

جزء عيسى

JUZ'U 'AMMA

Part 30 of the Qur'an

A Basic Study

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TRANSLITERATION CHART

Arabic Letter or Mark	Symbol Used in This Text
ا، ي، ؤ (vowel)	ā
ب	b
ت ة	t
ث	th
ج	j
ح	ḥ
خ	kh
د	d
ذ	dh
ر	r
ز	z
س	s
ش	sh
ص	ṣ
ض	<u>dh</u>
ط	ṭ
ظ	<u>th</u>
ع	‘
غ	gh
ف	f

Arabic Letter or Mark	Symbol Used in This Text
ق	q
ك	k
ل	l
م	m
ن	n
ه	h
و	w
و (as vowel)	ū
ي	y
ي (as vowel)	ee or ī
ء	,

fathah َ	a
kasrah ِ	i
<u>dhammah</u> ُ	u
shaddah ّ	doubled letter
sukoon ْ	absence of vowel

PREFACE

All praise is due to Allah; and blessings and peace be upon His messenger and servant, Muḥammad, and upon his family and companions and whoever follows his guidance until the Day of Resurrection.

Allah, the Exalted has said:

وَهَذَا كِتَابٌ أَنْزَلْنَاهُ مُبَارَكٌ فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَاتَّقُوا لَعَلَّكُمْ تُرْحَمُونَ

*"And this [Qur'ān] is a Book We have revealed [which is] blessed, so follow it and be conscious of Allah that you may receive mercy."*¹

Undoubtedly, the most significant feature of this Book is that it is the words of Allah, the Exalted. That means it is the absolute, indisputable truth, and that its legislation is perfectly balanced and completely just. In fact, scholars have defined the Qur'ān as "the words of Allah revealed to Muḥammad (ﷺ), the recitation of which is a form of worship."² It is a definition that cannot be applied to any other book or speech.

The second distinctive feature is that the Qur'ān is comprehensive, presenting the essential teachings of the faith and the laws that regulate and govern human life, mentioning some of them directly and providing a general principle relating to others. It is the primary reference and criterion whenever disagreement should arise in a matter of religion.

As the Qur'ān was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), his companions (the *ṣaḥābah*) learned it from him and then passed it on to their students among the *tābi'een*. According to scholars, knowledge of the Qur'ān is of four kinds:

1. That which is known only to Allah (ﷻ)
2. That which is known to scholars who have specialized – This is presented in the form of *tafseer* (explanation and commentary).
3. That which is known to the Arabs owing to their common knowledge of the language – This varies in degree among them and includes appreciation of grammatical points and subtle shades of meaning. A number of *tafseers* make mention of some of them as features of interest.
4. That which is clear to everyone, even in translation – This is the law (commands and prohibitions) concerning which there is no excuse for ignorance. It is the knowledge whose acquisition is a duty required of every Muslim, male and female. So how does one acquire knowledge of the Qur'ān?

The best explanations are through the Qur'ān itself because it contains reiteration.

اللَّهُ نَزَّلَ أَحْسَنَ الْحَدِيثِ كِتَابًا مُتَشَابِهًا مَثَانِي

*"Allah has sent down the best statement: a consistent Book wherein is reiteration."*³

¹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:155.

² *Mabāḥith fee 'Ulūm il-Qur'ān*, p. 21.

³ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:23.

In this verse, "*mutashābihan mathāni*" means that some parts of it resemble others and explain them, and narratives repeated in various styles in different sūrahs serve to clarify one another. It is obvious that the words of Allah cannot be explained by anything clearer and more precise than words of Allah, for He is the speaker and is most knowing of what He intended. This kind of tafseer (i.e., the Qur'ān explaining itself) was given much attention by early scholars.

