

UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE ON Surah “AL-IKHLAS”

Name AL-Ikhlās

Is not merely the name of this Surah but also the title of its contents, for it deals exclusively with. The other Surahs of the Quran generally have been designated after a word occurring in them, but in this Surah the word has occurred nowhere. It has been given this name in view of its meaning and subject matter. Whoever understands it and believes in its teaching, will get rid of (polytheism) completely.

Period of Revelation:

The fact is that this Surah is Makki, rather in view of its subject matter a Surah revealed in the earliest period at Makkah, when detailed verses of the Quran dealing with the essence and attributes of Allah Almighty had not yet been revealed, and the people hearing, the Holy Prophet's invitation to Allah, wanted to know what was his Lord like to whose worship and service he was calling them. Another proof of this Surah's being one of the earliest Surahs to be revealed is that when in Makkah Umayyah bin Khalaf, the master of Hadrat Bilal, made him lie down on burning sand and placed a heavy stone on his chest, Bilal used to cry "!"This word was derived from this very Surah. (That is Ahad Ahad)

Reason for its Revelation:

Early traditions show that different people on different occasions had questioned the Holy Prophet (upon whom be peace) about the essence and nature of the God to Whose service and worship he invited the people, (like Ancestry of your Lord , Attributes of your Lord , What your Lord is made off, What is your Lord like, His sex, Whether He is made of gold, silver, copper, iron, Whether He eats and drink, and also from who He inherited the world and who will inherit after Him.) and on every occasion he recited by Allah's command this very Surah in response. First of all, the pagans. of Quraish asked him this question in Makkah, and in reply this Surah was sent down. Then, at Madinah, sometimes the Christians, and sometimes the other people of Arabia, asked him questions of this nature, and every time Allah inspired him to recite this very Surah in answer to them. In each of these traditions, it has been said that this Surah was revealed on this or that occasion. From this one should not form the impression that all these traditions are mutually contradictory. The fact is that whenever there existed with the Holy Prophet a verse or a Surah previously revealed in respect of a particular question or matter, and later the same question was presented before him, Allah inspired him to recite the same verse or Surah to the people as it contained the answer to their question. The reporters of describe the same thing, saying: When such and such a question or matter was presented before the Holy Prophet, such and such a verse or Surah was revealed. This has also been described as repetition of revelation, i. e. the revelation of a verse or Surah several times.

Theme and Subject Matter:

A little consideration of the traditions regarding the occasion of the revelation of this Surah, shows what were the religious concepts of the world at the time the Holy Prophet began to preach the message of Islam. The idolatrous polytheists were worshiping gods made of wood, stone, gold, silver and other substances. These gods had a form, shape and body. The gods and goddesses were descended from each other. No goddess was without a husband and no god without a wife. They stood in need of food and drink and their devotees arranged these for them. A large number of the polytheists believed that God assumed human form and there were some people who descended from Him. Although the Christians claimed to believe in One God, yet their God also had at least a son, and besides the Father and Son, the Holy Ghost also had the honor of being an associate in Godhead: so much so that God had a mother and a mother-in-law too. The Jews also claimed to believe in One God, but their God too was not without physical, material and other human qualities and characteristics. He went for a stroll, appeared in human form, wrestled with a servant of His, and was father of a son, Ezra. Besides these religious communities, the zoroastrians were fire worshipers, and the Sabians star worshipers. Under such conditions when the people were invited to believe in Allah, the One; Who has no associate, it was inevitable that questions arose in the minds as to what kind of a God it was, Who was one and Only Lord and invitation to believe in Whom was being given at the expense of all other gods and deities. It is a miracle of the Quran that in a few words briefly it answered all the questions and presented such a clear concept of the Being of Allah as destroyed all polytheistic concepts, without leaving any room for the ascription of any of the human qualities to His Being. This is the pure concept of "Tauhid"

Closer look at the last ten Surahs of the Quran which includes Surah Al-Iklas:

