. A person who takes life seriously has to look for the answers to these questions just as seriously.

There are people who own things, or have responsibility over people, but are not conscious of this position, or do not take it seriously. That is why they do not take care of their possessions or their charges. Even though the right of disposition is given to them, they would not protect or look after what is theirs to look after.

Reminders are given to these people in terms of taking responsibility for what is bestowed upon them.

“O you who have attained to faith! Ward off from yourselves and those who are close to you that fire [of the here-

after] whose fuel is human beings and stones.” (Chapter 66, verse 6)

It is surely the proof of maturity for a person to take responsibility for things that are entrusted to him or her. Maturity is not a factor of age but responsibility and capability.

Among people, some are under the guardianship of others in one way or another. A person’s family is dependent on the head of the family; employees are dependent on their employer; citizens are dependent on government leaders.

Meanwhile, some people are “owned” by inanimate objects and abstract concepts, such as career, property, and riches – each of which has a lower value than the person’s own being. The strange thing about this is that the person thinks he owns those things, while in reality, they own him. Consider it: Isn’t the master of a person the one to whom he submits? Many people live their lives in pursuit of possessions. If we do that, our possessions become our master.

What would happen if a person becomes conscious of ownership? At this point, devotion comes into play – we can correctly dedicate our lives in order not to waste them in fruitless pursuit of things that ultimately cannot benefit us.

The most valuable of our “possessions,” undoubtedly, are our own souls and the people we have guardianship over. These have never been as carelessly treated or as wasted as in our current time.

One of the most shocking examples of how people – the most noble of all creation – degrade themselves is how they devote their souls to objects of equal or lower value.

Devotion is almost a destiny. If we have something we want to win over and we dedicate all our feelings, thoughts, and actions toward this item, then we become devoted to it – in effect, owned by it.

There is no human who escapes being devoted to something.

In this contemporary world, all values are inverted – the disgraceful is elevated while the honorable is seen as worthless, objects become more valued than people, long-lasting and lofty values are replaced with temporary and fake values

...

People devote themselves to temporary pleasures ...  
to their stomach ...  
to their careers ...  
to their feelings and desires ...

The descendants of Adam have proven their talent in inventing idols to which to devote their souls, all throughout history. Behind this inclination lies something in human nature that has a need for submission. Just as soon as a person loses sight of the real God, he immediately begins to find a fake god to worship.

At times in history, the ruling powers in society – whether in political or traditional religious circles – have helped foster this inclination. These leaders put distractions in front of people so they would not slow down the dissemination of imperialism. Meanwhile, ruling economic powers race with each other to offer their products, like the toys of grown-up children, to fill demands – and then to create more demands. They create their own kind of tyranny in their efforts to sell more and more objects for their own benefit.

And at times, these powers have joined in unholy alliances, with religious powers working with government and economic powers all in an effort to line their own pockets, without regard for the people they are supposed to be taking care of. When their worldly profits – or their economic, religious,

or political positions – are endangered, they work to link their own positions with broader patriotism to suppress disagreement. In fact, it is nothing but an institution of injustice.

These well-honed methods, however, do work. They combine with man's inherent need to worship to lead people, and these miserable folks begin devoting their lives to these distractions; for example, constantly "needing" the latest bigger, better, or more technologically advanced gadgets. This effectively places these objects in the role of an object of worship.

This type of devotion indeed is not true devotion but waste – waste of a person's life, family, belongings and own being, in summary, everything. This kind of spending is directed to consume, not to produce. This person has gambled with his most valuable capital, his life, and is cheated out of it. He has entered the deepest type of bankruptcy. His life is wasted.

If a man should choose an object of his devotion or allegiance, it should be on higher in value than his own self, so that his value would not be degraded by his own hands.

Well in this case, what should he look for? Among creation, is there anything to which a person can devote himself and not be consumed?

No; no again, by logic, by reason, by common sense, by scriptures. Among created beings, there is none above mankind to which man can submit. Given that mankind is the most noble of creation, any search for submission among created beings is vain. What is left, then, for this quest is only one thing: that is the creator.

We will call submitting oneself or one's own child to the service of God "devotion."

Undoubtedly, the highest of all the gates to devotion to enter is the gate that opens to the creator. The highest devotee is the one devoted to Him, and the most mindful and profitable one is the one devoted in His sake.

Becoming a devotee to God is a position of worthiness, a position that must be earned. And in His pure sake only the pure may offer a consecration, and only the pure may be consecrated.

In history and today, God has sent to nations messengers to show them the straight path on which to live and die honorably, while saving them from drowning in impurity when they get stuck in ignorance and immorality, losing their genuine values, degenerating by their own hands.

Messengers, trustworthy ones, martyrs, scholars, good humans! These are the couriers of purity, chosen by God, the Creator, to enlighten the darkening nights of these nations. The tradition of divine revolution ended with the last prophet; however, the heritage of everlasting message does continue to be carried on the shoulders of all the believers as a duty and responsibility as long as man exists. As in the past, whatever methods the nations found happiness with, they will also find it with the same methods in the future. The first requirement for this is a healthy staff that can function like a seed, an origin, a kindling – no matter how small in number – they are going to ferment the nation's transformation.

“And that there might grow out of you a community (of people) who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state.” (Chapter 3, verse 104)

There is no doubt that the rise of this devoted group of people depends upon self-sacrifice by very sincere believers. Thus, devotion to God plays a role in God's selection process for choosing the group that can take the lead among societies. It all starts with the devotional process.

The fact that there are few people worthy of this important duty, especially in this age, shows that people are in need of leadership for the nation of believers. To some degree, the reason for such a shortage is the lack of people with the necessary competence. That means the raw material is missing. Many people would agree with the opinion that, among the biggest problems of the Islamic movement, the first is the leadership problem. The masses depend on the solution to this leadership matter, waiting as if their hands were tied. Almost none of these people who complain about this matter, however, put much effort into finding a solution, or they don't know their duty and act upon it. They seem to have left the solution totally up to God.

In fact, our Lord has offered prescriptions in His Quran for the solution to the problem. In this case, there is no need for a new prescription; the need is to comprehend and be familiar with the already existing prescriptions and put them in operation. Through this, the people who complain about their situation would be tested in their sincerity.

Think of those like Mary, who was being devoted to sake of God and then, when she herself became a parent, devoted her own precious child to God's sake. Think of those like Zachariah, like John, who assisted the devotees. People like these do not complain about a lack of leadership – they simply do their own part, and by doing such, help solve the problem. On the other hand, think of a person who had neither dedicated parents like Mary, nor a circle of supporters like Zachariah and John, nor he supported others. When these people complain about the leadership problem, they will not be taken very seriously.

## Nations and Their Salvation

*“Behold, God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imran above all mankind in one line of descent.” (Chapter 3, verse 33)*

This verse from the Quran lists, among the chosen people, people like Imran<sup>1</sup> and his wife Anna<sup>2</sup>, who are not messengers but are mentioned beside the prophets Adam, Noah, and Abraham. This shows that selection is not just for messengers, but even for the leading personalities who will grow up and will play a role in societies’ salvation.

This choice God made, was it a random one? Or were there attributes that qualified these people to be candidates? What could those attributes be that give priority to any candidate for nomination?

It is a fact that we live in a world of reasons. This reality of the whole universe working through cause and effect is part of God’s wisdom and design. From this angle, even the most miraculous events have an explanation and wisdom in this cause-and-effect relationship. The Quran calls this *“Sunnatullah”* – God’s law and design. Man’s reasoning may fall

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1 Known as Joachim in English literature. Encyclopedia Britannica

2 Known as Anna, Anne or Ann in English literature, Hanna in Islamic literature. Encyclopedia Britannica

short sometimes in comprehending the wisdom and the reason behind some events in God's design; the reasoning was constructed by a much higher intellect that is complete. This is part of God's wisdom.

Yes, then, what were these attributes that these abovementioned families and individuals had that enabled them to be among the candidates for nomination for leadership in their societies? Are we given information about any of these qualities?

The Quran replies to this question – “yes.”

The narration of devotion we are detailing in this book you are holding is revealed by the book in which there is no doubt. That book, the Quran, has an all-inclusive universal message that is not limited to a specific time, place, or people. However, it sometimes expresses a universal message by using a specific time, place and concrete event with people who are named. The stories narrated in the Quran are selected by God with great purpose, as He knows mankind's problems in the past and the future. Why is it that of the thousands of prophets, only a few more than 20 are named and their stories narrated in the Quran?

When the Quran draws attention to a matter with an example, it shows that this matter potentially will affect mankind in the future as a major issue. It is even possible to chart common problems looking at Quran's sample histories. These range from common community problems with which many societies have struggled, to religious problems as people became diverted from pure worship of God toward factionalism and devotion toward other objects. For the Quran to take the rich human experience from the specific time and place where it occurred and retell it to future generations is one of countless forms of God's mercy.



One key story that shows solutions for human problems is the saga of the exemplary devotion that Imran, his wife Anna, their daughter Mary, and Mary's son Prophet Jesus demonstrated with their lives, their commitment to the Almighty, and the things that they gave up for the sake of their Lord.

Imran was Prophet Jesus' grandfather and was a pious person, highly respected in the community. Prophet Jesus' grandmother was called Anna. Anna was a very religious and chaste woman. She had reached a mature age without bearing children. She possessed the desire to have a child of her own; thus, she prayed and wept to the Lord asking for a pious child. Her Lord accepted her supplication and she became pregnant. In gratitude to her Lord, she decided to give her child into the service of the sanctuary.

But Imran said to Anna, "What if the child is a girl, as girls are not accepted for the service of the sanctuary?" They both feared that if the child was a girl, they would not be able to keep their promise to God.

For Anna had made a promise to her Lord upon conceiving. She promised to dedicate her child to the service of the sacred mosque and sanctuary in Jerusalem. She made this promise in the surety of thought that she would deliver a boy, as only males were caretakers of the sanctuary at the time.

"Behold! The Wife of Imran said, 'O my Lord! I do dedicate unto thee that which is in my womb, for thy special service, so accept this of me, for thou hearest and knowest of all things.'"  
" (Chapter 3, verse 35)

It is the devotional act of Anna, Imran's wife, that started this process of devotion that continued through three generations: mother, child, and grandchild. Mary, the one Anna devoted to God, was given an exceptional mission in the history

of mankind; her son Prophet Jesus completed this mission as a prophet. Then Zachariah came into play, and there followed John's miraculous birth. Three of these people ended up sacrificing their lives for their belief. (Prophet Jesus is sacrificed spiritually.) The initial impetus for all of this is the devotion of Anna: A tree of devotion flourished from her sincere supplication. Her act of devotion constitutes the first ring in the chain of this great devotional process. It was the reason for the divine selection of herself and her family.

Thus, we want to draw our attention to this phenomenon of devotion, which is the core of this process. We do believe that one of the wisdoms in God's immortalization of this story in Quran is to bring attention to the phenomenon of Anna and her graceful act of devotion, which started the process that brought about leaders who grew up to be able to shoulder the heritage of prophethood.

The nation of believers – which is now like a rosary of prayer beads missing the leading bead and scattered all around – must begin raising their own leaders even before they are born out of their mothers' wombs. So they will devote their own Marys – they will not fall into the mistake of just lazily waiting for a Jesus to come and give glad tidings. The nation of believers will appropriate the methods and guidelines that the Quran puts forward for them in an attempt to bring up their own guides. They believe and know that there is no nation without a savior in this sense. Every nation will raise its own savior itself, and the nation of believers will undertake leadership again with a group of chosen ones consisting of not only one but thousands of saviors. Doesn't the news of the Quran support this fact?

“... and (in God) all people have a guide.” (Chapter 13, verse 7)

This is what should never slip from our minds: God put in place divine laws for each and every thing He created. Everything happens within the framework of these divine laws. Of course, among these laws, there are rules for creating broad change. Our Lord immortalizes some of the positive and negative examples from history by narrating them in the Quran. After that, God advises often never to forget them.

“Thus (it is): no change wilt thou ever find in God’s way; yea, no deviation wilt thou ever find in God’s way!” (Chapter 35, verse 43; chapter 17, verse 77; chapter 33, verse 62; chapter 48, verse 23)

God’s law is unchangeable, and it is futile to expect it to change. So what is left for us is to comprehend the wisdom of this law and to comply by it. First we need to understand the message.

We believe that none of the examples in the Quran are for mere entertainment or for the sake of storytelling. Furthermore, the examples selected to be included in the Quran weren’t picked by lottery, or chosen at random. The disbelievers at the time of the last prophet, Muhammad<sup>3</sup>, reacted to these parables that Quran lifted from the dusty depths of the history as if they were mere stories, rather than lessons:

“(And so) whenever Our messages are conveyed to them, they but say, ‘Fables of ancient times!’ ” (Chapter 83, verse 13)

Rather, our Lord gave these examples for people to be advised by them:

“And (thus it is that) God propounds parables unto men, so that they might bethink themselves (of the truth).” (Chapter 14, verse 25)

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<sup>3</sup> It is customary for Muslims to say “Peace be upon him” after the name of Prophet Muhammad, or any other prophet.

“And so we propound these parables unto man: but none can grasp their innermost meaning save those who (of Us) are aware.” (Chapter 29, verse 43)

“Had We bestowed this Quran from on high upon a mountain, thou wouldst indeed see it humbling itself, breaking asunder for awe of God. And (all) such parables We propound unto men, so that they might (learn to) think.” (Chapter 59, verse 21)

In the Quran, positive examples are given as models to emulate and negative examples are given as lessons. Muslims cannot regard them as mere fairy tales. This book harbors within it the unchanging moral values of mankind, and the meaning within the tales is not peculiar to a certain nation, age, race, class, culture, or climate.

The types of people the Quran describes are prototypes of people. Times may change, and places too. Cultures, lives, living standards, and environments can change. But man’s basic nature does not change. For example, he is given to contention (chapter 18, verse 54). He is created with the inclination toward ignorance and injustice (chapter 33, verse 72). He inclines toward evil (chapter 12, verse 33). He is hasty (chapter 17, verse 11). Man will never change in these core attributes. There will never come a time when humans reach perfection and maturity by cleaning up all these viruses carried in their nature. As long as these characteristics exist, man’s need for a divine message won’t diminish. There is only one thing left for him to do – safeguard himself by the guidance of revelation from these weaknesses that come from his nature.