After the words of Allah, the most accurate explanation of the Qur'ānic text comes through the Prophet's authentic Sunnah. For after Allah Himself, no one was more knowledgeable about what He intended than His Messenger (ﷺ), to whom the message was revealed. Tafseer actually began during the lifetime of Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), who was commanded to convey the divine message and to make it clear it to the people. That he did with utmost conscientiousness, explaining the meanings of its verses by means of both words and deeds. The Prophet's sayings, actions and tacit approvals were a practical demonstration of the Qur'ān's meanings. As described by his wife, 'Ā'ishah, "His character was the Qur'ān."⁴

After the Sunnah, statements of the Prophet's companions are considered authoritative because they were present at the time of revelation and learned directly from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). The *ṣaḥābah* (companions) were those most familiar with the time, place and circumstances of each revelation due to their close contact with the Prophet (ﷺ) and their eagerness to understand every aspect of the revelation. They, in turn, taught it to the Muslims who succeeded them. At the same time, acute awareness of their accountability before Allah prevented them from answering questions or making assertions about anything of which they were not completely certain.

The *ṣaḥābah* taught their students of the following generation, the *tābi'een*. These successors took care to mention the sources for whatever commentaries they offered. Only those of their statements are accepted which are based upon knowledge taken from the *ṣaḥābah* and derived from the literal and logical meanings understood from the Arabic language. Narratives from other sources, such as those of the Jews and Christians, were sometimes included in their commentaries to add further detail but are not reliable and should not be taken as fact. The Prophet (ﷺ) instructed, "*Do not believe the People of the Book and do not deny them, but say: 'We believe in Allah and what was revealed to us.'*"⁵

If a meaning remains obscure, statements can be taken from the commentators which are nearest to explanations from the Qur'ān and Sunnah or words of the *ṣaḥābah*. If something is found there it is accepted; otherwise, the meaning is taken that is closest to what is understood normally from the Arabic language since it is the language of the Qur'ān. The scholars in such cases practice *ijtihād* (an academic effort to reach the right conclusion) and *istinbāṭ* (deduction). If one of them is correct he earns double reward and if he is incorrect he still gets reward for his effort, as long as it is based on confirmed knowledge.⁶

Learning the Qur'ān and teaching it is an obligation upon the Muslim community, and it is the means of keeping knowledge of the Book alive within it. As the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*The best of you is one who learns the Qur'ān and teaches it.*"⁷

⁴ Narrated by Muslim.

⁵ Al-Bukhāri and al-Bayhaqi.

⁶ However, no one should say anything about the words of Allah based on opinion without knowledge, for that is a major sin.

⁷ Al-Bukhāri and at-Tirmidhi.

BEGINNING WITH سُورَةُ الْفَاتِحَةِ SŪRAH AL-FĀTIḤAH

Due to the fact that Sūrah al-Fātiḥah is recited in every *rak'ah* (unit) of prayer⁸ and was described by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) as the greatest sūrah in the Qur'ān,⁹ a brief explanation will be given of its verses.

Al-Fātiḥah was revealed during the Makkan period and was the first sūrah to be sent down to the Prophet (ﷺ) in its entirety. Parts of some other sūrahs had been revealed prior to it, the earliest of them being the first five verses of Sūrah al-'Alaq.

Al-Fātiḥah contains seven verses, described in both the Qur'ān¹⁰ and ḥadīth¹¹ as "*as-Sab' ul-Mathānī wal-Qur'ān al-'Atheem*" (the Seven Oft-Repeated Verses and the Great Recitation). The sūrah was given other names as well, the most common of them being: *Fātiḥat al-Kitāb* (the Opening of the Book), *Umm al-Qur'ān* (the Mother of the Qur'ān) and *Sūrah al-Ḥamd* (the Sūrah of Praise), as it begins with "*Praise be to Allāh, Lord of the Worlds.*"

It has also been called "the Prayer" by Allah in a ḥadīth qudsi.¹² The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) related that his Lord had said, "*I have divided the Prayer into two parts: one for Me and one for My servant; and My servant shall have what he requests. When the servant says, 'Praise be to Allāh, Lord of the worlds,' I say, 'My servant has praised Me.' When he says: 'The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful,' I say, 'My servant has praised Me.' When he says, 'Sovereign of the Day of Recompense,' I say, 'My servant has glorified Me.' When he says, 'It is You we worship and You we ask for help,' I say, 'This is between Me and My servant, and my servant will have what he requests.' When he says, 'Guide us to the straight path – the path of those upon whom You have bestowed favor, not of those who have earned [Your] anger or of those who are astray,' I say, 'This is for My servant, and My servant will have what he requests.'"*¹³