Before we go into explanation of the Surah, it is important to know that this Surah is among the last ten Surahs of the "Mushaf" (The Quran we read now, not from the order of the Revelation of different Ayas and Surahs). The last Ten Surahs plus two more Surahs (Fatiha the very first Surah of the Quran and Surah Al-Asr) can be called "miniature Quran" because it contains the basic concept of religion of Islam. As general public and ordinary person does not read (with meaning) and memorize the whole Quran, but almost every person can read, understand and memorizes these 12 Surahs. These 10 Surahs (Namely Al-Fil, Quraysh, Al-Maun, Al-Kawthar, Al-Kafirun, An-Nasr, Al-Masad, Al-Ikhlash, Al-Falaq and An-Nas along with Surah Al-Fatiha and Surah Al-Asr) gives the basic understanding of Islamic concept of faith. Basic concept of deen are added in these Surahs (that is, Who is our Lord, concept of Tauhid (oneness of Allah), His attributes, worship concepts like Salah, Virtues of truthfulness and Patience & their reward, duty of Muslims to promote goodness/truthfulness and refrain others from evil in the society, helping of poor, believe in hereafter, no compromise in religious faiths and worship, concept of repentance, remembrance of Allah, outcome of the people who ridicule Allah/Quran and His messenger and who is the only and real and ultimate protector and provider for the people etc).

Also If we analyze these last ten Surahs in chronological order, we notice that first 7 Surahs from the 10 directly relates to life of our beloved Prophet Muhammad (SAW) and the last 3 relate directly to Allah Himself (That is the concept of Tauheed, Allah's attributes and that He is the only one who can give refuge and ultimate protector).

Surah Al Fil relate to the birth timeframe of Prophet Muhammad (SAW), he was born in the same year when Allah destroyed the invaders who came to destroy Ka'bah and then Surah Quraysh tells which nation, tribe, his ancestors belongs to, which is Quraysh and what favors Allah bestowed to his tribe Quraysh and how they were unthankful to Allah. Surah Al-Maun relates to the environment which was prevailing at the time of Prophet's advent. It talks about their moral degradation, like not believing in Day of Judgment, mistreatment of orphans and poor people, showing off and even refusing to give simplest of aid to others. Then in Surah Al Kawther, it talks about Prophet's personal status and his highest rank. In Surah Al-Kafirun when after confrontation with believers, non believers wanted some compromise with the Prophet; a categorical message was delivered that on the subject of worship and religion, there would be absolutely no compromise. It is also called declaration of disavowal to the polytheist of Mecca. The sixth Surah in this chronological order is Surah An- Nasr, which is about Prophet's final victory with the enemies, acceptance of Islam by vast majority of people and conclusion of Prophet's successful mission. The seventh Surah Al-Masad talks about the fate of Prophet's and Islam's enemy, that is Abu Lahab and his wife who were not only his uncle and aunt but staunch enemy of Prophet. So we can see these seven preceding Surahs before Surah Al-Iklas directly relates to Prophet's life, his ancestry, his status, environment he was living in, his victory and fate of his enemies.

Now the next three Surah's starting with Surah Al-Iklas which is subject of this article, and following two Surah's Al-Falaq and An-Nas directly relates to Allah, and His attributes and the essence of the whole deen (Religion) Islam, which is Tauhid (oneness of Allah, which has no partners, no family and the only protector, provider and can be trusted fully for our needs, small or big).

Closely looking at the subject matters of these ten Surahs, we will notice that most of them are in pair form, like Surah Al-Fil and Surah Quraysh form one pair (One talks about Prophets birth time and other his family background), Surah Al-Maun and Al-Kawther form one pair (One talks characters of the society at that time and in contrast character of the Prophet). Surah An-Nasr and Surah Al-Masad form one pair (One talks about Prophet's victory and the other fate of his enemies), similarly last two Surahs Al-Falaq and An-Nas are obviously a pair and complement each other. Now only two Surah's are not pairs which are Surah Al-Kafirun and Surah Al-Iklas. They are unique in the sense that Al-Kafirun is declaration of disavowal in categorical and in an unambiguous term to Mushrikeen (Polytheist) that no compromise can be made regarding worship and oneness of Allah. Surah Al-Iklas which is the essence of religion (Tauhid) and whole structure of the deen stands on it deals with the Questions who is Allah, what are His attributes, His ancestry etc. Although they are two unique Surahs in their own context, they do complement each other. When Prophet declared that "I do

not worship what you worship, nor do you worship what I worship, nor will you ever worship what I worship, you have your way, and I have my way” then a lot of questions were raised by non believers that we do believe in Allah, but how come your Lord is different than ours? This Surah was revealed to clarify that your belief in Allah has been corrupted because you associated partners with Him, you have assigned Angeles, your idols as His daughters and believe they will intercede with Allah on your behalf etc. Therefore I (Prophet (SAW) do not believe in your God, my God is the one who is mentioned in Surah Al-Iklas. The complementary nature of these Surahs also reflects in Prophet’s Sunnah. He used to combine these two Surah’s in Fajr sunnah prayer (Al-Kafirun in first Rakat and Al-Iklas in second Rakat), similarly two rakat sunnah prayer after the “TAWAF” of Kaaba has the same order of recitation.