It is for this reason that the Quran provides prototypes for guidance. With a pharaoh type, the Quran illustrates a typology that exists in all times and locations, and it lists the at-

tributes belonging to this type of person. These include disbelief, dominion, injustice, arrogance, transgression, overindulgence. The specific names and times may change, but what does not change is the character and behavior. Wherever and whenever you might be living, you can find such people in your world, country, region, city, neighborhood, or even in your family. In order to know who this prototype symbolizes, it is enough to know the characteristics.

Abraham and Moses are prototypes as well. They are the positive prototypes – ideal humans and ideal believers. Their characteristics are also clear. You can recognize them in different figures within your society. They oppose injustice, submitting themselves in truth, siding with the oppressed, and standing against the oppressor.

We have said that the owner of the divine message did not choose the examples He used in His book via a lottery. The limited number of parables the Lord presented in His book were not mere coincidence. When our Lord selected these examples, surely He did so by wisdom, as He always employs wisdom in every act. It was for good reasons that the examples were selected, emerging from the others and becoming immortalized. In our opinion, it is possible to summarize these reasons in two principles:

1. These examples illustrate the models of human typology, of both individuals and societies.
2. Their stories are lessons that capture the problems and dilemmas people encounter, and offer solutions to people and communities that find themselves in similar situations.

When these examples are given, sometimes very concrete language is used, and it is stressed that these examples are parables. This can be seen, for instance, in the last verses of

chapter Tahreem, which delineates the social and communal standing of women, and addresses the Muslim leadership through the wives of the last prophet. These verses carry a clear message.

“For those who are bent on denying the truth God has propounded a parable in (the stories of) Noah’s wife and Lot’s wife. And for those who have faith, God has propounded a parable in (the story of) pharaoh’s wife. And (We have propounded yet another parable of God-consciousness in the story of) Mary, the daughter of Imran.” (Chapter 66, verses 10-12)

Yes, the first topic presented in these examples is that humans are dealt with in two categories: disbelievers and believers. Two women are presented as the exemplars and the leaders of the disbelievers; furthermore, they are the wives of prophets – Noah and Lot. The theme in these examples is denial and betrayal. It becomes clear why the Quran seeks certain basic rules on the marriages of believing men and women in order to establish an Islamic family model by pointing out to the phenomenon of a believing man and a nonbelieving woman.

The believers constitute the second part of the example aforementioned: the wife of the pharaoh, and Mary, the daughter of Imran. There is a prototype presented here, with Asiyah being the wife of pharaoh, especially for the believing woman who could not find her true surroundings. Asiyah is presented as a model who wrote the legendary history of protecting her faith against disbelief, while not getting caught in the illusions of worldly magnificence and pleasures. This parable of course constitutes a source of strength and resistance for the believing woman – surely even in this contemporary century – who encounters a fight to protect her faith against

the dominance of men who have become pharaohs. The second example Quran gave of a believing woman is Mary.

Here we are going to examine the act of devotion that brought Mary and so many other exemplary ones into light. Asiyah and Mary are the parables of different dimensions. The first one is the prototype of an individual struggle, as if seen through a concave lens. However the second one is more the prototype of social struggle – even though there is naturally an individual side to it – as if seen through a convex lens. God has saved these examples of struggles as parables of advice and lesson for the future history of mankind by taking them into the Quran.

So we will draw the historic framework of a divine parable, which we believe interests us and our society dearly, as chosen by God for us to seek advice from. We will study the parable from respected sources, beginning with the verses of Quran. At the same time, we will draw attention to contributions this event could bring into our lives and the future of the Islamic life.

However, before we move on, for the point of better understanding the verses of Quran narrating this event, let us briefly touch upon the atmosphere in Medina where these verses were revealed and the events pointed out as circumstances surrounding the revelation.

## The Environment in Which the Story of Devotion is Revealed

The first section of chapter 3 in the Quran consists of 32 verses and was revealed right after the Battle of Badr, as understood from the content of these verses.

Verse 33 as well as approximately 80 other verses that explain the story of devotion are revealed years later than the first section. The later verses came in the ninth year of the Islamic calendar. The reason for these verses' revelation was the appointment of a committee of ambassadors from Najran to Madinah. This event must have been the most important event of that year, because the year was known as the "year of ambassadors" (*amu'l-wufuud*).

Najran is a region in the Arabian Peninsula between Hijaz and Yemen. The inhabitants settled along the migration paths. When the message of Jesus arrived in the region, the people in the region were suffering under oppressive, racist, and theocratic rule. The Jewish dictator at that time tried to stand in front of the message of Jesus, which spread by the efforts of self-sacrificing people. He went to such extremes in this case that his decree is mentioned in chapter 85. He went so far as to order people to be burned alive in trenches.

As time passed, the pure teachings of Jesus were distorted here as in other places, and the principle of oneness of God was lost.

It is here that the history of Christians in Najran is summarized. Although its history is short, Najran was one of the



most powerful countries of the area when Medina's Islamic government was established. The Najran Confederation consisted of 73 regions of settlements, and its army had the capacity of 120,000 men.

During this time Medina's Islamic government became more and more of a political power in the area within a considerably short period of time and – with the conquest of Mecca – extended its weight even further. No one was courageous enough to stand in front of this new power because they feared that they would suffer a crushing defeat. Meanwhile the Najran leaders, like the other regional powers of the Arabian Peninsula, sent a large committee of ambassadors in order to know this new power more closely and possibly sign a political non-aggression pact.

Sixty people were in this delegation, which occurred in the ninth year of the Islamic calendar.<sup>4</sup> Fourteen of these people were from the leading staff. They chose three leaders from amongst their delegation to represent them. These three representatives carried out the discussions with the messenger of God.

Between the messenger and the leaders of the delegation, debates took place in regards to Jesus. The messenger of God narrated to them the miraculous birth of Jesus and initiated thought-provoking questions against the delegation's defense of the polytheism of trinity by letting them rethink their position.

It is in this environment that the verses consisting of our subject were revealed.

“And (all) such parables We propound unto men, so that they might (learn to) think.” (Chapter 59, verse 21)

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<sup>4</sup> As reported by Wahidi.

## Quranic Framework

Chapter 3, verses 33-45:

“Behold, God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imran above all mankind.

(They are spiritually and ethnically) in one line of descent.

And God was all-hearing, all-knowing when the woman of Imran prayed: ‘O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow (the child) that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!’

However, when she had given birth to the child, she said: ‘O my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female’ – while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, and (fully aware) that no male child (she might have hoped for) could ever have been like this female – ‘and I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.’

And thereupon her Sustainer accepted the female child with goodly acceptance, and caused her to grow up in a splendid way, and placed her in the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: ‘O Mary, whence came this unto thee?’ She would answer: ‘It is from God; behold God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.’

In that same time and place, Zachariah prayed unto his Lord, saying: 'O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me (too), out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hearest all prayer.'

Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: 'God sends thee the glad tidings of (the birth of) John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from God, and (shall be) outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous.'

(Zachariah) exclaimed: 'O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren?' Answered (the angel): 'Thus it is: God does what He wills.'

(Zachariah) prayed: 'O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!' Said (the angel): 'Thy sign shall be that for three days thou wilt not speak unto men other than by gestures. And remember thy Sustainer unceasingly, and extol His limitless glory by night and by day.'

And lo! The angels said: 'O Mary! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world.'

O Mary! Remain thou truly devout unto thy Sustainer, and prostrate thyself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down (before Him).

This account of something that was beyond the reach of thy perception We (now) reveal unto thee: for thou wert not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary's guardian, and thou wert not with them when they contended (about it) with one another.

Lo! The angels said: O Mary! Behold, God sends thee the glad tiding, through a word from Him, (of a son) who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and (shall be) of those who are drawn near unto God.' "

## Historic Framework

Let's take a look at the last quarter-century of the era before Christ. The region is the Middle East, the birthplace of all the divine messages. Location is Palestine.

Imran, son of Masan, is a scholar who committed himself to knowledge and worship. According to the Matta Bible, his father's name is Yashahim (1:1-16). He is respected in the community. He earned this respect by his knowledge and moral maturity, and for being a descendant of Aaron. The fact that he was named after Imran is also not accidental. The father of Moses and Aaron, who lived approximately 18 centuries before him, also was named Imran. This name is mentioned in the Gospel as "Amram." So, Imran, son of Masan, is a "*sayyid*," or descendant of prophets, in the eyes of his society. He is also one of the top leaders of the temple that only the scholars among the descendants of Aaron could serve in.

Imran, whose sincerity in God-consciousness and scholarship is well known, married Anna, the daughter of Fakuz. Like her husband, Anna was also a true believer, conscious of her place in creation. For many years, the two did not have a child. One day, while Anna was resting under a tree, she saw a bird feeding her babies, and she contemplated the perfection of God's creation. Then despite her and her husband's age, she could not resist praying for an offspring. She prayed, asking her Lord to bestow on her a child.

Her sincere request found its reply by the Lord. When Anna found out she was pregnant despite her old age, she knew her prayer was accepted and her wish granted by her Lord. She believed it was her turn to be thankful then, so she vowed to dedicate to her Lord the beloved child for whom she had longed for years and now was blessed to receive by a miraculous grace.

“O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow (the child) that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me.”

While all these things were happening, her husband Imran was serving as a religious leader. When his wife Anna told him that she had vowed to dedicate the child in her womb for God, Imran became pale from shock and said to Anna:

“Are you aware of what you’ve done? Do you know the gender of the child in your womb? What if it is a girl and not a boy? Then what will we do?”<sup>5</sup>

The reason for Imran’s reaction was that until that day, those dedicated to serve in God’s house had always been boys. At the time, devoting a female child to religious service was out of consideration.

Imran’s worry lasted until his death. Anna was left a pregnant widow and her unborn child fatherless. Under these conditions, Anna delivers her baby. Her husband’s worries were valid; the baby is a girl. This situation causes Anna a little worry too, mixed with sadness.

“She said: ‘O my Sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female’ – the while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, and (fully aware) that no male child (she

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<sup>5</sup> As reported by Begavi.

might have hoped for) could ever have been like this female – ‘and I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 36)

Anna does not turn away from her promise and submits the devotee to her place of devotion. After her delivery, Anna pronounced the prayer above. Wrapping her baby with her sweater, she went to the temple and handed her over to the servants, who were called “*ahbar*,” saying, “Here is the child I have devoted.” Not long after that day, Anna passed away.<sup>6</sup> The child was born without a father now was without a mother too; the baby was left an orphan.

The *ahbar* had to accept her; in fact, they were happy to accept this exceptional situation because she was the daughter of their leader. Furthermore, they knew the remarkable situation of this child and believed her special position as a devotee to God’s service.

Then a discussion began in regard to who would be undertaking her care. Every one of them wanted the honor of taking care of this special devotee. Zachariah, who had a respected position among the scholars of the temple, said, “Undertaking her care would be more fitting for me than any of you. Let me do it.”

Zachariah was right. This is because his wife, Aisha, was Anna’s sister and therefore Mary’s aunt.<sup>7</sup> However, the other staff in the temple did not find this enough reason for him to get the guardianship of Mary. They also did not want miss the opportunity themselves. They said to Zachariah, “Didn’t the

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<sup>6</sup> As reported by Taberi.

<sup>7</sup> As reported by Zamahshari.

mother of Mary know this reality? If she did want you to take care of her, she would have counseled us so.”

When discussions produced no results, they all agreed to draw lots to select which family would be entrusted with Mary. They went altogether to the river of Jordan. Applying a longstanding tradition of drawing lots, they threw their pens into water. Zachariah’s pen – with God’s will – passed all the others. The Quran mentions this event:

“When this account of something that was beyond the reach of thy perception We (now) reveal unto thee: for thou wert not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary’s guardian, and thou wert not with them when they contended (about it) with one another.” (Chapter 3, verse 44)

Zachariah took Mary to his house. He submitted her to his wife Aisha. Aisha, who had never had a child, embraced Mary fully. She treated her just like a mother would have, had Mary’s mother lived. She raised this devotee as her sister’s keepsake and God’s trust until Mary grew to be a youth.

When Zachariah received signs that it was time to give the devotee back to her true guardian, he made a special place at the temple for her and settled her there. Since Mary was a girl, Zachariah was afraid something might happen to her, and he always watched out for her safety. He skillfully designed her dwelling place and took special precautions in order to protect her from any evil-intentioned ones.

People of the region in these years were suffering through famine and drought that utterly affected them.<sup>8</sup> Even the richest people had difficulty finding food. During these years,

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<sup>8</sup> As reported by Ibn Ishaq.



Zachariah grew old. He was having quite a hard time with the duties he had taken upon himself, but he did not hesitate to make any sacrifices. He began to worry whether someone would emerge to carry out these duties for Mary in the event of his death.

He gathered the leaders of the society and spoke to them thus: "As you see, I am an old man. I am no longer able to take good enough care of Mary, who is God's trust. After me, whoever is going to take care of her should come out now and help me." Those people who had competed with him for Mary before did not go near such great responsibility now during the famine. Finally, Yusuf, who was Zachariah's nephew and Mary's cousin, took the position upon himself.

The famine made Yusuf's task extremely difficult. He tried his best to keep up with his duty, but he still worried whether he was doing enough. When Mary noticed his worry, she said to him, "Oh Yusuf, trust in God. No doubt God will provide for us." Yusuf began to find enough provisions. He was bringing sustenance to her every day from what he had earned. God did give abundance to what he brought.

When Zachariah came for a visit, he would find food different than what Yusuf brought there, and he would ask: "Where are these from?" Sustenance appeared for her with no clear explanation, and he was amazed. Witnessing this exceptional situation, Zachariah suddenly felt a desire for offspring. For a long time, seeing Mary, he had admired her parents, thinking what a grace it was to have such a devout child. When he also witnessed God's exceptional treatment to Mary, he asked God for a child despite of his old age and his wife's barrenness; his prayer was accepted and John was presented. In the end, Zachariah and his son John would be killed by a very cruel tribe.

This is the basic historic framework of the event. We will discuss it in more detail later, but the main thing that interests us in this event is not the details of the story or the historical dimensions of it, but rather the message that it conveys. The Quran tells us that this story so that we learn its lessons and model our lives from it. Let us try in the light of the verses of Quran to discover the wisdom of its depth and continue to search for the message's meaning in the events carried out to every individual, society, and time.