Despite its brevity, *al-Fātiḥah* contains abundant connotations, and for that reason it has been called *Umm al-Qur'ān*. It includes the general meanings presented in the Qur'ān and the major principles and themes the Qur'ān addresses: *'aqeedah*, *'ibādah* and *sharī'ah*. The Prophet (ﷺ) once remarked: "*By Him in whose hand is my soul, there is nothing like this sūrah in Torah or the Injeel or the Zabūr. It is the seven oft-repeated verses and the great Qur'ān that Allah has given me.*"¹⁴

⁸ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*There is no prayer (ṣalāh) for the one who does not recite al-Fātiḥah.*" (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim) When a person first enters Islam, the first thing he or she must memorize is this opening sūrah in order to perform the prescribed prayers. If one recites only this sūrah in prayer, it is sufficient for the prayer to be valid. Reciting more is preferred, but not obligatory.

⁹ Narrated by al-Bukhāri.

¹⁰ In Sūrah al-Hijr, 15:87.

¹¹ In narrations by al-Bukhāri.

¹² A revelation from Allah related in the words of the Prophet (ﷺ).

¹³ Narrated by Muslim.

¹⁴ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

Meanings:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1. In the name of Allah, the Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful

Scholars have differed over whether the *basmalah* (the words "*Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem*")¹⁵ is part of the sūrah or merely an indication of its beginning. In most copies of the Arabic *mus-haf* today it appears as a distinct *āyah* (verse) in Sūrah al-Fātiḥah but not in other sūrahs.¹⁶

The meaning of Bismillāh is: "[I begin] in the name of Allah."¹⁷

Bism (بسم) literally means "by the name of" or "with the name of" and is a contraction of two words: *bi* (by/with) and *ism* (name). Ordinarily, and elsewhere in the Qur'ān it is written as بِاسْمِ but pronounced in the same way.

Allāh (الله) is the proper name of the one eternal, unique, absolute and perfect deity who is the Creator and Sustainer of all that exists. It is a word that indicates the only being that possesses the qualities of divinity and lordship. The definite article, *al* (ال) has merged into the word *ilāh* (إله – an object of worship). This definite article is an integral part of the word's structure and cannot be separated from it – thus establishing the meaning of the true object of worship and the only deity worthy of worship.

Therefore, this name is applicable to the one and only true God, and nothing else can be called "*Allāh*." Moreover, it is inclusive of all of His descriptive names and attributes; so many scholars have expressed the opinion that it is the greatest of His names.

The intellect recognizes Allah, but the mind is subject to the limitations of its created nature so it is not capable of comprehending many of His attributes or the extent of His greatness. Allah cannot be understood according to the terms of material existence. He is not bound by the laws of physics which He created. Unlike His creations, Allah is timeless and eternal, without beginning or end. He is the one and only Lord of the entire universe. He is the Creator and Sustainer upon which all creation depends for its existence at every moment.

Ar-Raḥmān (الرحمن) and **ar-Raḥeem** (الرحيم) are two of Allah's descriptive names derived from the word *raḥmah* (mercy). In Arabic grammar both are intensive forms of "merciful" (i.e., extremely merciful). Because these two names encompass all aspects of mercy, they are used together only in reference to Allah, the Exalted. A comprehensive and complementary meaning is intended by the combination of both:

The name *ar-Raḥmān* is used exclusively for Allah and no one else. The Qur'ān says:

قُلِ ادْعُوا اللَّهَ أَوْ ادْعُوا الرَّحْمَنَ أَيًّا مَا تَدْعُوا فَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ.

*Call upon Allāh or call upon ar-Raḥmān; whichever [name] you call – to Him belong the most excellent names.*¹⁸

¹⁵ Occurring at the opening of every sūrah except at-Tawbah.

¹⁶ The *basmalah* occurring in v. 27:30 is undeniably part of Sūrah an-Naml as it occurs within the text.

¹⁷ As Allah begins in His own name, it is preferable to begin all things with "*Bismillah*," seeking His aid and blessing.