Detail Explanation of each Ayah of Surah Al-Iklas:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

112:1) Say:¹ “He is Allah,² the One and Unique,³

1. The first addressee of this command is the Prophet (peace be upon him) himself for it was he who was asked: Who is your Lord and what is He like. Again it was he who was commanded to answer the question in the following words. But after him every believer is its addressee. He too should say what the Prophet (peace be upon him) had been commanded to say.

2. That is, my Lord to Whom you want to be introduced is none but Allah. This is the first answer to the questions, and it means: I have not introduced a new lord who I want you to worship beside all other gods, but it is the same Being you know by the name of Allah. Allah was not an unfamiliar word for the Arabs. They had been using this very word for the Creator of the universe since the earliest times, and they did not apply this word to any of their other gods. For the other gods they used the word ilah. Then their beliefs about Allah had become fully manifest at the time Abraha invaded Makkah. At that time there existed 360 idols of gods (ilahs) in and around the Kabah, but the polytheists forsaking all of them had invoked only Allah for protection. In other words, they knew in their hearts that no ilah could help them on that critical occasion except Allah. The Kabah was also called Bait-Allah by them and not Baitilahs after their self-made gods. At many places in the Quran the polytheistic Arabian belief about Allah has been expressed, thus:

In Surah Az-Zukhruf it has been said: If you ask them who created them, they will surely say, Allah. (verse 87).

In Surah Al-Ankabuut: If you ask them, who has created the earth and the heavens and who has subjected the moon and the sun. They will surely say: Allah. And if you ask them, who sent down rainwater from the sky and thereby raised the dead earth back to life. They will surely say: Allah. (verses 61-63).

In Surah Al-Muminun: Say to them, tell me, if you know, whose is the earth and all who dwell in it. They will say, Allah's. Say to them: To whom do the seven heavens and the Glorious Throne belong? They will say: To Allah. Say to them: Tell me, if you know, whose the sovereignty is over everything. And who is that Being who gives protection while none else can give protection against Him. They will surely reply: This power belongs to Allah. (verses 84-89).

In Surah Yunus: Ask them: Who provides for you from the heavens and the earth. Who has power over the faculties of hearing and sight? Who brings forth the living from the dead and the dead from the living? Who directs the system of the universe? They will surely reply: Allah. (verse 31).

Again in Surah Yunus at another place: When you set sails in ships, rejoicing over a fair breeze, then all of a sudden a strong wind begins to rage against the passengers and waves begin to surge upon them from every side and they realize that they have been encircled by the tempest. At that time they pray to Allah with sincere faith, saying: If you deliver us from this peril, we will become Your grateful servants. But when He delivers them, the same people begin to rebel on the earth against the truth. (verses 22-23).

The same thing has been reiterated in Surah Bani Israil, thus: When a misfortune befalls you on the sea, all of those whom you invoke for help fail you but He (is there to help you), yet when He brings you safe to land, you turn away from Him. (verse 67).

Keeping these verses in view, let us consider that when the people asked: Who is your Lord and what is He like to Whom service and worship you call us. The answer given was Huwa Allah: He is Allah. This answer by itself gives the meaning: My Lord is He whom you yourself acknowledge as your own as well as the whole world's Creator, its Master, Sustainer and Administrator, and He whom you invoke for help at critical times beside all other deities, and I invite you to His service alone. This answer comprehends all the perfect and excellent attributes of Allah. Therefore, it is not at all conceivable that the Creator of the universe, its Administrator and Disposer of its affairs, Sustainer of all the creatures living in it, and the Helper of the servants in times of hardship, would not be living, hearing and seeing, that He would not be an All-Powerful, All-Knowing, All-Wise, All-Merciful and All-Kind Sovereign.