## SECTION TWO

## Story of Devotion and Solution to the Leadership Problem

Society changes in positive and negative ways. Mankind comes from an origin that is pure and clean in anthropological and ontological terms. Man's ontological source is his pure nature that every human is born with. The anthropological origins of man are directly related to the pure nature of Adam, the first messenger.

It is essential to keep the generations of humans from becoming spoiled. Man is spoiled from the moment he moves further away from these two sources, and becomes better the closer he comes to them. The unchanging goal of all the divine messages and messengers has been to invite man to return to these pure origins.

God loved, protected, and created man as the vicegerent (caliph) of the earth. God equipped man with the tools needed to return to the correct path, regardless of time and location. The internal tools for this purpose are reasoning, conscience, spirit, perception, and understanding. The external tools are the revelations and the people who convey its meanings.

The conveyors of the revelation and inviters to the original nature have existed from the first man up until now. They will likewise continue to exist until the last man. Among these messengers, there have been two types: one is *rasool*, whose duty is to revive man's awareness and obligations within the

laws of the creator. The other is *nabi*, whose duty is to purify the belief system from the sickness all around it. These two groups of messengers received the support of God's revelation directly or through some other means, in addition to making use of the resources that were available to them at that time.

The divine revelation to the messengers ended with the last prophet, Muhammad; however, the end of this institution does not mean the end of God's attribute of communication and the end of divine message. The Quran, which is God's universal message sent through the last prophet, will maintain its validity and liveliness wherever and whenever humans exist, because its content includes all the core values of mankind in essence. With the existence of the Quran, mankind would not need a new prophet or a messenger who receives a new message.

God's message reflects his attributes and names like *kalam* (speech), *iradah* (will), *qudrat* (power), *Al-Hadiy* (the Guide), *Ar-Rahman* (the All-Compassionate), *Ar-Rahim* (the All-Merciful), *Al-Qahhar* (the Subduer), *Al-Mu'izz* (the Bestower of Honors) and *Al-Muzill* (the Humiliator). Besides in the verses of Quran, the message also continues to appear in the universe in matter, events, and especially in mankind.

"And on Earth there are signs of God's existence, visible to all who are endowed with inner certainty, just as there are signs thereof within your own selves: can you not, then, see?" (Chapter 50, verse 20-21)

Yes, God has kept sending down his messages for the eyes to see and the hearts to believe. The responsibility to understand and teach about the signs falls on those who carry on their shoulders the infinite heritage of the revelation. God

will support those who are competent to comprehend the message via other methods as well, such as the divine dream. This interaction is also mentioned as a part of divine message by the last prophet.<sup>9</sup>

“The messenger of God said: ‘Prophethood finishes with me, however glad tidings will remain.’ They asked, ‘What are glad tidings?’ He said, ‘Divine dreams.’ ”

Mankind does not need any new messengers or prophets who receive revelation after Muhammad; however, mankind does need guiding leaders who comprehend the verses of God’s book and can teach its signs in material, metaphysical, and spiritual concepts. These leaders carry out the duty of propagating the endless legacy of revelation and show people the paths to its guidance. This is a social necessity and a religious obligation that fulfills the need for a governing mechanism that manages order among individuals.

“... to every people there is a guide ...” (Chapter 13, verse 7)

The last prophet also mentioned in one narration that in every period of time, there will come leaders reviving the divine message back to its origin after time and traditions change and disturb it. This is valid not only at the leadership level, but also on the group of people who work for beneficial change:

“... and that there might grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!” (Chapter 3, verse 104)

Would God not be involved in the selection, training, and

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<sup>9</sup> As narrated in Sahih Al-Bukhari, Ibn Hanbal, and Abu Dawud.

success of the aforementioned good workers, distinguished messengers, sincere revivers, knowledgeable restorers and guiding leaders? Of course He would! God is the selector, the trainer, and the helper.

When considering what the nation of believers has suffered through at the hands of corrupt governments and incompetent leaders, the selection of great leaders clearly presents the best hope for a society to succeed. At this point, it is beneficial to remember this verse one more time:

“Behold, God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imran above all mankind.”  
(Chapter 3, verse 33)

In this verse, which is the first occurrence in the process of devotion, God’s selection is mentioned. There are four names mentioned here as the recipients of the selection: Adam and Noah, who are individuals, whereas ‘Ali-Imran and ‘Ali-Ibrahim are family names. The verse ends by stating that these selections have been chosen from those amongst their own kind.

It is here that we need to seek an answer to two important questions:

What is the reason and wisdom in this divine selection?

And what is the scope of this selection?

## **First Stage: Divine Selection and Becoming a Candidate**

In this aforementioned verse, there are four names that God selected and raised above all mankind: 1. Adam; 2. Noah; 3. The family of Imran; 4. The family of Abraham.

1. Adam: Adam was the first of his kind; therefore, he was not selected from among his own kind. Rather, he was selected from all creation. His selection is symbolic of the selection of all mankind. God Almighty chose mankind from among all His creation with Adam and gave the trust to them; or rather, mankind took the trust upon himself. And our Lord made the human being to be His representative on earth (chapter 2, verse 30).

This prestigious duty raised mankind up to the level of the most honored of all creation. Humans are appointed to this position, prevailing over other responsible creations, like the jinn and the angels, and the non-responsible creations like the sky, the earth, the mountains, and the seas.

Therefore, Adam's selection is not on just his personal standing, but rather a general representation. Noah, the families of Abraham and Imran, and all other human beings are direct recipients of this general selection.

2. Noah: Noah is perceived as the second father of mankind. Noah was ordered by God to lead mankind to the origi-



nal natural standing of Adam. During his time, people had already abandoned Adam's legacy and had gone astray, degrading themselves by worshipping their own kind, stone idols, wealth, and property. God was not pleased with this degeneration and brought remembrance back to the original state of man through straightening things out by Noah's hands.

The selection of Noah is not only about his personal qualities, but also about the qualities of the human race that descended from him. Since this individual is known as the second father of mankind, his selection was also the selection of his descendants.

3. The family of Abraham: Abraham, whose family God elevated, is known as the father of the prophets. The lineage of prophets from Jacob, Joseph, Moses, and Aaron (peace be upon them all), up to prophet Jesus can be traced to Abraham through his son Isaac. The lineage that comes from Ishmael to Muhammad also reaches back to Abraham. That is why the last prophet, Muhammad, speaks of Abraham as "my ancestor."

4. The family of Imran: This family consists of Imran, son of Masan; Imran's wife, Anna, the daughter of Fakuz; their daughter Mary; and grandson Jesus. God chose this family because of Anna's devotion to her Lord after she dedicated to God while still in her womb.

Now, were these selections based on lineage? The answer is no. Prophets are the best trainers and best examples, which can give a young family member a head start, but lineage is not enough. God-consciousness is the most important factor. The Quran makes clear that a person can achieve superiority only through God-consciousness, not through the advantages of family heritage, lineage, race, or gender.

If selection were based on lineage, no member of mankind could have been selected. This is because the two individuals mentioned in the verse we're discussing, Adam and Noah, are the ancestors of mankind. Candidacy for divine selection is open for everyone, as everyone is a descendant of Adam and therefore everyone shares an equal opportunity.

In addition, in the cases of Imran and Abraham, if we take lineage as the reason for their selection, then the aforementioned families' descendants would also have to be selected. However, again, we understand from the Quran that this is not the case. Here is Abraham's request for his future descendants to be blessed, and the divine reply:

"And remember this: when his Sustainer tried Abraham by [His] commandments and the latter fulfilled them, He said: 'Behold, I shall make thee a leader of men.' Abraham asked: 'And wilt Thou make leaders of my offspring as well?' [God] answered: 'My covenant does not embrace the evildoers.' " (Chapter 2, verse 124)

Yes indeed, God's promise is not inclusive of the evildoers even if they may be descendants of a prophet. This is true even if a prophet may have prayed for them and his prayers are accepted.

The Lord has mentioned of tests prophets Adam, Noah, and Abraham were put to by their closest relatives. Adam was put to a test by his son Cain, Noah by his wife, and Abraham by his father.<sup>10</sup> Despite the fact that these people were

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<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, we note here that while some of the names we're mentioning faced tests from a spouse or parent, all four who are in the verse under discussion on the story of devotion were put to test through their offspring. The first two, Adam and Noah, tested the deep sadness by ultimately losing their sons Cain and Canaan. The last two, the families of Abraham and Imran, on the other hand, gave this test positively by offering up their beloved children Ishmael

so close to God's messengers – the first a son of a prophet, the second the spouse of a prophet and the third the father of a prophet – they consumed themselves in denial. Having close ties to a prophet was not enough to save them. This shows the futility of a nationalist or racist mentality. Individual deeds are what matters.

The reason for divine selection should be looked for in belief rather than lineage. In other words, one should look for sons of the same road, not sons of the blood. Within this framework, all disbelievers are kin, and likewise, all believers are kin. The lineage that matters would be the lineage of religion, not family. Any believers who deserve to be chosen from their contemporary time are from each other. They are members of the same line of belief and the same goal. The differences in time, location, race, and color do not alter this reality.

This is valid not only theologically, but anthropologically as well. Actually, in terms of lineage Noah is of Adam, Abraham is of Noah, Aaron is of Abraham, Imran is of Aaron, and Jesus is of Imran; from another branch, Ishmael is of Abraham and Muhammad is of Ishmael. The word "by lineage" in the verse reinforces semantically what we said here. The word "*zarrah*," meaning "atom," is derived from the same root. Theologically, all believers are like one soul consisting of atoms, while mankind is an object consisting of atoms.

We understand the phrase "from each other" to have a

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and Mary at a very young age for the sake of God. For this reason, while Adam and Noah are mentioned as individuals, Abraham and Imran are mentioned as families. Chapter 3, verses 33-34, sum up this subject: "Behold, God raised Adam, and Noah, and the House of Abraham, and the House of Imran above all mankind in one line of descent [spiritually and ethnically]. And God was all-hearing, all-knowing."

theological meaning too because of some other verses uttered in the same format. For instance, the Quran says, "And [as for] the believers, both men and women, they are close unto one another" (chapter 9, verse 71). Then it says for Jews and Christians: "they are but allies of one another" (chapter 5, verse 51). The same is mentioned for the hypocrites: "The hypocrites, both men and women, are all of one kind" (chapter 9, verse 67).<sup>11</sup>

The logic of faith is one, and so is the logic of dissension. They do not change in accordance with time and place. The parable in Anna's action is applicable to anyone with the same intention and goal. As long as mankind exists, there will be courageous mothers believing in Islam and maintaining this line. People can become allies of Anna by embracing the act of this woman whom the Quran chose, and also by embracing the same goal, intention, and style. In accordance with the law of God, the same causes will bring forth the same results. In order to raise brave leaders who can restore corrupt societies back to their pure origins, the process of devotion should be started. This process is started by devotees aiming to generate candidates for divine selection. The candidates of course will be chosen from amongst the inheritors of the book. The Quran mentions this:

"And so, We have bestowed this divine writ as a heritage unto such of Our servants as We chose: and among them are some who wrong their own souls; and some who keep a middle course; and some who, by God's leave, are foremost in good deeds: [and] this, indeed, is a merit most high!" (Chapter 35, verse 32)

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<sup>11</sup> Katade, a scholar from the second generations of Muslims after the last prophet, says in his commentary that they are surely from one another in sincerity, good deeds, intention, faith, and mentality.

This selection will keep going as it was in the past: by replacement of ones who are once chosen but broke the promise with the ones who are deserving to be chosen as candidates.

“Art Thou not aware that God has created the heavens and the earth in accordance with [an inner] truth? He can, if He so wills, do away with you all and bring forth a new creation [in your stead] nor is this difficult for God.” (Chapter 14, verses 19-20)

If the chosen ones act as befits their heritage with good deeds and faith while conveying the message, throughout their life struggles, and recommend good and discourage evil, then they will be worthy of being chosen to carry the torch of righteousness.

The result would be glad tidings – good news – just as in the devotional process of Anna, Mary, and Jesus – the mother, child, and grandchild.

These names given in the Quran are the ones chosen as symbols of the best “devoter” and “devotee” of all times. There is no doubt that there have been others chosen over their contemporaries before and after these names. For example, other prophets are mentioned of as being raised above all mankind:

“... [upon] Ishmael, and Elisha, and Jonah, and Lot. And every one of them did We favour above other people.” (Chapter 6, verse 86)

It is understood from this evidence that the people mentioned are the leaders who deserved to be chosen from amongst the candidates of their times. They performed their prophetic duties within their societies. Mankind is advised to take them as examples. The ones who follow these exam-

ples are advised to devote themselves in the same way. Then there will be selections from among the people who will inherit the revelation in their society. The people who have the responsibility of conveying the message can be evaluated in three categories, as mentioned in chapter 35, verse 32:

1. "Among them are some who wrong their own souls" – that is because they have neglected their duties of protecting the book and applying it to life. Despite betraying the trust put on them, they falsely assume themselves to be among the People of the Book (Quran). This person, who is a member of the community that God has chosen to protect his book, does injustice to his own soul because he behaves like an extravagant heir and acts unfaithfully toward the divine trust.

2. "And some who keep a middle course." They are not the leaders in good works; neither like Anna with her act of devotion, nor like Mary to be dedicated to God, nor like Jesus to be the good news. They do try to submit and serve the devotees and the devoted ones alike. They do not treat the divine trust wrongfully. They may not have the strength to run; however, at least they do not act like the first group in blocking the road of the ones determined to persevere in doing good.

3. "And some who, by God's leave, are foremost in good deeds. That is the great favor." This group is the one that we have been discussing from the beginning. They are the ones who emerged from the chosen heirs to the book and became nominees for the candidacy of divine selection. They are the ones whom the Quran mentioned "to be amongst your society" as the group to be the devoted and faithful.

"But it was Our will to bestow Our favor upon those [very people] who were deemed [so] utterly low in the land, and to make them forerunners in faith." (Chapter 28, verse 5)

Now it is time to answer the question we asked earlier: "What is the reason of divine choice?" The Quran answers it for us:

"God was all-hearing, all-knowing when the wife of Imran prayed: 'O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing! "

When Imran's wife devoted without hesitation her only sweet baby for sake of her Lord ... yes, right at that moment an astounding process started, as if the order was given to hit the gong to mark the event.

Time forgot itself.

The angels held their breath.

Pens of the Heavens registered this as breaking news and brand-new history began to be written by the Owner of the past and future.

Yes "when she said ..."

