

وَأَشْفَقْنَا مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا ﴿٧٢﴾
 لِيُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ وَالْمُشْرِكَاتِ وَيَتُوبَ
 اللَّهُ عَلَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ط وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا ﴿٧٣﴾

We did offer the Trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they refused to bear its burden and were afraid of it, and man picked it up. Surely, he was unjust (to himself), unaware (of the end), [72] with the result that Allah will punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the Mushriks, men and women, and will accept the repentance of the believing men and women. Surely Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful. [73]

Commentary

Emphasis has been placed in this entire Sūrah on the reverence of the Messenger of Allah and on the obligation of obeying him. Now in the later part of the Sūrah, the great station and rank of this obedience has been identified. Here, the obedience to Allah and His Messenger and the implementation of their commands has been expressed through the word: *amanah*: (Trust), the reason of which will appear later.

What does "amanah" mean?

What is meant by the word: *amānah* at this place? many views of the leading exegetes among Ṣaḥābah and Tabi'īn, and others, have been reported to answer this question. Different things have been held to be the '*amānah*', such as, Islamic Legal Obligations, Protection of Chastity, Properties held under Trust, Removal of Impurity through having bath, Ṣalāh, Zakāh Fasting, Ḥajj etc. Therefore, the majority of commentators have said that all areas of religious conduct are included in it. (Qurṭubī)

In Tafsīr Mazharī, it was said: The whole package of all obligations and prohibitions set by the Sharī'ah is *amanah*. In Al-Baḥr-ul-Mūḥīṭ, Abū Ḥayyān said:

الظَّاهِرُ أَنَّهَا كُلُّ مَا يُؤْتَمَنُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَمْرٍ وَنَهْيٍ وَشَأْنٍ دِينِيٍّ وَدُنْيَا وَالشَّرْعُ كُلُّهُ أَمَانَةٌ
 وَهَذَا قَوْلُ الْجَمْهُورِ

Apparently every thing one is trusted with (by the Sharī'ah) from obligations and prohibitions, and every state of life which relates to this world or the Hereafter - in fact, the Sharī'ah, all

of it, is *amanah*. And this is the position the majority of Muslim scholars has taken.

In short, *amānah* (trust) means to be obligated with the precepts and injunctions of the Sharī'ah and being under command to carry these out. Once this is accomplished to the best of one's ability, the eternal blessings of Jannah (Paradise) have been promised, and on any contravention or shortcoming, there shall be the punishment of Jahannam (Hell). Some early commentators have said that *amānah* (trust) refers to the capability of fulfilling the heavy responsibility placed by Divine injunctions, something that depends on a particular degree of reason and awareness - and moving forward therein and deserving Divine vice-regency depends on this very capability. The species of creation that do not have this capability, no matter how high or superior their placement, simply cannot advance from their given place. For this reason, the skies and the earth, even angels, have no inherent ability to go forward from the place they are in. Everything from these creatures is restricted to whatever station of nearness (to the Creator) it has. Their state is aptly pointed to in a verse of the Qur'an where it was said: *مَآئِمَّا إِلَّا لَهُ، مَقَامٌ مَّعْلُومٌ* (There is no one among us who does not have a known station - As-Şāffāt, 37:164)

Under this sense of *amānah* (trust), all narrations of Ḥadīth about *amānah* turn out to be symmetrical and the sayings of the majority of commentators also converge on almost a mutual agreement.

In the Şaḥīḥs of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, and in the Musnad of Aḥmad, there is a narration from Sayyidnā Ḥudhaifah رضي الله عنه saying that, 'the Holy Prophet ﷺ had told us about two things. One of these we have already witnessed with our own eyes. The unfolding of the other is still awaited. The first thing was that, "First of all, *amānah* was sent down into the hearts of the men of faith. Then, the Qur'an was revealed and then the people of faith acquired knowledge from the Qur'an, and practice from the Sunnah".