After the revelation of the Quran this word “AHAD” has been used only for the Being of Allah, and for no one else. This extraordinary use by itself shows that being single, unique and matchless is a fundamental attribute of Allah; no one else in the world is qualified with this quality: He is One, He has no equal. He alone is the Sustainer: no one else has any share or part in providence and since He alone can be the Ilah (Deity) Who is Master and Sustainer, therefore, no one else is His associate in Divinity either.

It also means He alone is the Creator of the universe: no one else is His associate in this work of creation. He alone is the Master of the universe, the Disposer and Administrator of its system, the Sustainer of His creatures, Helper and Rescuer in times of hardship; no one else has any share or part whatever in the works of Godhead, which as you yourselves acknowledge, are works of Allah.

Since they had also asked the questions: Of what is your Lord made? What is His ancestry? What is his sex? From whom has He inherited the world and who will inherit it after Him? All these questions have been answered with one word “AHAD” for Allah. It means:

(1) He alone has been, and will be, God forever; neither was there a God before Him, nor will there be any after Him.

(2) There is no race of gods to which He may belong as a member: He is God, One and Single, and none is homogeneous with Him.

(3) His being is not merely One (wahid but ahad, in which there is no tinge of plurality in any way:

He is not a compound being, which may be analyzable or divisible, which may have a form and shape, which may be residing somewhere, or may contain or include something, which may have a color, which may have some limbs, which may have a direction, and which may be variable or changeable in any way. Free from every kind of plurality He alone is a Being who is Ahad in every aspect. (Here, one should fully understand that the word wahid is used in Arabic just like the word one in English. A collection consisting of great pluralities is collectively called wahid or one, as one man, one nation, one country, one world, even one universe, and every separate part of a collection is also called one. But the word Ahad is not used for anyone except Allah. That is why wherever in the Quran the word wahid has been used for Allah, He has been called Ilah wahid (one Deity) and nowhere just wahid because Allah exists without any plurality in any way; Whose Oneness is perfect in every way.

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

(112:2) Allah, Who is in need of none and of Whom all are in need;

The word used in the original is samad. On the basis of these lexical meanings the explanations of the word as-Samad in the verse Allah-us-Samad, which have been reported from the companions, their immediate successors and the later scholars, are given below:

1. Samad is he who has no superior.
2. The chieftain whose chieftaincy is perfect and of the most extraordinary kind.
3. Is he to whom the people turn when afflicted with a calamity.
4. The chieftain who, in his nobility and glory, in his clemency and forbearance, in his knowledge and wisdom is perfect.
5. He who is independent of all and all others are dependent upon him.
6. The one to whom the people turn for obtaining the things they need and for help in hardships.
7. He, Who is perfect in all his attributes and works.
8. He, Who is immune from every calamity.
9. He, Who is faultless.
10. He, Who is exclusive in his attributes.
11. He, Who is ever-living and immortal.
12. He who decides whatever he wills and does whatever he wills, without there being anyone to revise his judgment and decision.
13. He to whom the people turn for fulfillment of their desires.
14. Samad is He in whom leadership has been perfected, and to whom one turns for fulfillment of his needs and desires.
15. He Who people turn for protection against Satan, all evil things, magic, envier and evil of the lurking whisperer etc

Note: These Qualities of Allah as being As-Samad, it complements the last two Surahs of Quran (Al-Falaq and An-Nas)

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

(112:3) He neither begot any nor was He begotten:

The polytheists in every age have adopted the concept that like men, gods also belong to a species, which has many members and they also get married, beget and are begotten. They did not even regard Allah, Lord of the universe, as supreme and above this concept of ignorance, and even proposed children for Him. Thus, the Arabian belief as stated in the Quran was that they regarded the angels as daughters of Allah. The Prophetic communities too could not remain immune from this creed of paganism. They too adopted the creed of holding one saintly person or another as son of God. Two kinds of concepts have always been mixed up in these debasing superstitions. Some people thought that those whom they regarded as Allah's children, were descended from him in the natural way and some others claimed that the one whom they called son of God, had been adopted by Allah Himself as a son.

Although all these assumptions are destroyed as soon as Allah is called and described as "Ahad" and "As-Samad", yet when it is said: Neither has He an offspring nor is He the offspring of another, there remains no room for any ambiguity in this regard. Then, since these concepts are the most potent factors of polytheism with regard to Divine Being, Allah has refuted them clearly and absolutely not only in Surah Al-Ikhlās but has also reiterated this theme at different places in different ways so that the people may understand the truth fully. For example let us consider the following verses:

Allah is only One Deity: He is far too exalted that He should have a son: whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth belongs to Him. (Surah An-Nisa, Ayat 171).