Ar-Raḥmān is merciful in the absolute sense;¹⁹ thus, it is used to describe Allah alone, while *raḥeem* might be used to describe a human being as well.²⁰ *Raḥmān* emphasizes the concept of being entirely, intensely and absolutely merciful with mercy that encompasses all of creation. One component of this mercy is justice, which will be fully manifested in the Hereafter. And Allah also describes Himself also as *ar-Raḥeem*, which includes the concepts of continuity and specialization; i.e., He is especially and specifically merciful to the believers, given that they are more deserving of His mercy than others. In the words of the Qur'ān:

وَكَانَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ رَحِيمًا.

*And ever is He Merciful (Raḥeem) to the believers.*²¹

Allah's forgiveness of their errors and sins is part of this mercy, and it extends into the eternal life of the Hereafter. The Prophet (ﷺ) stated, "Allah's mercy has one hundred shares, only one of which He sent down to be shared by human beings, jinn, and all the animals. With this share of mercy they are able to show affection and mercy to one another and a wild beast is able to show affection to its young. Allah has reserved the other ninety-nine shares for His servants on the Day of Resurrection."²² So Allah (ﷻ) is *ar-Raḥmān* and *ar-Raḥeem* with respect to both this world and the next. His Messenger (ﷺ) said, "When Allah created the creation, He wrote in the register that is with Him above the Throne, 'My mercy overcomes My anger.' "²³

Ibn al-Qayyim added a further clarification: "*Ar-Raḥmān* refers to an attribute that is connected to Allah and is part of His essence whereas *ar-Raḥeem* indicates a relationship to the one to whom mercy is shown. The former is adjectival (describing what He is) and the latter is verbal (describing what He does). The former indicates that mercy is His attribute, and the latter indicates that He bestows His mercy upon creation."

2. Praise be to Allah, Lord of the worlds

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Believers are directed to praise Allah and to acknowledge His absolute sovereignty over all creation.

وَهُوَ اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ لَهُ الْحَمْدُ فِي الْأُولَى وَالْآخِرَةِ وَلَهُ الْحُكْمُ وَإِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ.

*And He is Allāh; there is no deity except Him. To Him is [due all] praise in the first [life] and the Hereafter. And His is the [final] decision, and to Him you will be returned.*²⁴

Praise implies recognition of Allah's favors, what is known of them and what is not known.

¹⁸ Sūrah al-Israa', 17:110.

¹⁹ i.e., His mercy is not limited to the capacity of humanity or any other of His creation; rather, it is unlimited.

²⁰ The Prophet (ﷺ) was described in the Qur'ān (9:128) as *raḥeem*.

²¹ Sūrah al-Aḥzāb, 33:43. The Prophet (ﷺ) said: "No one will enter Paradise through good deeds; not even me, unless Allah covers me with His mercy." (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim) While no human deed is free from imperfection, Allah's mercy toward His believing servants is based on the intent, effort and attitude of each.

²² Narrated by Muslim.

²³ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

²⁴ Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, 28:70.

The āyah confirms that all kinds and forms of praise are due to Allah alone and that He alone is worthy to praise Himself. And it teaches how Allah should be praised.

Al-ḥamdu (praise accompanied by reverence) is due to Allah at all times and in all conditions. To praise Him at the beginning and end of every action and every effort is a fundamental principle of Islam, for it expresses recognition of His innumerable favors. The definite article ال when attached to the word حمد imparts the meaning of all praise and every kind of praise. Moreover, praise (*ḥamd*) has a wider implication than thanks (*shukr*) and is inclusive of it. While thanks is due for specific recognized favors, praise is in gratitude for all blessings in general, apparent and unapparent, as well as acknowledgement of the Lord's perfect attributes.

Lillāhi is the divine name preceded by the letter ل (meaning to or for). With the phrase "*Al-ḥamdu lillāh*," the Creator praises His own name, and He alone is worthy to do so. In this manner believers are taught the best words with which to praise Him as well. And although all praise and gratitude is due to Allah from His servants at every moment and is an obligation upon them, He rewards them generously when they praise Him.

