

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Ash-Shura

The Consultation · Makki · 53 ayat — reflections on
surah 42 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah Ash-Shura

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الشورى — Ash-Shura, "The Consultation". Surah 42 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 53 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/42/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Revelation and religion come by Allah's decree, and the believers' affairs are settled by mutual consultation (shura). The surah affirms Allah's oneness and absolute sovereignty, His mercy in provision, and the reward of forgiveness, patience, and reconciliation over revenge.

Ash-Shura affirms that revelation to Muhammad is one link in a single chain — the same religion enjoined on Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, and Isa (42:13). It magnifies Allah as beyond all likeness (42:11) while depicting Him near, hearing, and provisioning. The surah shapes a community: their affairs run by mutual consultation, they forgive when angry, and they answer wrong with proportionate justice while preferring pardon (42:37-40). It weighs this world's fleeting gain against the lasting and better reward with Allah.

TWO

Its themes

- Unity of the prophetic message
- Transcendence of Allah
- Consultation (shura)
- Forgiveness and proportionate justice
- Provision and trust
- This world vs. the Hereafter

THREE

Key verses

(He is) the Creator of the heavens and the earth: He has made for you pairs from among yourselves, and pairs among cattle: by this means does He multiply you: there is nothing whatever like unto Him, and He is the One that hears and sees (all things).

Qur'an 42:11

'There is nothing like unto Him' is the Qur'an's clearest statement of transcendence, paired at once with 'the Hearing, the Seeing.' Ibn Kathir uses it to affirm Allah's attributes without likening Him to creation.

The same religion has He established for you as that which He enjoined on Noah – the which We have sent by inspiration to thee – and that which We enjoined on Abraham, Moses, and Jesus: Namely, that ye should remain steadfast in religion, and make no divisions therein: to those who worship other things than Allah, hard is the (way) to which thou callest them. Allah chooses to Himself those whom He pleases, and guides to Himself those who turn (to Him).

Qur'an 42:13

The one religion prescribed from Nuh to Muhammad is submission to Allah alone; al-Tabari reads this as the shared foundation of all prophets, differences of law notwithstanding.

Those who hearken to their Lord, and establish regular Prayer; who (conduct) their affairs by mutual Consultation; who spend out of what We bestow on them for Sustenance;

Qur'an 42:38

That believers 'conduct their affairs by consultation' sits between prayer and charity, marking shura as a trait of faith, not merely a policy. Al-Qurtubi notes the Prophet consulted his companions though he received revelation.

The recompense for an injury is an injury equal thereto (in degree): but if a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due from Allah: for (Allah) loveth not those who do wrong.

Qur'an 42:40

Justice permits a like response to injury, yet 'whoever pardons and reconciles, his reward is with Allah.' Al-Sa'di observes the verse honors the right to retaliate while lifting the one who forgives higher.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Ash-Shura is a Makkan surah and one of the Hawamim, but it is singular even among them: it opens with two separate sets of the disjointed letters, Ha-Mim followed by ‘Ayn-Sin-Qaf (42:1-2). Its familiar name, “The Consultation,” is drawn from a single word in verse 38, where mutual consultation (shura) is listed among the defining habits of the believing community — a striking choice of title, since the surah is overwhelmingly about revelation rather than governance.

The surah has no single agreed occasion of revelation; it belongs to the mature Makkan period, when the lines between the believers and the Quraysh had hardened and the Prophet ﷺ was grieving over his people’s obstinacy. Its character is elevated and contemplative. It opens and closes on the theme of wahy — the reality of God speaking to His prophets — and between those two poles it moves through God’s overwhelming sovereignty, the unity of the prophetic religion, the sin of dividing it, and the ethics that mark a God-fearing community.

More than most suras, ash-Shura is preoccupied with how the human mind should hold two truths at once: that God is utterly transcendent — “there is nothing like unto Him” (42:11) — and yet that He speaks, guides, forgives, provides, and draws near through His messengers and His mercy. The mood is less

confrontational than consoling, steadying the Prophet ﷺ and the believers by anchoring their small, embattled community in a vast providence.

How the surah unfolds

After the letters, it states its governing theme: thus does God reveal to you and to those before you (42:3), placing Muhammad ﷺ in one line with every prophet. It then lifts the eye upward — the heavens almost bursting apart in awe, the angels glorifying their Lord and asking forgiveness for those on earth (42:5) — and insists on God's sole guardianship (wilayah): He is the Protector, and had He willed He could have made all humanity a single community, but He left the choice to them (42:8).

The surah's pivot is its great declaration on religion (42:13): God has ordained for this community the same din He enjoined upon Nuh, Ibrahim, Musa, and 'Isa — "that you establish the religion and not become divided in it." This single verse gathers the prophets into one unbroken message and makes disunity the primary betrayal of it. The surah adds, pointedly, that earlier peoples split apart only after clear knowledge had reached them, out of rivalry among themselves (42:14) — so the Prophet ﷺ is told to call to that one religion and to stand firm as commanded, refusing to be pulled into their factions (42:15).