Note it well: they, in fact, invent a falsehood when they say, Allah has children. They are utter liars. (Surah As-Saaffat, Ayats 151-152).

They have invented a blood-relationship between Allah and the angels, whereas the angels know well that these people will be brought up (as culprits). (Surah As-Saaffat, Ayat 158).

These people have made some of His servants to be part of Him. The fact is that man is manifestly ungrateful. (Surah Az-Zukhruf, Ayat 15).

Yet the people have set up the Jinn as partners with Allah, whereas He is their Creator; they have also invented for Him sons and daughters without having any knowledge,

whereas He is absolutely free from and exalted far above the things they say. He is the Originator of the heavens and the earth: how should He have a son, when He has no consort? He has created each and every thing. (Surah AlAnaam, Ayats 100-101).

They say: the Merciful has offspring. Glory be to Allah! They (whom they describe as His offspring) are His mere servants who have been honored. (Surah Al-Anbiya, Ayat 26).

They remarked: Allah has taken a son to himself. Allah is All-pure: He is Self Sufficient. He is the Owner of everything that is in the heavens and the earth. Have you any authority for what you say? What, do you ascribe to Allah that of which you have no knowledge. (Surah Younus, Ayat 68).

And (O Prophet) say: Praise is for Allah who has begotten no son nor has any partner in His Kingdom nor is helpless to need any supporter. (Surah Bani Israil, Ayat 111).

Allah has no offspring, and there is no other deity as a partner with Him. (Surah Al-Muminun, Ayat 91).

In these verses the belief of the people who ascribe real as adopted children to Allah, has been refuted from every aspect, and its being a false belief has also been proved by argument. These and many other Quranic verses of the same theme further explain Surah Al-Ikhlās.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

(112:4) and none is comparable to Him.”⁶

6. The word “kufu” as used in the original means an example, a similar thing, the one equal in rank and position. In the matter of marriage, “kufu” means that the boy and the girl should match each other socially. Thus, the verse means that there is no one in the entire universe, nor ever was, nor ever can be, who is similar to Allah, or equal in rank with Him, or resembling Him in His attributes, works and powers in any degree whatever.

Merit and Importance:

That is why the Holy Messenger of Allah (upon whom be peace) held this Surah in great esteem, and he made the Muslims realize its importance in different ways so that they recited it frequently and disseminated it among the people. For it states the foremost

and fundamental doctrine of Islam .The four such brief sentences are immediately impressed on human memory and can be read and recited easily. There are a great number of the traditions of, which show that the Holy Prophet on different occasions and in different ways told the people that this Surah is equivalent to one third of the Quran. The reason being that the religion presented by the Quran is based on three doctrines: Tauhid (oneness of Allah), Apostleship and the Hereafter. This Surah teaches, pure Tauhid, therefore, the Holy Prophet (upon whom he Peace) regarded it as, equal to one-third of the Quran. The importance of this Surah in the eyes of the companions of the Prophet can be gauged by two incidents. On the authority of Hadrat Aishah has been related in Bukhari and Muslim that the Holy Prophet sent a man as leader of an expedition. During the journey he concluded his recitation of the Quran in every Prayer with Surah Ikhlas. On their return him companions mentioned this before the Holy Prophet. He said: "Ask him why he did so."When the man was asked, he replied: "In this Surah the attributes of the Merciful God have been stated; therefore, I love to recite it again and again." When the Holy Prophet heard this reply, he said to the people: "Inform him that Allah holds him in great love and esteem."

A similar incident has been related in Bukhari, on the authority of Hadrat Anas. He says: "A man from among the Ansar led the Prayers in the Quba Mosque. His practice was that in every Rakat he first recited this Surah and then would join another Surah to it. The people objected to it and said to him: "Don't you think that Surah Ikhlas is by itself enough? Why do you join another Surah to it? You should either recite only this surah, or should leave it and recite some other Surah. He said: "I cannot leave it; I would rather give up leadership in the Prayer. At last, the matter was brought before the Holy Prophet. He asked the man, "What prevents you from conceding what your companions desire? What makes you recite this particular Surah in every Rakat , The man replied: "I have great love for it."The Holy Prophet remarked: "Yours this love for this Surah has earned you entry into Paradise."