Allah also declares that He is *Rabbul-ʿālameen* (Lord of the worlds). **Rabb** (رَبّ) is comprehensive in meaning, indicating an owner, master, ruler, controller, provider, guardian and caretaker. Divine lordship is inclusive of creation, sustenance, ownership, guardianship, development, control and completion of everything brought into existence. It is represented by the Arabic الربّ (the Lord) which can refer to none but Allah, the Lord of all creation.

ʿĀlameen is a plural form of *ʿālam* (world). It is derived from *ʿalāmah*, which means a sign or a trace. So each of the worlds created by Allah is a trace of its Creator and a sign of His existence. In the Qurʾān *al-ʿālameen* can refer to people or it can mean categories of beings, species or communities, such as "the world of insects" or "the world of plants." The plural form indicates all of these worlds or the entire universe. Qatādah said, "It refers to everything in existence other than Allah." And Ibn ʿAbbās defined it as the creation in its entirety, the heavens and earth and whoever is within them and between them, that which is known and unknown. He also said that *al-ʿālameen* refers to everything possessing a soul that moves on the earth.²⁵ Allah is the Lord of everything in existence. He created everything and has absolute power over it; nothing is outside of His Lordship.

The affirmation of the absolute sovereignty and dynamic authority of Allah over all creation is embodied in the concept of *tawḥeed*.²⁶ "*Lord of the worlds*" expresses belief in the one supreme master who created His creation for a purpose and continues to guard and care for it, ensuring its stability for as long as He should will. Nothing is beyond His control. Additionally, the phrase "Lord of the worlds" reflects Allah's power over those who disobey Him and His ability to punish them, creating unease and apprehension in the heart.

²⁵ Some scholars restricted the meaning of *al-ʿālameen* to those creations possessing intelligence, and Allah knows best.

²⁶ In contrast to the confusion of polytheistic beliefs, Islam has focused on the correction of human beliefs and clearly defined the concept of Allah's nature and attributes.

3. The Entirely Merciful, the Especially Merciful

الرَّحْمَنُ الرَّحِيمُ

"**Ar-Raḥmān ar-Raḥeem**" is repeated again in this verse after the mention of divine lordship to emphasize His mercy. It is not to be forgotten that the Lord of the worlds, to whom humble servitude is due, remains *ar-Raḥmān*, *ar-Raḥeem*. The recurrence of these two names provides a portrayal complementary to that of the previous āyah. This method is utilized throughout the Qur'ān for keeping balance in the heart between the fear of punishment and hope for mercy. Allah has similarly described Himself with contrasting attributes in other verses; for example:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ شَدِيدُ الْعِقَابِ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ.

*Know that Allāh is severe in penalty and that Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful.*²⁷

نَبِّئْ عِبَادِي أَنِّي أَنَا الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ وَأَنَّ عَذَابِي هُوَ الْعَذَابُ الْأَلِيمُ

*Inform My servants that it is I who am the Forgiving, the Merciful. And that it is My punishment which is the painful punishment.*²⁸

The believer's constant state between hope and fear promotes worship and obedience.²⁹ The Qur'ān keeps him within this balance, motivating exertion of his best efforts toward obeying and pleasing his Creator.

4. Sovereign of the Day of Recompense

مَالِكِ يَوْمِ الدِّينِ

After the reminder of His mercy comes another unique description. Allah not only affirms that He is Lord of the presently existing worlds, but that He is also the Owner and Inheritor of the Day of Recompense, for which He will have created new worlds. It is then that Allah's judgment of every creature will be announced and full compensation given for whatever was earned of good or evil during life on earth. Belief in the Hereafter is essential because it reduces human obsession with the present life and its immediate earthly desires. Believers are assured in the Qur'ān that the eternal life will more than compensate for any exertion and sacrifice they may have put forth in this temporary existence, and that justice, so lacking in the present world, will be completely restored in the Hereafter as a logical conclusion to purposeful creation.

Mālik (مَالِك) and **Malik** (مَلِك) are both established ways of reciting the first word of this āyah. Each has been reported with continuous transmission going back to the Prophet (ﷺ). The scholars have stated that when related to Allah, *malik* is an attribute of essence whereas *mālik* is an attribute of action.