After that, he narrated the other Ḥadīth as follows: "A time will come when no sooner does a man rise from sleep, *amanah* (trust) will be confiscated from out of his heart leaving some of its traces behind, just like you would roll down an ember from the fire on your feet (and this ember will certainly roll away but) its traces will survive in the form of

inflammation or blister - although, no constituent element of the fire itself is left out there. So much so that people will enter into mutual transactions and contracts, but no one will fulfill the obligations of amanah due against him and (there will be such a dearth of trustworthy men that) people will be found saying that there is a trustworthy man in such and such tribe!"

In this Ḥadīth *amānah* has been declared to be something which relates to the heart and this alone has the ability of fulfilling the obligations and duties imposed by the Sharī'ah of Islam.

And according to a narration of Sayyidnā 'Abdullāh Ibn 'Amr رضي الله عنه appearing in the Musnad of Aḥmad, the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been reported to have said, "There are four things which, if you come to have them, and you have nothing out of so many worldly things, you are still no loser. (Those four things are): Guarding of trust, telling the truth, good morals and lawful sustenance. (From Ibn Kathīr)

An investigation into the way the 'trust' was 'offered'

In the cited verse (72), it was said that Allah Ta'ālā placed this *amānah* (trust) before the heavens, the earth and the mountains and all of them refused to bear the burden of this responsibility shrinking from it out of the danger of not being able to fulfill its due right - but, man did.

Here, it is worth pondering that the heavens, the earth and the mountains that are inanimate and, obviously devoid of knowledge and consciousness, how then would it be possible to rationalize the presentation of such an offer before them and that of their response to it? Some early commentators have taken this to be a figure of speech - as the noble Qur'ān has said elsewhere by way of comparison: لَوْ أَنْزَلْنَا هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَىٰ جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْنَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ (Had We sent down this Qur'ān to a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, burst apart out of awe for Allah - Al-Ḥaṣhr 59:21). It is obvious that this example has been given as a matter of supposition - not that it was really revealed to or on a mountain. So, these commentators have taken the 'offer' of 'trust' to the heavens etc. also in a figurative or metaphorical sense.

But, in the sight of the majority of Muslim scholars, it is not correct, because in the verse of Sūrah Al-Ḥaṣhr, the Qur'ān has itself made it clear, by initiating the statement with the word: 'if,' that it is just a

hypothetical statement. On the contrary, the present verse is an affirmation of an incident in a descriptive style, and it is not permissible to take it in figurative or metaphorical sense without any proof. And if it is argued that these things have no senses and therefore no question can be asked from them and no answer is expected from them, then this argument stands rejected on the basis of other express statements of the Qur'ān. The reason is that the Qur'ān has explicitly said: **وَإِنْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ إِلَّا يُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِهِ** (And there is not a single thing that does not extol His purity and praise - Al-Isra', 17:44). And it is obvious that knowing Allah Ta'ālā, realizing that He is the Creator, the Master, the highest and the best, and glorifying Him consequently is something not possible without knowledge and consciousness. Therefore, it stands proved from this verse that knowledge and consciousness do exist in all elements of creation to the extent that these are also there in what is considered to be inanimate. On the basis of this knowledge and consciousness, these can be addressed and a response can be expected from them. Their response could take different forms. It could take the form of words and letters and - it is not rationally impossible - that Allah Ta'ālā could bestow on the heavens and the earth and the mountains the functional ability to verbalize and speak. Therefore, in the sight of the majority of the learned among the Muslim Ummah, the phenomenon of this 'ard of *amānah* (the placement or offer of trust) came to pass in reality and these entities expressed their inability to bear the burden of this responsibility - also in reality. There is no simile or metaphor at work here.

The acceptance of the offer of the 'trust' was optional, not mandatory

A question may be asked here. When Allah Ta'ālā personally made the offer of this great trust before the heavens and the earth and the mountains, how could they dare refuse it? If they had contravened the Divine order, they would have been destroyed totally. In addition to that, the obedience of the heavens and the earth to divine orders is also proved from the verse: **آتَيْنَا طَائِعِينَ** (we come in obedience - Fuṣṣilat, 41:11) which means: When Allah Ta'ālā ordered the heavens and the earth to come to implement His command, be it willingly or unwilling, both of these responded by saying that they were pleased to come to obey His command.