It then weighs the two harvests: whoever wants the yield of the Hereafter, God increases it for him; whoever wants only this world receives some of it but has no share in the next (42:20). Here too falls the much-discussed verse in which the Prophet ﷺ is told to say he asks no reward for his message "except affection for kinship" (al-mawaddah fi al-qurba, 42:23). The

surah affirms that God accepts repentance, sends down rain and mercy after people despair (42:28), and reminds them that whatever misfortune strikes is by their own hands' earning, while He pardons much (42:30).

A portrait of the believers follows and gives the surah its name (42:36–39): what is with God is better and lasting for those who trust their Lord, shun the gravest sins and indecencies, forgive when angered, answer their Lord's call, keep up the prayer, conduct their affairs by mutual consultation, spend from what God gave them, and — when wronged and oppressed — defend themselves. Immediately the balance is set: the repayment of a harm is a harm like it, but whoever pardons and sets things right, his reward is with God (42:40); justice is a right, yet forgiveness is the higher road.

The surah closes by returning to its opening theme with a definitive statement on how God communicates with humankind (42:51): no mortal is addressed by God except by revelation, or from behind a veil, or by God sending a messenger–angel who conveys by His leave. And it ends by describing the Qur'an itself as a "spirit" (ruh) from God's command, given to a Prophet who had not known what the Book or faith were until it came — and who now guides to a straight path (42:52–53).

The major themes, in depth

The dominant theme is revelation — its reality and its modes. The surah frames wahy as the lifeline between a transcendent God and His creation. Precisely because "there is nothing like unto Him" (42:11), He does not leave humanity to grope in the

dark; He speaks. The closing verses (42:51–52) give the Qur'an's own account of the three ways divine speech reaches a human being — direct inspiration, address from behind a veil (as with Musa), or an angelic messenger — and then call the revelation a “spirit,” something that gives life to hearts as the soul gives life to the body. Ibn ‘Ashur observes how the surah brackets everything between these two statements of revelation, so that all its arguments rest on the certainty that God has truly spoken.

A second theme is the unity of the prophetic religion and the gravity of division (42:13–15). The surah teaches that the essential din — submission to the One God — is not new with Muhammad ﷺ but the shared trust of all the great messengers, and that the true crime of earlier nations was to shatter that unity after knowledge, moved by mutual envy. This gives the command “do not become divided” its full weight: sectarian splitting is presented not as a secondary fault but as the very thing that undid the communities before. Al-Qurtubi reads this as a standing warning against factionalism within the ummah itself.

The third theme, from which the surah is named, is the ethic of the believing community (42:36–40). Consultation (shura) is set among the core traits of faith, sitting between answering God, establishing prayer, and spending in charity — which is why the tradition has understood shura as a defining principle of Muslim collective life, not a mere political convenience. Around it the surah builds a rounded character: people who forgive personal wrongs yet do not accept humiliation, who hold the right to just retaliation but are drawn upward toward pardon and

reconciliation. The verse “the repayment of an evil is an evil like it, but whoever pardons and reconciles, his reward is with God” (42:40) holds justice and mercy in a single, honest tension.

A fourth theme is God’s encompassing providence and the two harvests (42:19–30). The surah portrays a Lord who is subtle and gentle (latif) with His servants, provides for whom He wills, sends reviving rain after despair, spreads His mercy, and forgives far more than He punishes. Against that backdrop it puts the choice of the two crops (42:20): the same effort, aimed at the eternal harvest, is multiplied, while aimed only at this world it yields a portion and nothing beyond. It reframes ambition — not as wanting less, but as wanting the lasting thing.

Points of reflection

The surah asks us to hold God’s transcendence and His nearness together. He is beyond all likeness, yet He speaks, forgives, and provides. To live between those truths is to worship with awe and to hope without limit — never reducing God to something we can grasp, never imagining Him too remote to hear us.

Its charge against division should unsettle any age of faction. If the ruin of earlier peoples was that they broke their one religion into parties after knowledge came, then guarding the unity of the community — and refusing to be recruited into needless splits — is itself an act of obedience.

And its portrait of the believer is a program for character: to consult rather than dominate, to forgive personal injury while standing firm against oppression, to answer God, keep the

prayer, and give — and, when angry, to reach for pardon knowing that the higher reward waits there. It teaches us to want the lasting harvest, and to earn it by the daily manners of a soul that trusts its Lord.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Hold Allah above all comparison, yet know Him as near and hearing.
2. Make consultation a habit in family and community life, not an afterthought.
3. You may claim your right, but forgiveness carries the greater reward.
4. Weigh every worldly gain against what lasts with Allah.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Tabari, al-Sa'di, al-Razi. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.