After this phrase is pronounced, there is a need for an answer. So, one may ask, "What happened when Imran's wife said this?"

We find the answer in the verse 33 at the beginning:

"Behold, God raised the House of Imran above all mankind."<sup>12</sup>

Indeed, a proper devotion happens to be the starting point of serious events that changed the destiny of the world.

While Anna was giving her sincere devotion, how on earth could she know that she was changing history by turning it upside down and writing a new one?

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12 As reported by Zajjaj

How would she know she was to close an era and open another?

How would she know her devotion was to be the recipient of a magnificent miracle that would astound people and leave their mouths wide open in wonder?

Again, how would she know her action was to start a process that would bring such a glad tiding as Jesus?

And how would she know the process starting with her prayer would bring such a prophet like John the Baptist, and he was to be so devoted to his faith and duty that he never gave up until he had given his life for it?

She did not know these things. She did not know during her lifetime and could not foresee any of the future. Without seeing any of these things, she made her dedication to the highest authority (her Lord), seeking refuge from evil and those who commit evil. While being honorable throughout her life, she worried about whether her dedication was accepted until she passed away herself.

She did not do this action with knowledge, but with love; not with logic, but by heart. If she knew all these things, her knowledge might have won over her love or her logic over her heart. If it happened so, she might have not gone through with her act of devotion. Indeed, she could not have completed it, because what she devoted was neither material property nor even a part of her body – it was part of her soul.

Yes, the reason for the divine choice was very clear and open:

When the wife of Imran prayed: “O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!” Then “God raised the house of Imran above all Mankind.”



This was God's way, which has no fault, nor is it mere coincidence.

This was the reason for divine selection.

This was the most fascinating example of the articles in God's selection.

This was the sign of the fact that major changes come after major blessings, and major blessings come with major sacrifices.

How could a society be saved when its children are devoted to wrong goals, contemporary false gods – the world, career, money, opposite gender, gold, and silver, instead of the way of God?

Within such a society, the measure of leadership would indeed be false measures or values fame or rank, and not values like knowledge, faith, deeds, sincerity, or sacrifice.

If the saplings that are to be nominees for leadership in Islam have dried up, then the ones who embrace the appealing colorful plastic fruits in the fake saplings deserve to be cheated. This is especially true in societies where people dedicate themselves to their children and then dedicate their children to a short worldly life, and postpone ever thinking about God – and think this makes an ideal life.

## Second Stage: Dedicating Freely

Why the “wife of Imran”?

*“When the wife of Imran prayed: ‘O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service. Accept it, then, from me: verily, Thou alone art all-hearing, all-knowing!’ ”*

This verse is reported in the words of the wife of Imran, Anna.

As part of the Quran’s general style, it does not go into details of this subject. It suffices by stating “the wife of Imran.”

What is the name of this woman? It does not give this information. It did not give details just like it did not state where and when this event took place ...

Why doesn’t it?

It is for an obvious reason: This is God’s style. His style is clear to the core. It stays away from unnecessary details that may distract readers’ attention. Perhaps that is to prevent people from reading the Quran like a history book. Of course, the Quran contains much history. This is true. However, it is not a history book. Many times it tells the event, but does not state the location, time, or names. Whenever it does state specifics, it uses titles like pharaoh, which are not personal names. In fact, these individuals have personal names like Ramses, etc. ...

Why does the Quran do so? Indeed, it does so in order not to limit its overall message to a certain time, place, or individuals. In other words, it does so to prevent people from narrowing it down to the corners of history.

Names like pharaoh are generic names. They are what shah is for Persians, malik for Arabs, khan and hakhan for Turks, and what king and president are for western cultures. Likewise, Nimrod is a character type, rather than a personal name. The Quran generalizes these typologies by not giving their personal names. Through use of this style, people should be able to easily recognize the type of individuals around them by seeing their resemblance to these examples in their morals, behavior, and beliefs.

Overall, it is known that every era, society, and region could have its own type of Nimrod? Of course, it is also known that there will be a Moses or an Abraham figure to resist them.

For this reason, both the positive and negative examples that Quran draws upon are universal types. You cannot find the names of positive figures from Islamic history like Abu Bakr, Ali, Omar, Uthman, Aisha, Khadijah (may God be pleased with all of them) in the Quran. Just as you are not able to find the names of negative figures – Abu Jahal, Umayyah or Abdullah bin Ubayy. Amongst friends of Muhammad only Zayd and amongst the disbelievers only the name of Abu Lahab are stated. They are exceptional and there are reasons for them to be mentioned in the Quran.

The Quran uses this style in order not to distract peoples' attention. The important thing is not who did what, but rather what was done. If it is a good thing, then it is for everyone. The Quran is a book that is believed, understood, and practiced. It is not meant to be a subject of academic research to

write dissertations or to make academic career out of. For that reason, the Quran has this style. That is why the first generation of Muslims understood the term scholar, or “*alim*,” as the one who reads Quran to understand, live by, and keep it alive.

The Quran says “wife of Imran” and does not give the name. If you want to have details on the subject, then you’ll have to check the history or research the available resources. When we do that, we learn from historical resources that the name of the woman is “Anna.” Now, this piece of information has marginal significance for us. However, the fact that the accuracy of this event is supported by other resources forces the disbelievers who look at the Quran with doubt to accept it as a historical event.

On the other hand, argument alone does not explain the wisdom in Quran’s calling her “wife of Imran.” We believe that the Quran is drawing attention to two points by using that title.

1. The fact that the performer of the action is a woman. She personally made the vow a reality; there is wisdom in this fact for the ones who think. A mother has a special bond with her child beyond even what a father can have. Here we have a woman, a mother, who sacrifices her own soul – her only beloved child.

God is also reminding people of the opportunities there are for the females who desire to be close to God, who want to please their Lord, and dedicate something for His sake. She is at no disadvantage compared to men in the ability to please God – she actually has a unique extra opportunity due to this special position and bond with her child.

2. The modifier “Imran” in the phrase “the woman of Imran” is also an essential part and a prominent character in the

actual event. While bringing out the fact that the one performing the action is a woman, the mention of her husband reminds us of the central importance of family working together. Family is the cornerstone of society. This family model of righteous parents together with the correct goals and actions helps to bring forth an exemplary child.

“The wife of Imran” made her devotional act a reality that brought her name to be written in the book of immortals by saying this: “O my Sustainer! Behold, unto Thee do I vow [the child] that is in, my womb, to be devoted to Thy service.” Anna was for sure aware that she was giving the most valuable thing she could have in her entire life.

Anna’s experience of having a child was different from the norm. After living a long life without a child, just at the end of her life, a child was given to her as a gift by the Lord because of a prayer. For this reason, the value and meaning of Anna’s child in her sight was very different.

However, she knew that being thankful to God, who had accepted her prayer and granted her wish despite her age, was among the conditions for maintaining or even increasing the amount of her blessings.

An offering that is accepted should be returned by some measure of gratitude to the giver in turn. Gratefulness to grace and thankfulness for blessings was needed. How should she thank her Lord so that it would be a proper response to this outstanding blessing? She knew that God does not need anything. God does not get hungry or thirsty and does not go through any hardship. However, she also knew serving the religion, the house of worship, the book of God – in short serving anything God loves – is serving God himself. By upholding divine values, faithful believers are actually helping themselves.

“O you who have attained to faith! If you help [the cause of] God, He will help you, and will make firm your steps.”  
(Chapter 47, verse 7)

### **Anna: Monument of Self-sacrifice**

Anna was convinced that she had to offer a sacrifice to that authority, this is for sure. For us to understand how great this sacrifice was, we do need to analyze the situation that she had to undergo.

We must examine two possibilities concerning Anna:

1. Was she someone who had riches?
2. Was she someone who had nothing?

If the first state is the reality, then the wife of Imran chose the most valuable item she had to offer to her Lord, of all the things she could have given. If she hoped to gain the pleasure of her Lord this way rather than by the vehicle of other things, then this is the highest of the sacrifices.

In this case, she knew that only things that are valuable would be offered to the most worthy recipient. She also knew that the degree of sacrifice is a reliable measure of love and submission. Thus, she must prove her love to her beloved Lord in an adequate way. She knew as well that the best of thanks is not only done through the tongue, but is also done by deeds and living. She also knew that when thankfulness is not given for blessings, it could turn into countless troubles for the recipient of those blessings.

The second of the two possibilities explores the situation if she was poor; and if so, she would be devoting her only valuable “possession.” Such a sacrifice is at least as great as in the first possibility.

This was an outstanding expression of love and submission. She could never conceive a child by normal means. She had long ago passed her child-bearing years. Despite this fact, she believed in Lord's highest power and wished for a child. Therefore, God granted her wish and gave her an exceptional child as a bonus. Thus, she received special treatment, far out of the ordinary. This magnificent blessing required a different type of thankfulness. Anna's gratitude was exactly that. She devoted without a moment of hesitation. She consecrated even though she did not have anything.

She acted wisely. Is it not a fact that God is the real owner of everything?

"Verily, unto God do we belong and, verily, unto Him we shall return." (Chapter 2, verse 157)

"For, God's is the dominion over the heavens and the earth; and on the Day when the Last Hour dawns – on that Day will be lost all who [in their lifetime] tried to reduce to nothing [whatever they could not understand]." (Chapter 55, verse 27)

The life of this world comes with accessories like children, property, and everything else... All of these were "(but) a brief enjoyment" (chapter 3, verse 97), "and know that your worldly goods and your children are but a trial and temptation" (chapter 8, verse 28). The Owner of all ordered: "O ye who believe! save yourselves and your families from a Fire" (chapter 66, verse 6).

Anna too saved her own soul and her child's by devoting her to the Lord. She acted wisely by giving the trust back unto her Owner's trust.

Yes, she was mindful as she gave the Owner what she "possessed." She also acted wisely by giving her child to the best teacher. It was wisdom of the highest level that she

handed over her child to the best caretaker – no other power could have protected her child better. She acted wisely by choosing the most assured strategy for saving her own soul and her family's.

The verses state that she made her offering and her offering was accepted. However, two points are made here to show the secrets of acceptance:

1. offering the devotion freely
2. offering the devotion with upmost humility and modesty  
"Freely"

The word "*muharraran*" which we translate "as a free person," stays as the key word in front of us for the acceptance of the devotion.

Let us briefly look at what the earlier scholars said on this term "*muharraran*."

Ibn Abbas says "it means solely and only in the service of the Temple I gave."

Mujahed says that it means "only and for the service of God, sincerely and seeking no worldly considerations."

Sha'bi says "it means giving up for the sake of worship and sacrifice."

Suddi says "it means without working for this world."

Rabi says "to guarantee the acceptance of her dedication."

Begavi explains it as "Muharrar is being free from any conditions."

Qurtubi considers it an object of the sentence "it means 'I dedicate a child who is totally free.'"

Ibn-I Arabi comes to the strange conclusion that Anna might not be a free person but a concubine.



Ikrime interprets thusly: "I dedicated to your sake free from of all worries and considerations of this world."

Most of these commentaries are not much different than each other. They complement each other, and their core is this: The wife of Imran dedicates her beloved only child free of all kinds of conditions, with a sincere intention, not expecting any worldly gain for it, for nothing else but God.

While dedicating, she is not negotiating. Leave the bargaining aside, she knows there is no guaranty of the acceptance of her devotion while she says humbly, "May you accept this from me".

As ibn-I Arabi calls her dedication the highest of devotions. Isn't that the case?

You are devoting the most valuable of all beings, your most valuable asset when you needed it most, with the purest intention and the most mature manner.

You will devote to Him only.

You will devote without expecting anything in return.

You will not negotiate.

You will plead, "Accept this from me."

After you devote, you will not look back. You will just seek refuge from the rejected Satan and offer yourself to God and submit plainly without any ceremony.

Here is the best example of devotion of all times – the peak that devotion can reach.

For Anna to fulfill such devotion, especially under the circumstances of her contemporary time, she had to be totally free to accomplish her goal. Physical freedom is only a part of the meaning. The essential freedom is not the freedom of flesh and bone, but rather the freedom of feelings and

thoughts, faith and spirit. There are so many people who assume that they are free according to modern standards. Their entire lives pass in servitude while they are not even aware of being captured and blind. The most common and worst type of slavery is this kind. For sure the most real and valuable of the freedom is the kind we are mentioning here.

For her to be able to dedicate from her own soul, especially under these circumstances, doesn't it require such a complete freedom?

To give, one has to own; and to devote, one has to be free. If you do not own something, how can you give it? Furthermore, if you are not the owner of what you need to give, then how is it possible to give? If you have submitted yourself to what you need to devote, then how can you submit it to something else?

If people can't bring themselves to give something, that means they are not the owner of it. On the contrary, those things became owners of people.

If people are not devoting, it is because they dedicated their lives for the sake of those objects or mortals instead of God's sake. I leave it up to you to think of the deep difference between Anna and those who devote their entire beings, their energy, and all their accumulations to their children, family, or their own selves under the lie of "planning the future," to eat well, dress well, live better – in short, devoting their lives to entertainment and enjoyment, which are all inferior dedications.

The wife of Imran was a human too. She had ambitions and desires that made her a target for Satan. However, Anna had been released from the captivities and bondage of life, making her free to break multiple chains at once in order to fulfill such a great devotion.

## **Breaking the Chains**

Let us think of the nature of those chains she had to break free from and the bonds she had to separate from as well. It is possible to gather these under two categories: internal pressure and external pressure.

1. Freedom from internal pressure: There are so many obstacles in front of humanity to overcome in pleasing The Lord. When we classify them, two types of obstacles lie before us: One of them is internal obstacles which come from the human structure and there is no doubt that Satan and desires come out of this.

Satan, the archenemy of mankind, has many methods to seduce a person. His words are mentioned in the Quran:

“I shall most certainly lie in ambush for them all along thy straight way.” (Chapter 7, verse 16)

He tries to turn people from the right path, and if he is not successful in that, to trip them along their way, or at least to slow them down to make them stop and sit on the road.

Indeed the wife of Imran came across Satan when she was trying to walk on God’s straight path. Satan worked hard to nullify her great actions.

For example, Satan may have said to her coming from the front side: “You are a woman alone. Your husband is old. He might die soon. What are you going to do in your old age all alone? Come on, give up on this.”

On the other hand, he could have come from the back and said: “If you are left homeless and hungry, who is going to take care of you? You are risking both your future and your child’s future.”