The answer is that, in the cited verse (41:11), the command given had a

mandatory command with it where it was also said that they were to come with pleasure, or without it but, no matter what is the case, they had to obey the command. This is contrary to the present verse featuring the offer of the trust where following its presentation, they were given the choice of taking or not taking this awesome responsibility.

Ibn Kathīr has, with the support of various authorities, reported from several Ṣaḥābah and Tabi'īn - Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās, Ḥasan al-Baṣri, Mujāhid and others - the following details of this offer of the trust:

'What Allah Ta'ālā offered first to the heavens, then to the earth, and then to the mountains as a matter of choice was: Would you undertake to carry out the responsibility imposed by this trust (obedience to given injunctions) from Us against a return fixed for it?' Everyone asked, 'What is the return?' It was said, 'If you fulfill the demands of this trust (obedience to given injunctions) to the best of your ability, you will have the best of reward, and particularly the honor of having nearness to Allah, and if you failed to implement these injunctions, or fell short in it, you will be punished.' Hearing this, all these huge big bodies responded by saying, 'O our Lord, we are operating under Your command even now. But (now when we have been given a choice), we find ourselves weak and unable to bear the burden of this heavy responsibility. As reward, we do not want it, and as for punishment, we cannot bear it.' And Tafsīr Qurṭubī, with reference to Hakim Tirmidhi, has reported from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه that the Holy Prophet صلى الله عليه وسلم said: '(After the offer of the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, and after their response), Allah Ta'ālā addressed Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام and said: 'We offered Our trust to the heavens and the earth but they expressed their inability to bear the burden of this responsibility. Now, would you assume this responsibility knowing that which goes with it?' 'Ādam عليه السلام asked, 'O Lord, what is it that goes with it?' The answer was: 'If you succeeded in fulfilling the demands of this trust to your best (that is, remained obedient to your best), you will be rewarded (which will be in the form of the nearness and pleasure of Allah and the eternal bliss of Jannah (Paradise), and if you let this trust go to waste, you will be punished.' 'Ādam عليه السلام (eager to advance towards nearness and pleasure of Allah Ta'ālā) went ahead and assumed this responsibility. However, from the moment he assumed the burden of this heavy trust, not much time had passed, not even that much as is between the Ṣalāh of 'Aṣr and Zuhr,

within which the Satan snared him into that well-known slip and he was made to leave Jannah.

During which period of time did this event of the offer of trust take place?

From the narration of Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه which has appeared immediately above, it seems that this offer of trust made to the heavens and the earth and the mountains was made before the creation of 'Ādam. Then, following the creation of Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام, it was also said before him that this trust was also offered to the heavens and the earth earlier, and that they did not have the ability to bear the burden of this responsibility, therefore, they excused themselves out of it.

And what is apparent here is that this event of the offer of trust came before the Covenant of Eternity, that is, the Covenant of 'Alast because the Covenant of أَلَسْتُ بِرَبِّكُمْ (Am I not your Lord?) is a phase of this very acceptance to carry out the responsibility of fulfilling the trust - and stands for taking a solemn pledge to hold and discharge the responsibilities enjoined by an office.

For vicegerency on the earth, the ability to bear the responsibilities of the great trust was necessary

As eternally predestined, Allah Ta'ālā had already decided to appoint Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام His Khalīfah (vicegerent) on the earth and this Khilafah (vicegerency) could only be entrusted with one who bears the responsibility of upholding the essential obedience to Divine injunctions - because, it is the very objective of this Khilafah that the Law of Allah be implemented on the earth and that the creation of Allah be induced to obey Divine injunctions. Therefore, as a matter of creational imperative, Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام agreed to bear the burden of the responsibility of this trust - although the inability of other humongous units of creation to bear it was already in his knowledge. (Maḥzarī and Bayān-ul-Qur'ān).

