

Surah Kafirun, Chapter 109

(Disbelievers)

Number of Verses: 6

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

This Surah was revealed in Mecca. Both the content and the occasion of revelation of the Surah clearly confirm this idea.

The statements of the Surah show that at the time of its revelation Muslims were in a minority and disbelievers were in the majority, of whom the holy Prophet (S) was under great pressure. They urged him to collude with them, but, he refused all of them and without having any conflict with them, made them completely hopeless.

This is a good example for all Muslims that under no conditions should they collude with the enemies of Islam against the basis of the religion, and if it happens that disbelievers ask them to follow such suggestions they should make them totally hopeless.

The phrase

"I worship not what you worship"

is, in particular, repeated twice, in this Surah, for emphasis. This emphasis is made in order to disappoint the enemies.

Again, the verse:

"Nor do you worship Whom I worship"

is also another emphasis showing their stubbornness which ends with the conclusion:

"To you be your religion, and to me my religion".

The Virtue of Studying Surah Kafirun

There are many narrations on the excellence of reciting this Surah which illustrate the extreme importance of its content.

For example, it is narrated in a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) that he said:

"The person who recites (the Surah)

'Say: O you disbelievers'

*it is as if he has recited a quarter of the Qur'an, and the insolent Satans will recoil from him, and he will be free from polytheism, and he will be saved from the Great Terror (on Doomsday)."*¹

Salvation, on the Day of Judgement, will be attained only through monotheism and the negation of polytheism; it is the theme on which this Surah is based.

A tradition from the holy Prophet (S) says that he asked Jabir-ibn-Mat'am whether he wished to have the best companions and the most amount of provisions with him when he was on a journey, and he said he did, then, the Prophet (S) said:

*"Recite these five Suras,: Kafirun, Nasr, Ikhlas, Falaq and Nas, and begin your recitation with Ibismillah-ir-rahman-ir-rahiml."*²

In another tradition, Imam Sadiq (as) said:

"My father has said that Surah Kafirun is one fourth of the Qur'an, and when he recited it he used to say

*'I worship only Allah, I worship only Allah'."*³

Surah Kafirun, Verses 1-6

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ

لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَّا عَبَدْتُمْ

وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ

لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ

1. **"Say: O you disbelievers,"**
2. **"I worship not what you worship,"**
3. **"Nor do you worship Whom I worship,"**
4. **"Neither shall I worship what you worship,"**
5. **"Nor will you worship Whom I worship,"**
6. **"To you be your religion, and to me my religion."**

Occasion of the Revelation

Islamic narrations denote that this Surah was revealed about some of the pagan chiefs of the Quraish tribe such as 'Walid-ibn-i-Muqayrah', 'As-ibn-i-wa'il,' Harith-ibn-i-Qays'. Umiyyah-ibn-i-Khalaf and so on.

They said:

"O Muhammad Follow our belief and we will follow yours and we will let you enjoy all our privileges. For one year you should worship our gods and the next year we will worship your God. If your belief is better, we have enjoyed it with you; and if our belief is better, you have enjoyed it with us".

The Prophet (S) said:

"I take refuge to Allah that I make no match of anything with Him".

They said:

"You may touch some of our gods, at least, and take a good omen from them. If you do this, we will confirm you and worship your God".

The Prophet (S) said:

"I am waiting for the command of my Lord".

At that moment this Surah was revealed. Then, the Messenger of Allah went to the Sacred Mosque. A number of the chiefs of the Quraish were gathered there. He stood on a place above them and recited this Surah, wholly, to them. When they heard the message of the Surah they became completely hopeless of their aim and began hurting him and his followers.

He Never Agrees with the Idol Worshippers

The verses of this Surah address the holy Prophet (S) and the command is:

***"Say: O you disbelievers,"
"I worship not what you worship",
"Nor do you worship Whom I worship",***

Thus, he clearly defines his way which is totally different from their way. He frankly states that he never worships idols and that they, with their stubbornness and the blind following of their ancestors and their persisting in it, never agree with worshipping Allah, which is free from polytheism, nor do they leave their unlawful great amounts of income gained from other idol worshippers.

Again, in order to disappoint the idol worshippers aim, completely, of him (S) leaving monotheism and accepting idolatry, it says:

***"Neither shall I worship what you worship",
"Nor will you worship Whom I worship".***

Therefore, he is stating that they not urge him, uselessly, upon accepting idolatry; it is impossible.

"To you be your religion, and to me my religion."

Many of the commentators have clearly said that the objective of using the term /kafirun/, here is for a particular group of chiefs among the idol worshippers of Mecca.

Perhaps, their reason for saying this, in addition to the matter mentioned for the occasion of revelation is that, finally, many of the idol worshippers of Mecca believed in Islam.

So, when he says:

"Nor do you worship Whom I worship,"

"Neither shall I worship what you worship"

it is certainly about those chiefs among the idol worshippers who never believed the truth even to the end of their lives; while many pagans had entered Allah's religion in crowds at the time Mecca was captured.

Here, there are some questions which should be answered:

1. Why Does the Surah Begin With the Command: 'Say'?

Would it not be better to begin with

'O disbelievers'

without having added. Say, at the beginning?

In other words, the Prophet (S) should carry out the command of Allah and tells them only the phrase

'O disbelievers'

without repeating

'Say'

along with it.

Regarding the content of the Surah, the answer to the question is clear, because the pagans had invited the holy Prophet (S) to collude with them regarding idols, so it means he should repel this from himself and say that he would never agree with them in idolatry.

If the word

'Say'

were not at the beginning of this Surah, the statement would be the statement of Allah not that of Muhammad, and thus the sentence:

"I worship not what you worship",

and the like, would be meaningless.

Moreover, the word

'Say'

was in the message that Gabriel brought from Allah.