Satan also may try to come from her right side, saying,

“First let your child be born, grow up and become an adult. Let him or her go to college, get a degree and fame with a career. The child might become a director, minister, or even a president. Then he or she would serve God better, right? Think about this – the better carrier the better the service.”

Coming from the left side, “Couldn’t you find anything else to give instead of your child? There are so many scholars and knowledgeable people around you. Do you think you know better than them? None of them devoted their children to God like you do. This scholar has three children, that priest has five children and such and such wise man has seven children; however, you have only one. After all, does God need your devotion? Are you the one who is going to fix what the whole world is missing?”

He might even try coming from the above and say: “You are already firm, pure hearted, faithful, and righteously pious. If you are not going to enter heaven, then who will? God knows also that you are alone, you will need your child to help you in the future. You might end up sick or in poverty. You never know if you might fall into a situation like that.”

Alternatively, he could say coming from the bottom: “Be reasonable – use your intellect. Give God what is due to God and give Caesar what is due to Caesar. Follow a middle path, and be a moderate person who acts with deliberation. Extremism is not good in anything – my recommendation is for you to not do this.”

Satan, his devils and their allies did whisper to her just like they did to so many other righteous people.

Anna frees herself from these chains by the help of her wisdom and sharp perception originating from her faith. She called out to her Lord and protected herself from the devil’s

lasso thrown on her emotions and thoughts. She closed her ears to these suggestions from inside and out.

2. Freedom from external pressure: The other type of pressure for any individual is the external pressure. This type has so many aspects; however, the most common are society, culture, and tradition – basically, a person's surroundings.

Anna was living in a Jewish society that had strayed from its original teachings and become selfish and profit-centered. This community was infamous in attempting negotiations with God over obligatory duties, and turning religion and its holy belongings into marketable materials. In such a society, Anna's act indeed would draw so much attention and reaction as well.

There were two dimensions to this communal reaction under discussion now: religion and social-cultural.

In the religious tradition, there were conditions for a person to be dedicated into God's house. According to those rules, the child to be consecrated had to be a boy. Girls could not be consecrated. Anna had to face reality in this term before her child was born; her husband scolded and rebuked her. Furthermore, according to some narrations, Imran's death was caused by worries by the possibility of communal condemnation in case of a female child was born promised for devotion. However, Anna was ready to undergo these possible heavy reactions and boldly opposed her critics until the end of her life. Thus, Anna broke the first chain of the surrounding pressure which is the religious traditional chain right at the beginning and became free.

The second big ring of the chain of surroundings is social culture. This event took place in Palestine at the time when the Romans were ruling. Naturally, within societies where

patriarchal Roman culture dominated, women were often treated in a degrading manner. She had no social or personal security. This was the case with the society and the religion of the time as well. Even within their concept of the relationship between man and Lord, there was this discrimination. They constructed a religious perception in which man received better treatment than woman even in the afterlife just because of his gender. God planned a divine scenario that would destroy such gender discrimination and break the masculine idol; for this, God chose two heroic women (Anna and Mary) to fulfill His plan for the world to see.

After suffering an unthinkable defeat at the hands of Anna and her offspring, the social culture would experience a bigger one to come. That was a son bestowed unto Mary without a father, to a woman who was devoted by a woman. One of the many wisdoms of this great miracle is the divine rejection of the pagan Roman culture that constructed man's image as idols to be worshipped. They degraded women and unfortunately they are the ancestors of contemporary western civilization.

Anna fulfilled her dedication to her Lord as an entirely free person by breaking all these aforementioned internal and external chains.

Anna was well aware that full submission to God is the true freedom. To teach the true nature of freedom for future generations, she freed herself first by rejecting those who were selfish, evil, and individualistic, and submitted her will to God's Will; then she gave her child to her Lord, trusting His ability to protect and teach the child wisdom so that she would be forever free.

## Third Stage: Devoting Modestly

The work was not over by giving a part of her soul. Another feature the wife of Imran taught us is the manners and process of doing a good deed for it to be acceptable. Otherwise, a deed may not achieve its full value in obtaining the pleasure of God.

In this devotional process, Anna had faith and a goal: the pleasure of God. Then she fulfilled a good deed with sincere intention: Devotion.

What remained was the correct attitude in order for this deed not to be wasted.

Through her attributes and wordings, she portrayed her awareness of the one to whom she was making her dedication. Her sacrifice was tremendous, to describe it in a word. She could have felt pride and perhaps bragged about it; however, she did not do so. She did not swagger or show off. She acted to the contrary; she did as the friends of God, trustworthy ones, martyrs, and devout ones did ... both gave and implored, both devoted and put her face on the threshold of submission and said:

“My Lord, accept it, then, from me.”

No signs of arrogance here. On the contrary, there is anticipation with excitement and worry about whether the de-

votion will be accepted. "What if God does not accept it?" Surely, He does not have to? What if she had made some mistake or something was wrong in this process?

She does not act indifferently, saying, "I have done my dedication; the rest is up to Him, whether He accepts it or not." On the contrary, she is deeply modest and submissive:

"Accept from me! ... Thou alone art all-hearing, and all-knowing!"

Yes, He was so, all-hearing and all-knowing, hearing Anna's request coming from the bottom of her heart, and was aware of all the concerns in regards to her devotion, which she kept deep in her heart. The only thing the wife of Imran had comfort with was that He was all-hearing and all-knowing. For this reason, she turned her face, soul, and speech to her Lord, as if she was speaking to Him directly, and poured out all her troubles to her Lord.

"Lord, what I have in my womb ... Thou alone art all-hearing, and all-knowing!"

Maybe Anna was saying these in a voice she couldn't even hear herself. And there was no need to broadcast it. There were some things she wanted to say, but her tongue would not utter them. If she said them, would it be disrespectful to the Lord? What if that would be a misstep that would undo her good deeds, or cause ill feelings in her heart? The best was not to pronounce them. After all, He heard and He knew, and this was more than enough for Anna.

There wasn't any intermediary between Anna and her Lord while these were happening. She wasn't a prophet, nor was she a messenger – she was just an ordinary believer. An intermediary was not necessary for her devotion or for com-



munication with her Lord, because she knew that the Lord is closer to His subjects than their jugular veins (chapter 30, verse 16). The example of Anna was chosen from among ordinary believers so people after her could take her as a role model.

Maybe this was to show that anybody can do what she did.

## Fourth Stage: Stepping Down on Tradition

*“When she had given birth to the child, she said: ‘O my Sustainer behold, I have given birth to a female’ – the while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to, ‘And nowise is the male like the female. And I have named her Mary. And, verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.’ ”*

Anna, wife of Imran, was finally giving birth to the child she had decided to devote to God, a fatherless baby. She had gotten through many obstacles in this devotion process to get to this point. However, her fear had come true: The devotee was born a girl. She was face to face with a big test. There were two obstacles now in front of her: The first is the distorted religious tradition, and the second is social tradition.

In the distorted religious tradition, the official religious powers had distorted the pure Law of Moses and settled their religious perception in accordance with their desires. In this traditional setup, they did not leave any space for women. This official group of men who held religion in their possession degraded women and put them down in front of the community in the name of religion. They constricted God’s holy scriptures – meant for all humans, both men and women – to be religion only for men. Furthermore, they even constructed a specific group of men distinguished for religion,

the *ahbar* and the *ruhban*. Therefore, they not only secured their theocratic dictatorship on people, but also made profit out of religion for themselves.

There is no doubt that Anna's husband, the respected Imran, was one of the trustworthy and faithful *ahbar* whom the noble Quran praises. He was among the few virtuous, devoutly worshipping, ascetic scholars in this group. God chose his family and immortalized his name by placing it in His book.

Despite the respected and distinguished position Imran held in his community, the existing religious power with its rigid rules had concerned him from the beginning. We understand this concern from his reaction when his wife informs of him about her vow to God for her child in her womb: "Are you aware of what you've done? Do you know the gender of the child in your womb? What if it is a girl and not a boy? Then what will we do?"

Although Imran was the leader of his community, he might have been thinking they could not fight the tradition that was established with its rigid rules. Truly they were in a difficult situation. On one hand, there was the promise his wife had given her Lord, and on the other hand, the danger of conflicting with the traditional religious order. Although there is only a 50 percent chance for the child to be a girl, it was enough to cause Imran so much worry that he fell ill. Imran died with sorrow<sup>13</sup> before he could see his child born, leaving Anna a widow and Mary without a father.

Anna also was feeling this sorrow. Under the pressure of the prevailing tradition and "while God had been fully aware of what she would give birth to," she said apologetically:

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13 As reported by scholars including Ibn Ishaq and Kalbi.

“O my sustainer! Behold, I have given birth to a female, and nowise is the male like the female ...”

There are several possible interpretations of this verse, including the message that human beings do not get their value from gender; God knew the true merit of this child and acknowledged it. God is emphasizing the fact that Anna’s concerns and her apologetic attitude in this matter are not necessary. It shows that the tradition is not in keeping with God’s will. The fact that the child is a female is a sign of the rejection of this tradition.

These verses confront the obstacle of social traditions as well as religious. When Anna said, “O my Sustainer, Behold! I have given birth to a female,” indeed she was affected by the traditional judgments surrounding her. The society that surrounded Anna had lived under the governance of Romans for many years. At that time, governors were appointed by the Romans who ruled the society, and the public order was secured by Roman soldiers. The Roman culture was dominant in influencing the society.

The perception of the pagan Roman civilization toward women is a huge subject that can be a book by itself, but to summarize it briefly, women were considered unimportant, backward, weak, and secondary human beings who didn’t hold any worthy position. Basic human rights like owning property, inheritance, giving witness in legal issues, becoming involved in politics, choosing her spouse, and gaining education were completely out of the question. Roman family organization was patriarchal. However, this patriarchy was not the way we know of today – it was in the form of idolizing masculinity. In this family structure, a woman was not considered part of the family. She was someone who would serve the needs of the husband and the male children first, before herself or her daughters.

Thus, God would give Anna a girl while she expected otherwise, in order to defy this attribute of the society; and He gave her a grandson without a father, so as to break down this idolatry of masculinity in the society.

How would Anna know the tremendous future role that her child would play? Again how could she know that God was to give her such a responsibility within the miracle He commanded in order to destroy the abstract idols of social tradition?

As she did not know the future, she would say "O my Sustainer, behold, I have given birth to a female and nowise is the male like the female."

Finally, Anna overcame a personal challenge as well. She faced a test when she had a girl while deeply expecting that she would have a boy. Her Lord tested her sincerity. Was she determined and sincere in her intention, or was her devotion based on a moment of emotion and fervor? Anna knew indeed that God was the creator of everything just like she knew He was all-hearing and all-knowing. She could have said: "Since you have created a female, my responsibility is over. I did what I could. If you had created a male, then I would have kept my word." She could have easily found an excuse to go back on her word.

She did not do that. On the contrary, she felt shy, as if she were responsible for this situation. With humility, she said, "O my Sustainer, behold, I have given birth to a female and nowise is the male like the female."

Yes, the devoting mother Anna gave birth to Mary, the devotee; and Mary was to be the mother of Jesus, who was to come to bring the Good News. Through this episode, the process of devotion would be completed.

Now in sum, God did the following by blessing Anna by a baby girl:

1. Tested Anna.
2. Purified her from the misguided traditional culture.
3. Provided a divine correction to corruption by removing arrogant men from their idolatrous state and returning them to the path of their true nature.
4. Drew attention to the plight of women and dimensions of motherhood, elevating women and mothers back to the high positions in society that they deserved.
5. Prepared the way for miraculous future events.

## **Fifth Stage: Trusting God**

Anna's sadness and confusion did not last long. She adapted to the situation and accepted it with full submission. After this, what needed to be done was to treat the devotee in the best way and protect her with the consciousness that she is a trust.

She was able to fulfill her maternal obligations by nursing Mary by her milk, and lovingly guarded her. She was not worried in this sense. Her primary worry was about her protection from a spiritual perspective, because this part of her responsibility was beyond her capacity. She was aware of it, just as she was aware that Satan would trouble all human beings right after their birth, because Satan was the archenemy of man.

*"Verily, Satan is man's open foe!" (Chapter 12, verse 5)*

Satan does not discriminate between child or adult; even if a child is in the womb, he is actively planning trouble for that person, and at birth he seeks that the newborn is devoted to himself, to become a soldier of his. Perhaps knowing this truth, Anna chose the most guaranteed path for her child even while the child was in her womb, and she did not waste any time to make this prayer to her Lord as the first thing:

*"Verily, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed." (Chapter 3, verse 36)*

This prayer brings Anna forth to us as a person who is teaching motherhood to all mothers. She is teaching that motherhood is not about clothing and feeding. She was chosen by God as the example of devotion by teaching parents that a good future for their children is not about livelihood and inheritance, but rather leaving them in security, protected from the evil of Satan.

Anna is spoken of in the Quran as an exemplary mother for the family of mankind. She secured her baby's future by consecrating her while she was in her womb. She also provided protection from the archenemy, Satan, by her prayer of protection right after the birth of the baby. It was as if she knocked at the door to her Lord and said: "The consecrated one is born. From now on, her care, her guardianship, and her destiny do not belong to me but You. For this reason, I offer her to You."

Following this sincere act, the reply came. We learn this from the narration of the last prophet. Muhammad said thus:

"There is no child of man born without the Satan's touch except the daughter of Imran's wife and her son. It is because the wife of Imran said this when she delivered her baby: 'Oh Lord, I seek Thy protection for her and her offspring against Satan, the accursed.'"

In this way, we are shown the way to destroy the evil trap set for our children by Satan and his friends, who act much quicker than us in educating our children. That means children's education begins by the beginning of pregnancy, contrary to the assumption that the age of education begins at discretion of society.

Anna's role was to end here. She had devoted herself while breaking all the chains of oppression, pledged the devotee to



her owner, and completed her duty by success in this devotional process.

Now, it was the second phase of this devotional framework.

How were all of these acts of Anna seen by the Lord, the one to whom the child was consecrated?

Is the offering accepted or is it rejected like the offering presented by Cain?

If accepted, in what form and why is it accepted?

How was this devotee treated, cared for, and raised?

How were the people positioned to educate this devotee, and how were they rewarded?

And the most worthy question of all: What message would the devotee convey?

The answers to all of these questions can be found in the story of the second generation of this devotional framework.