In the last sentence of verse 72: إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا : Surely, he was unjust (to himself) unaware (of the end), the word: 'Zalūm' means one who is unjust to himself, and 'jahūl' means one who is unaware of the end. From this sentence, it is generally assumed that it has appeared here blaming man in an absolute sense, that is, so ignorant was man that he went ahead inflicting injustice upon himself by accepting to carry such a big burden of responsibility, something beyond his power. But, in the light of

explicit statements in the Qur'ān, this is not actually so because 'man' may mean either Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام or whole mankind. Now Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام is, as a prophet, protected by Allah from committing sins. The burden of responsibility which he had assumed was carried out by him duly and certainly. As a result of this, he was made a vicegerent of Allah (Khalīfatullāh) and sent to the earth. He was made the object of prostration by angels and, in the Hereafter, his station is far higher than that of the angels. And if 'man' must mean mankind, then, in this class, there are several hundred thousands of noble prophets عليهم السلام and several millions of the righteous and the men of Allah (awliya' Allah) even angels emulate - those who proved by their conduct in life that they were capable of handling and deserving this Divine trust. It was because of the basis laid out by these very noble souls, who duly vacated the rights and demands inherent in the great trust, that the Holy Qur'ān declared mankind to be the noblest of Divine creation: وَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ (And We bestowed dignity on the Children of 'Ādam - Al-Isrā', 17:70). This proves that neither is Sayyidnā 'Ādam عليه السلام blameworthy, nor the mankind as a whole. Therefore, commentators have said that this sentence is not there to impute a blame, rather, it appears there as the description of the actual event with regard to the most of individuals in the class. As such, the sense is that the majority of human kind proved to be *zalūm* (one who inflicts injustice upon himself) and *jahūl* (one who is unaware of the end) that failed to fulfill the rights and demands of this trust and fell into the abyss of loss. And since this was the state of affairs with the majority, therefore, it was attributed to humankind.

In short, in the verse, the two words (*Zalūm* and *Jahūl*) mentioned above have been used for those particular individuals among human beings who did not obey the injunctions of the Sharī'ah as they were expected to, and failed to fulfill the right entailed by the *amānah* or trust placed with them - that is, the disbelievers, hypocrites, transgressors, the wicked, and sinning Muslims of the community. This Tafsīr has been reported from Sayyidnā Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنه, Sayyidnā Ibn Jubayr رضي الله عنه, Ḥasan Al-Baṣrī رحمه الله تعالى and others. (Qurtūbī)

And there are others who have said that *Zalūm* and *Jahūl* has been used at this place in the sense of 'naïve', as an affectionate form of address carrying the thought that man, brimming with love for his Creator and in quest of the station of nearness to Him, simply forgot the

end of the whole thing. Similarly, these words could also be taken to have been spoken for the entire humankind. In Tafsīr Mazḥarī, details of this aspect have been reported from Mujaddid Alf Thāni and other noble Ṣufīs.

لُعَذِّبَ اللَّهُ الْمُنَافِقِينَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتِ (with the result that Allah will punish the hypocrites, men and women, and the Mushriks, men and women, and will accept the repentance of the believing men and women. Surely Allah is Most-Forgiving, Very-Merciful. [73]) The letter 'lam' used in the beginning of this verse is not for mentioning the cause or aim, as generally understood in common usage, but it is the lam of 'aqibah in the terminology of Arabic linguistics. It points out to the end of something, as it appears in a line of Arabic poetry which reads:

لِدُّوْا لِلْمَوْتِ وَأَبْنُوا لِلْخَرَابِ

'Be born only to be dead and build only to be ruined'

It does not mean that the aim of one's birth was to be dead or that the aim of constructing of a building was that it could be ruined, but it simply means that the end of everyone born is death and the end of every building is falling into ruins.

The sense of the verse is that, as a result of man's assumption of responsibility for the trust, mankind will split in two groups: (1) Disbelievers, hypocrites and others who will rebel against Divine orders and become wasters of the great 'trust'. They will be punished. (2) There will be believing men and believing women who, through their obedience to Divine injunctions, will fulfill the dictates of the trust reposed in them. They will be treated with mercy and forgiveness.

The Tafsīr of the two words: Ḥalūm and Jahūl that has been reported above from most Tafsīr authorities finds additional support in this last sentence as well - that these words are not meant for the whole mankind. In fact, they particularly refer to those individuals who wasted away the Divine trust reposed in them. And Allah, Pure and High, knows best.

**The Commentary on
Sūrah Al-Aḥzāb ends here
With the help of and praise for Allah Ta'ālā**