The holy Prophet (S) had to retell exactly what was stated, in order to preserve the authenticity of the Holy Qur'an.

This would illustrate that Gabriel and the holy Prophet (S) did not make the least variation in the Divine revelation, and have actually proved that they have been obedient missionaries to the command of Allah; as Surah Yunus, No. 10, verse 15 says:

"...Say: It is not for me, of my own accord to change it: I follow naught but what is revealed unto me..."

2. Did the Idol Worshippers Deny Allah?

We know that idol worshippers never denied Allah, and according to the clear verses of Qur'an if they were asked about the creator of the heavens and the earth, they said that it is Allah:

"If thou ask them who it is that created the heavens and the earth they will certainly say, Allah..."⁴.

Then, how is it that it says, in this Surah:

***"Neither shall I worship what you worship,"
"Nor will you worship Whom I worship?"***

Regarding the proposition which is not on the 'creation', but, the subject matter is upon 'worshipping', it makes the answer to this question clear, too.

Idol worshippers knew Allah as the creator of the world, but they believed that they should

'worship'

the idols so that the idols would become intercessors in the Court of Allah, or that they, themselves, are not worthy enough to worship Allah, but, that they should worship the man-made idols.

This is the point that the Qur'an rejects firmly and refusing their false imaginings, it says worship must be performed only to Allah; not to idols, alone, nor to both of them.

3. What Is This Repetition In the Verses For?

So many different ideas have been given on the purpose of the repetition for the lack of worship of idols by the Prophet (S), and the lack of worship for Allah by the disbelievers.

Some believe that this repetition is for emphasis and for disappointing the polytheists and distinguishing the ways of Islam from their ways, and for logical reasoning of the impossibility of collusion between monotheism and polytheism. In other words, since they insisted on inviting the Prophet (S) to polytheism

and repeated it, the Qur'an, too, repeats the refusal of their proposal.

A tradition denotes that Abu Shakir Disani a disbeliever, asked Abu Ja'far Ahwal, one of the followers of Imam Sadiq (as), why the same proposition is repeated, in this Surah, the act of which is opposed to the excellence of eloquence.

Abu Ja'far, who knew no answer for the question, went to the sixth holy Imam Ja'far ibn-i-Muhammad As-Sadiq (as) in Medina and asked him for the answer.

The holy Imam said that the cause for the revelation of these verses and its repetition, in the Surah, was just in reply to the repetition in the proposal by the disbelievers who told the holy Prophet (S) that he should worship, for one year, what they worshipped and the next year they would worship what; he worshipped. These verses were revealed and refused all their proposals. [5](#)

Some others have said that this repetition is for the reason that one refers to the present and the other refers to the future; that is, 'I never worship what you worship, neither at the present nor in the future'. (But apparently, there is no evidence for this commentary).

There is also a third commentary which says that the first repetition states the difference of what is worshipped, and the second refers to the difference in worship. That is, 'neither do I worship what you worship nor is my worship like your worship, because mine, free from any other motives, is pure and only for Allah, the One True God. '

Besides, 'your worship of the idols is based on ancestral custom, social conviction or imitative instincts, but my worship, of Allah, is based on acknowledgement and thankfulness'. [6](#)

However, it seems that the repetition, as was said before, is for emphasis, as the aforementioned tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) refers to, also.

4. Is the Phrase: 'To You Be Your Religion' A Licence For Idolatry?

It is sometimes considered that the last verse, of this Surah, which says:

"To you be your religion, and to me my religion"

has the concept of 'a general peace' and it lets them remain in their religion, because it does not urge them to accept Islam.

But, this consideration is very weak and baseless, because the tone of the statement in the verses clearly shows that this meaning is a kind of scorn and warning, i.e., let your religion be yours and you will see its fatal consequence soon.

This idea is similar to Surah Qasas, No. 28, verse 55:

"And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom and say: 'To us our deeds and to you yours; peace be to you; we seek not the ignorant'".

There are a great deal of verses in the Qur'an that condemn polytheism in any form. The verses count it as the worst thing and consider it as an unforgivable sin.

There are some other answers to this question, but the first meaning, as an answer, seems the most appropriate.

5. Not Even For One Moment Did He Collude With Polytheism

What is stated in this Surah is, in fact, a statement of fact that monotheism and polytheism are two distinct separate ways, completely opposite to each other. They have no similarity in each other. Monotheism leads Man to Allah, but polytheism makes Allah a stranger to him.

Monotheism is the secret of unity in all aspects, while polytheism is the source of dispersion and separation in all affairs.

Monotheism promotes Man from the world of materialism; high up beyond the natural world, and joins him to the eternal world, to the infinite being of Allah. But, polytheism drops Man down into the well of materialism. It joins him to limited, weak, perishing creatures.

For the same reason the holy Prophet (S) and all other great prophets not only did not collude with polytheism, but their first and greatest duty was also to fight against it.

Now, it is to all those who seek truth and the scholars and preachers of this religion to follow the same way, and they must proclaim their detachment and their hatred of any polytheism and collusion with polytheists, everywhere. This is the true way of Islam.

Supplication

O Lord! Keep us aloof from any polytheism and any polytheistic deed and thought.

O Lord! The temptations of the polytheists, of our time, are also very dangerous. Protect us from falling into their traps.

O Lord! Bestow on us such clarity and decisiveness that, like the holy Prophet (S) we can refuse any proposal of collusion with blasphemy and polytheism.

[1.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 551

[2.](#) Ibid.

[3.](#) Ibid.

[4.](#) Surah Luqman, No. 31, verse 25

[5.](#) Tafsir-i-Ali-ibn-Ibrahim, vol. 2, p. 445.

[6.](#) Abulfutuh-i-Razi, Commentary, vol. 12, p. 192.

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