Both recitations convey sound meanings, although *malik* is more comprehensive. When recited as such, the emphasis is upon the meaning of sovereignty, i.e., that Allah (ﷻ) is the

²⁷ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:98.

²⁸ Sūrah al-Hijr, 15:49-50.

²⁹ An excess of fear produces hopelessness and inertia, while an excess of optimism produces heedlessness and negligence.

only sovereign to whom all dominion, power and authority belongs on that Day. And when recited as *mālik*, the emphasis is on ownership, which is included within the concept of sovereignty. Ownership does not necessarily include sovereignty while sovereignty undoubtedly includes ownership and possession.³⁰

Yawm generally refers to a period of time, and not necessarily a day of 24 hours as known in this world. For example, the Qur'ān mentions a day the extent of which is a thousand years³¹ and a day the extent of which is fifty thousand years.³² Also known as "al-Yawm al-Ākhir" (the Last Day), it is in reality as near as an individual's death, when the soul is released from the confines of time that was created by Allah for life on earth.

Deen refers here to compensation and recompense, as in the words of Allah:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يُوفِّيهِمُ اللَّهُ دِينَهُمُ الْحَقَّ

*On that Day Allah will pay them in full their true [i.e., deserved] recompense.*³³

Ibn 'Abbās explained the Day of Recompense as the Day on which all creations are judged: the Day of Resurrection. He said, "Allah will recompense them for their actions; if good, then with good, and if bad then with bad, except for whatever He forgives. And indeed, the only command [that Day] will be His command."³⁴

And thus, Allah (ﷻ) has said:

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ. ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ. يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ.

*And what can make you know what is the Day of Recompense? Then, what can make you know what is the Day of Recompense? [It is] the Day when a soul will not possess for another soul [power to do] a thing; and the command, that Day, is [entirely] with Allah.*³⁵

5. It is You we worship and You we ask for help

إِيَّاكَ نَعْبُدُ وَإِيَّاكَ نَسْتَعِينُ

Thus far, Allah, the Exalted, has referred to Himself in the third person. At this point He instructs His servants to address Him directly in the second person, evoking consciousness of His presence. The āyah conveys the essential principle of *tawḥeed*,³⁶ which is the logical result of the sūrah's preceding descriptions. It expresses the right of the Creator over His

³⁰ Allah is the Owner and Sovereign of the present creation as well as the Day of Recompense. However, on that Day, the brief sovereignties of this world will have ended and the totality and perfection of Allah's sovereignty will be clearly manifest. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) related, "On the Day of Resurrection Allah will fold the heaven in His right hand and the earth in His left, saying, 'I am the Sovereign; where are the kings of the earth?'" (Al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

³¹ Refer to Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:5.

³² Refer to Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:4.

³³ Sūrah an-Nūr, 24:25.

³⁴ The believer who avoided major sins during his life on earth will be forgiven his minor sins within a brief time. But those who rejected guidance and the sinful among Muslims who did not repent will be confronted with their transgressions in painful detail on a long and difficult Day.

³⁵ Sūrah al-Infīṭār, 82:17-19.

³⁶ i.e., acknowledgement that Allah is the only deity worthy to be worshipped, to the exclusion of all else.

creations, as in the ḥadīth: *Allah's right over His servants is that they worship Him without associating anything with Him.*³⁷ And it is the response to His command:

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اعْبُدُوا رَبَّكُمُ الَّذِي خَلَقَكُمْ وَالَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكُمْ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ

*O mankind, worship your Lord who created you and those before you, that you may become righteous.*³⁸

Through the worship of Allah alone man attains freedom from all forms of intellectual and political tyranny and from the abuse and debasement inherent in servitude to other men.

Iyyāka is the second person singular pronoun in object form, and it addresses Allah, the Exalted. The object precedes the verb in order to denote emphasis and exclusivity, i.e., "It is You alone and none but You."

Na'budu is derived from the verb *'abada*, which means to be subservient and compliant to another, to worship and obey Him. Islamically, it is a comprehensive term meaning to do whatever is pleasing to Allah, both in public and in private. The prefixed letter ن stands for the subject pronoun "we" so the meaning becomes "It is You, O Allah, that we Muslims worship and none other."

