

Sura 107: Al-Ma'un (Small Acts of Kindness)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 7:

1. *Have you considered him who denies the Judgment?*
2. *It is he who mistreats the orphan,*
3. *And does not urge (others) to feed the poor.*
4. *So woe to those who pray,*
5. *But are heedless of their prayer;*
6. *Those who show off,*
7. *Yet withhold small acts of kindness.*

Some are of the opinion that this Sura has been revealed in Mecca; others are of the opinion that the first three verses were revealed in Mecca while the last four were revealed in Medina. However, the seven verses mesh together nicely; they all have the same objective. This makes me inclined to think that the whole Sura was revealed in Medina, especially that the Sura deals with the subject of showing off and hypocrisy. These topics were not known to Muslims in Mecca. However, it is still possible that the first three verses were revealed in Mecca and the last four were revealed in Medina.

This short Sura with its seven verses emphasizes a fundamental principle of the religion of Islam. Islam is not a religion of superficial rituals. Rituals have to be performed as a reflection of the sincere devotion to Allah. Performance of rituals as a portrayal of sincere devotion to Allah should shape the behavior of the Muslim. This behavior will provide a sound framework for life on earth.

“Have you considered him who denies the Judgment? It is he who mistreats the orphan, and does not urge (others) to feed the poor.” The Sura starts with a question about those who deny the Judgment. Then the verses continue to identify those who deny the Judgment: those who mistreat the orphan and do not encourage the feeding of the poor. This may be a surprise for those who expected a traditional definition of belief. But the answer defines the essence of belief. Disbelievers are those who insult, harm, and humiliate the orphan; and they do not encourage feeding the poor and being kind to them. Anyone who truly believes in the Judgment would not commit such acts.

Belief is not a lip service. Belief is a transformation that happens to the heart and motivates it to do good deeds and to be kind to other human beings. God does not want people to talk but He wants them to act. These three verses provide the clearest representation of the essence of the faith.

The following verses present a practical illustration of what was mentioned above, “*So woe to those who pray, but are heedless of their prayer; those who show off, yet withhold small acts of kindness.*” Who are those who are heedless of their prayer? They are those who perform the movements of the prayer but they do not establish it. They go through the motions, they recite the invocations, but their hearts are far away from it. Their souls are not aware of the true content of the prayer. They pray not because they are devoted to God but because they want to show off. Those people do not benefit from their prayer. They do not enjoy the transformation that prayer brings to the soul to motivate it to do good deeds. That is why they do not perform any acts of kindness to their fellow human beings.