## **Sixth Stage: The Acceptance of the Devotion:**

*“And thereupon her Sustainer accepted the female child with goodly acceptance, and caused her to grow up in goodly growth, and placed her in the care of Zachariah. Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: ‘O Mary, whence came this unto thee?’ She would answer: ‘It is from God; behold, God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 37)*

The wife of Imran consecrated her unborn child, delivered her, confirmed her pledge to God, and passed away from this life. Anna had two wishes from her Lord:

1. The acceptance of her act of devotion.
2. Protection of her child from the evil of Satan.

The first she asked of her Lord even before the birth, and the second right after the birth of her child. We learn again from the Quran that the reply her Lord gave was positive:

*“And so her Sustainer accepted her with goodly acceptance.”*

In the verse, the name “Sustainer” is chosen from among the many names of God. Indeed the selection of this name originated from divine preference, the reason being that whatever happened was the reflection of this attribute of God.

Yes, God, the Sustainer, accepted the devotion entrusted to Him to sustain. However, there are different kinds of acceptances. For example, there are obliged acceptances that look like this: Someone brings a gift to person of worldly power; even though the recipient does not value the giver, he still is obliged to accept the gift because of some considerations and says, "All right, all right, leave it at the door and go." This is one kind of acceptance.

There is also acceptance based on pity. This is accepting a gift just in order not to break someone's heart, or make him happy without even looking to see what the gift was, just to get it over with. This person might say, "Take it and give it to someone to make them happy." This is also a form of acceptance.

Acceptance with pleasure is the best of all, and Anna's devotion was accepted with such appreciation by her Sustainer.

"Her Sustainer accepted the female child with goodly acceptance." (Chapter 3, verse 37)

While the offering of Cain was rejected by his Sustainer, Anna's was not. Furthermore, it was described as not just an ordinary but a goodly acceptance. Surely there was a good reason for this.

The reason was her piety. She offered a beautiful devotion.

What was the manner of this offering? And what made it beautiful?

First, her faith was legitimate. She devoted to God, whom she believed to be All-Hearing, All-Knowing, and the Educator, without any constriction, without negotiating. And she did submit her child to God, whom she also believed to be the best protector, and guardian against the mischief of Satan.

All these were the signs of Anna's consciousness in mon-

otheism. This level of consciousness is gained not through knowledge, but rather by faith, and is activated through love. She proved her maturity in her consciousness of monotheism by her devotion, faith, direction, and submission. In summary, her faith was true and legitimate.

Secondly, her intention was legitimate and true as well. She made her devotion and did not expect anything in return. She submitted her child, her beloved baby, to God and did not even stipulate that her brother-in-law, Zachariah, must be the staff member of the temple who would take care of her, in order not to do anything unmannerly against the Sustainer.

Of course it should be so! It is up to the recipient of the act of devotion to decide what to do with it. If someone gives you a gift, then turns around and asks you about the gift, trying to tell you what to do with it ... wouldn't that be very unmannerly? Anna was not impolite to her Lord. She did not even request guardianship from Zachariah's family over her baby girl, which was her very basic right; in this way, she proved to be very sincere in her deed once again. In summary, her intention was legitimate.

Thirdly, her manner was legitimate. Instead of enjoying the rightful pride of devoting her only child, whom she had at the end of her life, she modestly said, "Accept this from me." She did not make any claim of superiority or become pretentious. After her child was born, she continued her modesty.

As was her faith, intention and method was right, God placed her deed in the category of good deeds, and accepted it with a goodly acceptance.

In other words: A beautiful devotion of a beautiful one presented beautifully to the most beautiful in a beautiful manner was accepted beautifully.

## MESSAGE OF DEVOTION

From now on, the treatment of the devotee belongs to one to whom it was devoted.

Here a question comes to mind: All right then, how does the most beautiful, God, treat a beautiful one (Mary), when a beautiful submitter (Anna) devotes her in a beautiful manner (legitimate) and receives a beautiful acceptance?

## **Seventh Stage: Being Raised Like a Flower**

For such a flower there is such a gardener.

Here we asked how God treats a devotee when devoted in such a beautiful and proper manner. Let us get the answer from Him (God):

“Her Sustainer accepted her with a goodly acceptance and caused her to grow up in goodly growth ...”

Being accepted by God; furthermore, with a goodly acceptance, not an ordinary kind! And as a natural result of this, being elected to grow up with goodly growth!

A flower needs water, sunlight, and fertilizer. Every flower cannot grow in every place; each needs appropriate soil and climate.

Flowers require daily care; if that care is not given, they wilt and die.

A flower needs a gardener who looks after all these needs, and a trustee who protects it from disease and pests.

In this particular flower’s case, primarily, her family and seed must be special. Indeed, they are Imran and his wife, who are special. The soil of this flower is the house of Imran that God has chosen; and the location is God’s pure house. The sun for this flower is love and care; its water and fertilizer

are purification and worship. The person who is assigned for daily care of it is Zachariah:

“... and placed her in the care of Zachariah.” (Chapter 3, verse 37)

It is only God’s work to assign a prophet as a gardener in the care of such devotee.

Who is this gardener?

He is one of the assigned messengers in the Holy House (*Bayt’ul Muqaddas*).

For a long time, the service of the Holy House had been performed by the children of prophets, and in this way the assignment was transferred from generation to generation. Zachariah is thus one of the righteous persons from this lineage.<sup>14</sup>

The other members of the religious institution did not want to miss the opportunity to be the guardians to such a special kind of devotee. They did not accept Zachariah’s wish to take her in his care even though he held a rightful claim. He had said to them: “She is my relative. My wife is her aunt. For this reason, taking her into my care falls on me more than any of you.” They rejected this request, began discussions, and decided to draw lots at the end. Down into the Jordan River they threw their pens that they used to write down the scriptures of the Old Testament; here God’s invisible help reached down and waters of the Jordan River brought Zachariah’s lot forward.<sup>15</sup>

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14 The following part of the verse under discussion, “and placed her in the care of Zachariah,” means also in another reading: “Zachariah took upon himself her care.” The difference between these two readings is the same in the result even though the first one means the assignment of Zachariah by God and the second is the volunteering of Zachariah. This reading diversity is not an important difference pertaining to the core of the verse’s message.

15 We are not going into details of the narrations that almost all commentaries dealt with in detail

“This account of something that was beyond the reach of thy perception We [now] reveal unto thee: for thou wert not with them when they drew lots as to which of them should be Mary’s guardian, and thou wert not with them when they contended [about it] with one another.” (Chapter 3, verse 44)

There is a fact that we have to be aware of concerning the narrative part of the event: how God, who “placed her in the care of Zachariah,” performed his will, and how God helps someone who devotes in his sake ...

### “God’s Forces”

We live in a universe of reasons. Everything occurs within a divine plan even though the human brain falls short in comprehending most of it. The almighty God, who holds power over everything, materializes His rewards and punishment in this framework of divine plan. In this materialization process of divine planning, all creatures take part in realizing God’s will. The Quran calls them in entirety “God’s forces.” We have very little knowledge about their quantity and quality:

“For God’s are all the forces of the heavens and the earth.”  
(Chapter 48, verse 7)

“For We have caused none but angelic powers to lord over the fire [of hell]; and We have not caused their number to be aught but a trial for those who are bent on denying the truth.”  
(Chapter 74, verse 31)

“O you who have attained to faith! Call to mind the bless-

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and sometimes with some variation.



ings which God bestowed on you (at the time) when [enemy] hosts came down upon you, whereupon We let loose against them a storm wind and [heavenly] hosts that you could not see yet God saw all that you did." (Chapter 33, verse 9)

Yes, everything in the universe, from microorganism to galaxy, intangible or material, animate or inanimate – all kinds of beings take on "extra" duties as God's forces while they are performing their regular responsibilities of being in the universal plan.

There have been many examples of this from the first man till today. Yet these soldiers will continue to fulfill the duties assigned to them wherever and whenever required. Some striking examples of these are recounted in the Quran, so this is an opportunity to provide a reminder of the universal movement doing God's work.

This is an opportunity that no other movement on earth has had: It is only for the faithful working to do God's will – those get the help of clouds, water, wind, fire, stone, sun and so many others. We learn from the stories in the Quran that the following people and groups – Noah, Lot, Salih, Abraham, Moses, and the People of the Cave and the People of Badr – received the same kind of help that Zachariah received.

Meanwhile, the same way the inanimate forces of our Sustainer ran to help them when they faced difficulties, Satan did not wait idly by: He was helping his friends and his soldiers too. However, his help to his friends was no use against God's help. And he knew that the party that God helps surely would win, so in such situations he would fall hopeless and get agitated with himself.

So, God's acceptance of Anna's devotion was not limited to mere words, just as Anna's thankfulness was not limited to

words. For the devotee to grow like a flower, God's soldiers were mobilized, like Zachariah – a conscious being – and the river that was unconscious.

Every believer who shows the same type of sincerity and deserves help will be helped when it becomes necessary. This is God's promise that extends to all times:

“Verily God will ward off [all evil] from those who attain to faith.” (Chapter 22, verse 38)

“For We had willed it upon Ourselves to secure the believers.” (Chapter 30, verse 47)

And again, God does not break His promise:

“Oh, verily, God's promise always comes true – but most of them know it not!” (Chapter 10, verse 55)

Wisdoms ... Wisdoms ...

So God placed Zachariah as the caretaker of the young child. When pondering on this assignment of Zachariah by God, one would see that it is full of countless wisdoms, all related to each other.

What does God do when He accepts? How does He teach when He trains? How are children raised like flowers? And how can one provide for that rare flower from amongst all the other flowers, knowing it was chosen as a role model for the worlds? This and other similar questions depend upon the comprehension of the wisdoms under consideration.

First, the event has to be discussed from two angles:

1. From the perspective of the flower (Mary).
2. From the perspective of the gardener (Zachariah).

In order to know what the selection of Zachariah meant for Mary, we have to remember again the circumstances that she was in.

According to historic accounts, Mary was still a little child during this selection and was not aware of what was happening around her.

Furthermore, this baby girl had lost her father, without ever seeing him.

Then, she also lost her mother, without the chance to know the honorable woman who gave birth to her ... she did not even have a chance to say “mother” once.

She is left with several needs. The first of these needs is someone who provides food, drink, cleanliness, and care, not just once or for a few days, but until she grows up, requiring a caretaker who is extremely giving and does not complain even once. Even more importantly, the devotee needs love and mercy. Isn't it the case that a person is fed on bread, grows on labor, and lives on love?

The gardener assigned to her care had to be able to supply the needs of this flower, whose water was love, whose sun was mercy, and whose fertilizer was the nutrients she needed for spiritual growth.

At this point, the mightiness of the wisdom in divine selection dazzles our eyes and the dual dimensionality in divine education from God bears witness in perfection.

God first of all makes space around the person whose education He takes upon Himself, just as He did with the last messenger of God, Muhammad: God first takes father and mother, so that the person to be raised by God does not have anyone else other than God to offer refuge, support, and shelter. All the ties binding the person to this world are broken. In the last messenger's case, he lost his father, Abdullah, before birth and his mother, Amina, when he was a child. Then he stays with his grandfather Abdul Muttalib, and God takes

him away as well. The same result repeats for his uncle, Abu Talib, with whom he had taken shelter. At last, Khadijah, in whom he takes refuge, is also taken away from him by God.

There is no one to lean on anymore. In fact, even if anyone is available to lean on, it is temporary. Would he lean more so on these temporary ones? Indeed he could not, because whoever he relies on leaves; his Lord did not want him to depend on anyone even symbolically. The man known as the “mercy to the worlds,” who was trained through the education of God, has finally learned not to depend on any man. One day, he said to his friend Abu Bakr: “Oh Abu Bakr, if I were to make a dear friend, I would have chosen you.” But he does not choose any dear friend other than his Lord.

Thus, a similar treatment to that given to Muhammad was also applied to Mary, as her father and mother were taken away from her.

With this, the person is taken away from the influence of the parents who are the first educators. The ties that bind a person to his or her surroundings are broken, and afterwards a new environment is chosen for her, to which she is given as a trust. So, Mary’s surroundings were cleared because of Anna’s sincerity, in order that society’s negative culture would not affect her.

When the landscape was cleansed of the possible inhibitors to her growth, the flower was set in a different pot and an entirely different environment.<sup>16</sup> After this, someone had to be chosen for Mary so that her needs, care, love, and mercy are all provided and no interference disrupts her training. At this

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<sup>16</sup> She was performing a kind of migration even while she was still a baby, following the tradition of all the prophets and righteous martyrs who also were forced into migration.

point, the divine will makes a perfect selection. Orphan Mary was placed in the care of her own aunt's love and mercy.<sup>17</sup>

Mary was given to Zachariah's family just as a trust. She was a trust because she belonged directly to God. He allowed no one to come in between or shadow the divine training he ordained. So the education of the devotee would be pure. In summary, no one except Him should handle her education and she should seek refuge only in her Lord.

What at first looked like a loss turned out to be a gain.

This divine scenario was perfect not only for the flower, but also for the gardener. When we look at the event from the perspective of Zachariah and his family, we see this: As much as the flower needed a gardener, the gardener needed the flower as well. Zachariah, whose wife Aisha was barren, had become very old without having the good offspring that he desired so much. By giving Mary to this couple to care for, God filled their void of longing for a child they could love.

For Aisha in particular, no doubt what she desired the most was to take over the care of her niece, who was now an orphan and the only remembrance her sister left. This duty belonged to her more than anyone else – after all, she could care for her better than any stranger. If she took on Mary's care, she might be able to fill the empty space left after Anna, and give Mary at least the love and mercy of a mother. Mary was a vulnerable little girl – this motherly care would protect her from exploitation in the hands of others.

Aisha was feeding not only the tummy of her niece, but also her heart and mind; training of this special trust with

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<sup>17</sup> One remembers the last messenger Muhammad's beautiful declaration, as reported by Abu Dawud: "Your aunt is like your mother."

healthy knowledge was left to Zachariah. Mary was apparently prepared for the temple to which she was devoted. In reality, though, she was being prepared by God for something none of them could even guess.

When the time arrived, Zachariah settled her in the temple and made a secure dwelling place for her and completed his duty successfully. Because of his old age, his mind was on his approaching death, and he was wondering who was going to take care of Mary's needs as she did not go out of the temple much. After a long period of worries, finally that matter found a solution too. Now, his cousin, the carpenter Joseph – or Yusuf – took this task upon himself.

Zachariah was satisfied that he had completed his duty; however, even though his watch over Mary had decreased, he never stopped checking on her and watching to see if Yusuf was fulfilling his duty.

At this time, there was a drought that caused severe famine. When they kept hearing of people dying because of the famine, they forgot themselves and began worrying for Mary. All the work now was for the flower not to fade.

However, someone else was thinking on her behalf, watching and protecting her. He sent His help when His servant ran out of power. The aids He provided amazed His prophet, Zachariah, who knew and recognized his Lord well.

## **Eighth Stage: Divine Aid**

*“Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: ‘O Mary, whence came this unto thee?’ She would answer: ‘It is from God; behold God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 37)*

Yusuf accepted the position to take care of Mary’s needs after her settlement at the temple, but he was going through quite a difficult time in performing his duty because of the drought and famine. Mary did not have many needs; however, in a famine, provision for even one person’s care is a big deal. Yusuf was trying to do as much as he could for Mary. She was aware of this situation with her deep perception and tried to calm Yusuf thus: “Oh Yusuf, have good faith in God. For sure, God will sustain us.”<sup>18</sup>

Mary believed in God with marvelous sincerity, a belief appropriate only for her glorious lord. She had faith that indeed God somehow was going to help them. However, in order for her faith to actualize, every possible resource on hand had to vanish.

Well, it happened so. Zachariah came across something amazing during a routine visit, at a time when he was aware

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<sup>18</sup> As reported by Ibn Ishaq.

of the hardship of the situation and was dealing with the pain of not being able to aid:

“Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: ‘O Mary, whence came this unto thee?’ ”

There is no clear explanation in the Quran and the sunnah (the traditions and words of Prophet Muhammad) about the nature of this provision, as to where it came from and exactly what it was, but the scholars have expressed their opinions. An early commentator, Zamahshari, in his commentary of this verse, says: “Her sustenance was coming from heaven, she did not have any milk from her mother, but she found beside her winter fruits during summer and summer fruits during winter.” Almost all the second generation of scholars and the first commentators say similar things. On the other hand, Maragi and some other scholars reject this interpretation and say that these were not heavenly foods but normal foods, nothing miraculous. These say that Zachariah’s amazement was in how Mary received them, especially in the time of famine.

It is not so important from our perspective to know what this provision was and where it came from. If this detail would have added to the Quran’s message in this story, God no doubt would have explained the nature and source of this provision just as He described other parts of the story in detail. It is simply not strange at all for God to send provisions from Himself to Mary, who would be the recipient of another miracle – to have a baby without a father.

There is one thing we know for sure, and that is that this was an extraordinary situation. We know this provision came to her without any effort on her part, and there must be some-



thing extraordinary about what she received. There cannot be another explanation for Zachariah's amazement. Evidently, there was something amazing about the situation, and no one would be amazed at something ordinary.

Here is the essential lesson to take from this: God uses all means to help people who devote their lives to Him. They will find His help whenever their strength diminishes and they go through hard times. God's help reaches from the first of mankind to the last, as long as their goals, intentions, and methods are appropriate. Examples are seen in the help provided for Noah against his tribe, Salih and Lot against their transgressing tribes, Abraham against Nimrod, Moses against the pharaoh, the People of the Cave against Diocletian, and the last messenger against the nonbelievers.

These are just a few examples. By giving these examples in the Quran, God Almighty tells the believers that He will aid them at all times and conditions against the unbelievers who are following the legacy of the pharaoh, Nimrod, and tribes of Noah and Lot. However, it is necessary to meet certain conditions to receive this aid. We see these conditions clearly in these exemplary stories in the Quran.

Thus, Mary was a devout person who deserved the divine aid by her faith, good deeds, patience, and perseverance.

"God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning." (Chapter 3, verse 37)

It is not right to restrict an understanding of this divine sustenance to provision or food only. This sustenance comes in different forms: it was given to some as prophethood, to some it is given as knowledge, to some as wisdom, to some as wealth, or governance, or power, or patience and success, or heroic feats and honor. Sometimes, a person will even

receive all these gifts if he fulfills all the conditions and really deserves them. God gives all these resources and more to the ones who work for His sake, consecrating and being consecrated. They are for those who struggle by their hearts, minds, and souls; these people can benefit from this “open account” that is without any limit to its riches.

Whoever is surprised about the food – whose delight is momentary – that was given to Mary should be equally amazed at the other gifts given to her, including guidance, sincerity, wisdom, steadfastness, determination, strength, perception, and the miracle of procreation. These blessings are not like food or drink; they are more valuable and long-lasting.

Mary was given a son without the aid of a father, and she – as a woman alone in her travails – passed tests heavier than the weight of mountains. The most honorable and chaste woman of her time was subjected to the lowest slanders her own people could offer.

Was the patience and perseverance she was given to withstand this tremendous test any less incredible a gift than the food she was given? Why has the Islamic scholarly tradition for centuries neglected this crucial point instead of wasting time discussing the quantity and the quality of the “sustenance” whose benefits are minor in comparison?

Indeed, “God grants sustenance unto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning” (chapter 3, verse 37), just like He gives wisdom, faith, patience, perseverance, and insight.

This sustenance actually was the start of another process as part of the divine plan, which led toward rewarding the family of Zachariah with the gift of John the Baptist, known to Muslims as Yahya, for their services.

### **Reward to the gardener**

*“In that context, Zachariah prayed unto his Sustainer, saying: ‘O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hearest all prayer.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 38)*

Zachariah was filled with the satisfaction of accomplishing his mission of taking care of the precious flower and returning her to her owner.

“Whenever Zachariah visited her in the sanctuary, he found her provided with food. He would ask: ‘O Mary, whence came this unto thee?’ ”

This help, which is the measure of the sincerity between the Sustainer and His devout follower, was the sign of Mary’s value in God’s regard.

There was turmoil stirring within the heart of Zachariah as he witnessed this situation. Questions in his mind came like storms. Emotions he had not felt before began to fill his heart from the void this event opened there.

He desired so much to have a devout child like Mary now.

He had always admired her and acknowledged her. After witnessing the divine aid to her, his admiration turns into a desire and wish. Now he was feeling sharper than ever the pain of being childless.

This feeling was not new for him; it had been there since he took the responsibility for Mary’s care. It seemed impossible for his wish to become reality, because he was very old and his wife was barren. Therefore, he tried to satisfy his longing for a child by focusing all his attention on her care. The present reality of life was standing like a mighty mountain in front of the desires of Zachariah’s family.

But then, what he witnessed in God's extraordinary care of Mary was like a new horizon opening before him. The ashes of his old desire for a child were reignited and his heart was kindled all aglow. The One who sustained Mary in such a way despite the circumstances – would not the same One open the ways for Zachariah to have a child? Wouldn't He clear their handicaps of old age out of the way?

As the Quran describes, when he, Zachariah, saw the blessings given to Mary, he opened his hands to pray.

"In that context, Zachariah prayed unto his Sustainer, saying: 'O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hearest all prayer.' " (Chapter 3, verse 38)

Zachariah made this prayer while witnessing the sustenance provided to Mary, which was far out of the ordinary, so he could be blessed by a child out of the ordinary fashion too.

It is understood from the verse that what brought him to his Lord was that blessing given to Mary. For a long time, the Sustainer's protection over Mary, whom he admired, by her faith, righteousness, and morality, was the kindling of this desire in him for a devout child.

When Zachariah saw Mary in that circumstance, his comprehension was lifted above this world of events and matters that work in chains of cause and effects. He was now face-to-face with this forceful example of God's mercy, power, protection, care, and aid. He made this prayer from the bottom of his heart as he paused in astonishment.

"O my Sustainer! Bestow upon me [too], out of Thy grace, the gift of goodly offspring; for Thou, indeed, hearest all prayer."

Yes, God is all-hearing and all-knowing. He knew Zachariah's prayer and his desire for a child was out of devotion, and so he too could devote for His sake, not for worldly desires. He knew that Zachariah did not want a child for reasons like continuing his family name. He knew that his desire was to enjoy the contentment of giving God a gift and great sacrifice.

This prayer was going to be accepted and the gardener was to be rewarded. Not long after this:

"Thereupon, as he stood praying in the sanctuary, the angels called out unto him: 'God sends thee the glad tiding of [the birth of] John, who shall confirm the truth of a word from God, and [shall be] outstanding among men, and utterly chaste, and a prophet from among the righteous.' " (Chapter 2, verse 39)

The good news was given: the birth of John (Yahya). He was the reward for Zachariah's services. This good news to Zachariah would serve another purpose as well: an atmosphere was being prepared, after Anna and Mary, for the last generation of this devotional process, Jesus. One of John's features was, as mentioned in Quran, that he was to "confirm the truth of a word from God" – to confirm the truth of Jesus.

When Zachariah had made his prayer, he was in the transcendental state of one witnessing a miracle and getting a glimpse into powers beyond the realm of the material world. But upon receiving the reply right away that his request will be granted, he went back to the world of reasons – the world of logic, laws, and material things. In this world, it appears impossible for Zachariah's request to become a reality. He asked with the bewilderment of one locked up in the world of logic:

"[Zachariah] exclaimed: 'O my Sustainer! How can I have

a son when old age has already overtaken me, and my wife is barren?' " (Chapter 4, verse 40)

He asked this even though it was he who asked for this exact gift a little earlier. However, as we have mentioned earlier, there is a huge difference between the spiritual state of when he made this prayer and now when he asked this question. He made his prayer by his heart and faith; however, he asked this subsequent question by his logic and mind. This question was only an example of the ancient contest and clash between these two worlds.

However, Zachariah got his wish by putting his mind and logic into the hands of his faith. This was a simple process: He saw Mary in that condition, and made a comparison right there between his and her situation. After this comparison, he came to a conclusion from the fact that his position resembles hers and he could have a similar outcome. Then he presented his case from his heart where his faith is the ruler. His Lord approved of it and further presented Zachariah with blessings from his Sustainer.

But now he asks as he turns the process of perception by believing into the perception by logic:

"How can I have a son?"

The answer he got from his Sustainer was to speak to his faith, not to his mind:

"Thus it is: God does what He wills."

Yes as you see, the answer is short and simple: "Thus it is." And then, attention is drawn to one attribute of God: "God does what He wills." Isn't it so that He is the creator, all-powerful?

Even though Zachariah's heart believed in this, his logic seemed not to submit so easily. His mind needed to be con-

vinced. For this, proofs, documents, and things of those sorts were needed. Zachariah turned to his Sustainer.

“[Zachariah] prayed: ‘O my Sustainer! Appoint a sign for me!’

Said [the angel]: ‘Thy sign shall be that for three days thou wilt not speak unto men other than by gestures. And remember thy Sustainer unceasingly, and extol His limitless glory by night and by day.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 41)

### **The uniqueness of Mary**

After this verse, the subject changes all of a sudden and returns to the main subject:

“And lo! The angels said: “O! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world.” (Chapter 3, verse 43)

At first it seems like there is no relation between these two verses. Nevertheless, after concentrating on them carefully, one can see that there are some attributes used for Mary, a woman, that are not used for Zachariah; for example, “elected,” “made pure,” “and raised above.”

There’s no doubt that there were differences that made her unique. In our opinion it is the difference of submission between the two elected and devout ones, Zachariah and Mary, that comes into play first. The angels called unto her just like Zachariah when they said, “O! Behold, God sends thee the glad tiding, through a word from Him.” She asked how it is that when no hand of man touched her. In return, the same answer given to Zachariah was given to her. Let us consider these verses:

“Lo! The angels said: ‘O! Behold, God sends thee the glad

ting, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn near unto God.

Said she: ‘O my Sustainer! How can I have a son when no man has ever touched me?’

[The angel] answered: ‘Thus it is: God creates what He wills: when He wills a thing to be, He but says unto it, ‘Be’ – and it is.’ ” (Chapter 3, verses 45-47)

What is said to Zachariah and Mary? The replies to each are in almost the same format. However, there is a difference. While Zachariah asks for a sign that he will have a son, Mary on the other hand does not need to ask for any sign – even though she faces a more challenging situation while knowing herself that no man has touched her. She accepts this, saying “Thus it is,” and submits without condition to the divine will. Zachariah received the same answer, but could not help asking for a sign.

Thus for this reason, Mary was named the trustworthy (“*siddiq*”) in chapter 5, verse 57, and became one of the two women (the other is the wife of pharaoh) presented as the model for the women of the world. In chapter 66, Mary is also called among those “*ganeteen*,” truly devoted to her Sustainer.

“Who accepted the truth of her Sustainer’s words, – and [thus,] of His revelations – and was one of the truly devout.” (Chapter 66, verse 12)

Neither “trustworthiness” nor “being truly devout” are the attributes that solely belong to messengers and prophets. Whoever exhibits these and other similar attributes will become eligible candidates to be divinely selected for a post.

The caretaker of the devotee, Zachariah, was rewarded by



the birth of John the Baptist. In this occurrence, the example of the message points to the sacrificing members of those working for God's movement. Both the reward and the rewarded are also awarded martyrdom, which is the highest honor bestowed at the end of life. These two helpers in the process of devotion dedicated their lives to their Sustainer, and they were rewarded by martyrdom.

In this process of devotion, the role of John is no less than that of his father, Zachariah. Zachariah assisted the generation of the devotion by raising Mary; John had the duty of preparing the atmosphere for the third generation. John lived for the rule of his faith and was martyred by the despot ruling leaders of his time, who did not want to obey God's orders, after he was unjustly imprisoned and eventually killed.

During this phase of devotion, John is not the only sacrifice. As mentioned earlier, his father Zachariah also joined the ranks of people who are sacrificed for the sake of God after his son was killed.

All these occurrences might seem like a tragedy for the family of Zachariah, but in fact it is filled with the greatest of awards. They earned martyrdom by their efforts in the process of devotion.

## **Ninth Stage: Selection of the Second Generation**

*“And lo! The angels said: ‘O! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world.’ ”*

The girl who was devoted to God has grown, and she has joined the candidates for divine selection. Her mother’s prayer was not sufficient guarantee for her selection, but it gave her a head start as a candidate. The high position of the house of Imran also was not enough to ensure that every member of this family would be chosen for this cause. To be chosen, each family member was to go forward and affect the result through his or her own faith, good deeds, and sincerity.

“Every human being’s destiny have We tied to his neck.” (Chapter 17, verse 13)

“Every soul draws the meed of its acts on none but itself: no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another.” (Chapter 6, verse 164)

So, Mary’s selection was made based on this divine law, which transcends time and place. It is an important point to recognize that for Mary to belong to a righteous family, to be the beneficiary of her mother’s sincere prayer, or to be devoted by her mother before birth – none of these were enough reason for her to be selected as amongst the chosen. Only after she reached the age of maturity and responsibility, and

she proved herself by her faith and action, only then was she informed that she was chosen. This is clear from the verse at the beginning of this section. The tense of the expression used in the verse shows that Mary's selection happened within a due process. That is, Mary was selected when the time was right. The choices she made by her free will and subsequent good deeds she did determined the timing of selection.

The sustenance, which appeared out of nowhere, surprised Prophet Zachariah but not Mary. She perceived these blessings as a natural result of her sincere relationship with her Sustainer, and stated her beliefs, which had full conviction in, as follows:

“Behold God grants sustenance onto whom He wills, beyond all reckoning.” (Chapter 3, verse 37)

In addition, to be amongst those whom God chose, she had the maturity to say to her cousin Yusuf, “Oh Yusuf, have faith in God – for sure God will sustain us,” at a time when everyone was struggling for life. This made it possible. She believed this truth with all her being and she turned her heart and mind to God just like her body. For this reason, she did not show any sign of worry and was calming everyone around her by expressing her trust in God.

So Mary was finally receiving the glad tiding that she had succeeded on her tests and won the selection:

“And lo! The angels said: ‘O! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world.’ ”

For sure, God chooses the ones who purify themselves, and He also purifies those whom He chooses. That means when the human being does what is up to himself or herself, then God does more in helping that person. He promised to

help those who help His religion. Hence, God purifies the ones who are devoted to His sake.

As to the nature of this purification, it could be physical, or it could mean removing spiritual blemishes like polytheism, immorality, sins, or transgressions. In our opinion, Mary was purified in all material and spiritual areas where cleansing is possible – mind, heart, and body – for the great responsibility she was going to shoulder. She became so close to God that He rewarded her by faith and sincerity, submission and trust, by honoring her as the “exemplary woman” of all times.

Mary had done what was up to her by trying to stay away from emotional, mental, and material contaminations as much as possible. She never swayed in her trust and faith in God. Then God aided her in areas that her strength was not sufficient and perfected her with purification. This was the law of life: when the servant fulfills his or her duty as much as his or her strength allows, then the Sustainer helps and completes what is left unfinished.

The term “*aalameen*,” or “the worlds” in the verse, is a plural term used for conscious creatures in the Arabic language. Hence, Mary was selected from among all conscious creatures.

No doubt her superiority to the women of the world is symbolic; basically she is being presented as “a role model.” This can be understood from the traditions of the last messenger on this subject: “The best of the women of paradise are the daughter of Imran and Khadijah, the daughter of Khuwaylid,”<sup>19</sup> and “Amongst the women who reached the peak of spiritual maturity ... Mary, Asiyah, Khadijah and Fatima are amongst them.”<sup>20</sup>

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19 Narrated by Ali B. Ebu Taalib.

20 Narrated by Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari.

It is understood from these reports that Mary is an exemplary woman and mother. Her story illustrates the possibility and need for every society in every time period to have a Mary too. If it were impossible for other women to be the "Mary" of their times, why would the Quran point her as an example? The examples in the Quran are meant to be advice. What is suggested by God is achievable, because suggesting the impossible does not fit into God's wisdom.

The Quran elaborates on its examples. Asiyah is the model for a woman who has fallen in the hands of such a man like the pharaoh, who is rich in worldly measures but poor in faith. Just as she protected her faith under such conditions, the Asiyah of the modern age too will protect her faith vigorously against the diverse seductions like hedonistic luxury and selfish passions.

For the woman who wants to devote an immortal devotion to God, the example is the wife of Imran, Anna. She would dedicate her devotion like Anna did. She would take the example of Anna's strong belief, sincerity, and manner.

Mary, Khadijah and Fatimah are more examples for mothers of the leaders. These mothers show guidance, invite humanity to truth, and undergo responsibilities heavier than the mountains ... As long as humanity exists, there will be those who follow the examples of these models.

These examples are presented so a Muslim woman can become the Asiyah, Anna, Mary, Khadijah, Fatima, or Zainab of her time, her society, or her family.

## **Tenth Stage: Divine Prescription, Final Preparations**

It is undeniable that Mary has a distinguished position amongst all the exemplary women in history. She was the model of the models. God had presented her as an example to the spouses of the last prophet – Aisha, Zainab, Safiyyah – who themselves were in the position of exemplary models for the believing women.

After Mary became a candidate due to her faith, sincerity, and good deeds, and was chosen by divine decree, God presented her a prescription for inner training that suited her placement. The heavy responsibility she was going to undertake in the future could only be carried successfully by such faith, sincerity, and submission. This is the prescription:

“O! Behold, God has elected thee and made thee pure, and raised thee above all the women of the world. O! Remain thou truly devout unto thy Sustainer, and prostrate thyself in worship, and bow down with those who bow down [before Him].” (Chapter 3, verses 42-43)

O Mary!

The holy gate you shall submit yourself in standing upright is the same holy gate you were given for devotion.

It also is the only place for prostration, bowing down your head, submitting with full presence, and pleading what is in

your heart, and a place from which you should never turn away. It is the only place to say: "*labbayk ya Rabb*," "I came to you oh Sustainer," and worship with obedience.

Hence, direct your thanks to Him. Turn your eyes, your face, your soul, and your heart only toward Him. Do not look for any other shelter, refuge, or support. Bow down together with the whole universe, which bows down to Him. Get ready with the conscious beings and inanimate objects, heavens and the earth, mountains and the seas, atoms and the cells, and the angels! ...

Do turn your feelings and thoughts to Him and His beloveds, whatever and whoever is related to Him!

You too join this universal chorus with all the trusted ones, devout ones, martyred ones, and "bow down with those who bow down [before Him]."

You are not alone! You are sharing the common values with those who reject worshipping created ones and submitted themselves to God, the Creator. Hence, join their tremendous crowd and enjoy playing your role chosen by your Sustainer! ...

The phrase "*maa'r-raki'een*," which means "with those who bow down," came in the masculine plural form, which can encompass both male and female – not the specific feminine plural "*raaki'at*." This makes the phrase inclusive gender-wise, avoiding the misunderstanding that it might refer to a suggestion limited to one gender, females. The phrase refers to all human beings, both women and men, and even other conscious beings who bow down – the jinns and angels.

With this divine order, "bow down with those who bow down [before Him]," Mary is being reminded that she is not alone but rather a member of a universal movement. She

stands with all those who have stood up in presence of their Lord and Sustainer between hope and worry in the middle of night with a transcendent spirit and universal consciousness, and she bows with all those who have bowed down to Him.

Now, the process that began by Anna's prayer was getting closer to bearing its fruits. Anna, after submitting her devotion, passed away from this world. The devotee was accepted by the one to whom she was submitted, and she was raised like a flower by the help of the gardeners in the house of Prophet Zachariah.

After the devotee proved her maturity in her individual test and earned divine selection, the final preparations are underway.

Mary has to get ready to face a responsibility that is heavy both mentally and materially, and that responsibility is the miracle of delivering a child without any father. There is also a social aspect to her challenge, in all the accusations Mary would face. This most chaste woman was going to be subjugated to an ugly slander by relatives and society when she became pregnant. Even other righteous people like Prophet Zachariah and Yusuf were to face their share of the slander.

What a strange manifestation of fate it is that this devotee – from an honored family, raised by Prophet Zachariah, recipient of divine aid – was to be put under such a heavy test that could cause even the mountains to moan!

It is very hard to guess the weight of the test and the pain she suffered because of these slanders, as she was still very young.

Mary, the child of divine training, whose unshaken faith is witnessed by Quran, and whose attributes of trust and sincerity were approved by God, was going to say the following.



“Oh, would that I had died ere this, and had become a thing forgotten, utterly forgotten!” (Chapter 19, verse 23)

This is God’s way of testing.

This is the most challenging of the tests.

Once the tests start, they pour down on the heads of those who shoulder the great message. This is called “trial upon trial” by the Quran, and those who pass these trials without failing or collapsing under this onslaught, without turning back and giving up, emerge then as the strongest in faith since their faith is strengthened like steel.

“And most certainly We shall try you all, so that We might mark out those of you who strive hard [in Our cause] and are patient in adversity: for We shall put to a test [the truth of] all your assertions.” (Chapter 47, verse 31)

“But] do you think that you could enter paradise without having suffered like those [believers] who passed away before you? Misfortune and hardship befell them, and so shaken were they that the apostle, and the believers with him, would exclaim, ‘When will God’s succour come?’” (Chapter 2, verse 214)

“Wherefore He requited you with woe in return for [the Apostle’s] woe, so that you should not grieve [merely] over what had escaped you, nor over what had befallen you: for God is aware of all that you do.” (Chapter 3, verse 153)

Those who feel the load of the tremendous responsibility on their shoulders as they follow the legacy of the examples or serve as an example might bend a bit but do not fall down, stumble but not collapse, slow down but not lay down. While they struggle with sadness and hardship, if you happen to ask them about their condition, you would always get the same answer:

“They said: ‘For us God sufficeth, and He is the best Guardian.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 173)

Even if you find them at the hardest times, even then you cannot make them complain about God. They do know that being tested by fires is being trained. They are pleased with their Sustainer (trainer). Indeed He too is pleased by them.

“God will be well pleased with them, and they with Him. They are the Party of God. Truly it is the Party of God that will achieve success.” (Chapter 58, verse 22)

No matter how much hardship they take, they do not attribute it to God. Their complaints and sadness would be only from their own selves. Whenever something good happens to them, they attribute it to God, and whenever they receive otherwise, they themselves take upon the responsibility for it.

They serve as shields for their societies, buffering them from challenges. They live for the eternal happiness of mankind, and struggle for their eternal goodness, fight and even die for them. They hold their heads up amid all the lightening strikes in the storms of life.

Just as a poet says:

Whenever a sad heart is traveling, it can visit me,  
Along path of troubles, I am a lighthouse to help.

## **Eleventh Stage: And the Fruit of the Devotional Process – the Glad Tidings**

We now have come to the final stage of the devotional process. The fruit of all this process is now to be picked.

This “beautiful plant” had been planted on the field of the house of Imran. Anna devoted the seedling to her Sustainer while it was still underground. When the beautiful plant sprouted, she was raised in a beautiful garden prepared for her under the supervision of a gardener the likes of Prophet Zachariah. Already it was almost time for this growing plant to bear her fruit. This is the short story of the devotional process.

What is the conclusion? Well the conclusion is “the good news.” God named him “the Messiah,” “the good news.” Indeed, because of this challenging process, he became the good news who came to say “salvation.”

“Lo! The angels said: ‘O! Behold, God sends thee the glad tidings, through a word from Him, [of a son] who shall become known as the Christ Jesus, son of Mary, of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn near unto God.’ ” (Chapter 3, verse 45)

The Quran stresses that he is a “word” from God, because

he was the son of a word from God.<sup>21</sup> This word is the command from God: “Be” (“*kun*”). God said “Be!” and he became. By him, God the almighty was going to break most of the idols of his time.

The first idol he broke was the collective idolization of man, whom the Roman society divinized. By being born without a father, he destroyed this social idolization. Look at the force of God to break this social imbalance by how He refers to this man, and a man equipped by supernatural authorities at that:

“Jesus, the son of Mary.”

God stresses this naming convention in the Quran’s references to Jesus. In divine language, the name “Mary” was made an integral part of the name “Jesus.” Could there be a better message of rejection to anyone who discriminates or stereotypes?

The second idol he destroyed is the idolization of nationalism. The nation of sons of Israel, who were given the duty of guarding the divine message, had cheated on this trust, but still continued to see themselves as the chosen nation. The Jews at the time sanctified racism to the extent that they even claimed to have a higher position in the afterlife and favorable treatment on the Day of Judgment.

“And they say, ‘The fire will most certainly not touch us for more than a limited number of days.’ Say [unto them]: ‘Have you received a promise from God – for God never breaks His promise – or do you attribute to God something which you cannot know?’ ” (Chapter 2, verse 80)

God was destroying this nationalism, which turned into idolatry again, by someone amongst them.

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21 In Katade’s opinion.

In the verse, the expression “his name is the son of Mary, Jesus” was at the same time drawing a deep rejection to another prospective idolatry. Jesus’ followers soon would distort his message and call him “the son of God,” divinizing him. The Quran points out the right form of address, stressing the fact that he is “the son of Mary.”

While rejecting this injustice done to Jesus by his “friends” this way, God also rejects the injustice and slander done to him by his “enemies” in the same verse, by this sentence: “of great honor in this world and in the life to come, and [shall be] of those who are drawn near unto God.”

These polar opposite disasters, one of which comes from “the friends” and the other comes from “the enemies,” are generally two potential problems that await all leaders in society.

The first ones were doing injustice to him by divinizing him, which meant putting him into a position in which he did not belong. The second group was doing injustice by slander and malicious attacks, trying to draw him down. In the end, these two groups’ actions had a major point in common: They were both unjust.

The last messenger asked to be called “the messenger of God and his servant” and said “do not name me what Christians called the son of Mary!” as he knew the ancient weakness of mankind.

The Jews and Christians were in fact doing injustice to their own selves. What a pity that the vehicle for some was the one they rejected and for the others, it was the one they loved.

Hence the duty to continue the legacy of “the good news” was not given to these two aforementioned groups because of their history of underdoing and overdoing. Instead of them,

it was given to another group, the Muslims, who do not try to raise up what God lowers, and do not try to lower what God raises up.

There will of course be even amongst the Muslims who are given the trust, people who go astray. Then for sure, there will always be a righteous group of people selected amongst the Muslims and protected from such disease by reading, understanding, and observing the book in their lives:

“... and that there might grow out of you a community [of people] who invite unto all that is good, and enjoin the doing of what is right and forbid the doing of what is wrong; and it is they, they who shall attain to a happy state!” (Chapter 3, verse 104)

Thus, by the hands of the people, described in this verse, this legacy will be maintained and the duty of carrying this trust would be given to them.

This devotion story is a historical secret that God gave away to his sincere believers. This story tells one of the methods to be eligible for joining this selected group of people as the Quran mentions in Chapter 3, verse 104 – and even being a leader amongst the selected ones.

*“... that there might grow out of you a community [of people] ...”*

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