The same applies to the second phrase, *iyyāka nasta'een*. **Nasta'eenu**, from the verb "*asta'āna*" means to seek or ask for assistance. The object again precedes the verb for emphasis and the letter ن is its subject. The words express a servant's dependence upon his Lord in all his affairs and his acknowledgement that any help and assistance given him by others will occur due to the will of Allah and not independently. The phrase also indicates that it is not permissible to rely on any other but Allah since none controls the affairs of creation apart from Him and He is the source of every occurrence.

Islam revolves around these two principles: worship of Allah alone and reliance on Allah alone. The Qur'ān confirms:

وَلِلَّهِ غَيْبُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَإِلَيْهِ يُرْجَعُ الْأَمْرُ كُلُّهُ فَاعْبُدْهُ وَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَيْهِ

*And to Allah belong the unseen [aspects] of the heavens and the earth and to Him will be returned the matter, all of it, so worship Him and rely upon Him.*³⁹

Allah's help is sought in order to deal with the trials of life, to overcome its difficulties and to obey Him in every circumstance. The order in which the two verbs are mentioned indicate that worship of Allah is the objective⁴⁰ and that the favor of His assistance is requested to accomplish it; which is the reason He said concerning this verse, "*This is between Me and My servant, and my servant will have what he requests.*"

³⁷ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³⁸ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:21. See also Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:36 and al-Anbiyā', 21:25.

³⁹ Sūrah Hūd, 11:123.

⁴⁰ As stated in Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:56.

6. Guide us to the straight path

اهْدِنَا الصِّرَاطَ الْمُسْتَقِيمَ

The previous verse defined the method of obtaining Allah's acceptance and approval, namely by worshipping Him alone and by seeking His help to worship Him in the proper way. His assistance is sought by means of supplication (*du'aa'*). The supplication in this verse expresses man's lifelong need for his Creator's guidance. Just as one cannot worship Him properly except with His help, he cannot continue except with His guidance.

It has been stated by scholars that the best thing one may ask of Allah is guidance because it is the means of attaining the best outcome from worldly life. Ibn 'Abbās explained that it is a request to be shown the straight path or to be inspired to follow it. But although the believer has been guided to Islam initially, he must progress beyond that primary stage in order to remain steadfast on the path and avoid deviations. For this reason 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib, Ubayy bin Ka'b and others described it as a request to be made firm and constant upon the straight path.

Ihdinā is the imperative form of *hadā* (to guide or direct) with the attachment of the pronoun *nā* (us) as its object. The guidance referred to here is general and varied in meaning, but it is always inclusive of constancy and renewal. Some of its aspects as stated by the scholars are as follows:

- How to stay firm and constant on the straight path, which is described as the religion of Islam and its essentials. These include: the six pillars of faith, the five pillars of Islam, its ethical principles and avoidance of what is prohibited in the Qur'ān and Sunnah and by consensus among Muslim scholars. The believer asks his Lord for constancy in these matters knowing that people are sometimes shaken in their faith.⁴¹
- How to attain an increase in guidance, resulting from the knowledge and insight granted by Allah
- Guidance in matters that are problematic – to arrive at the best solution for issues wherein opinions differ. It is guidance toward constancy in one's approach and methodology, to adhere to truth even though it might not be apparent to others, and to remain firm on the principles of Islam in all circumstances.
- Guidance concerning options – to what is best, or at least the lesser evil.
- How to best worship Allah under all conditions in the manner that most suits one's particular circumstance according to the priorities of the moment.

Guidance is granted in phases and degrees. One who has been guided in the past remains in need of guidance for the future. There are external causes which require the believer to continually seek renewed guidance. Reassessment is imposed by increased knowledge and experience, by changing circumstances and by environmental demands. Because the need for guidance is constant and enduring, the Muslim has been required to recite "*Guide us to the straight path*" in every rak'ah of prayer, asking his Lord to instruct and direct him in every matter that concerns himself and others.

⁴¹ Similarly in Āyah 3:8, Allah (ﷻ) mentions that people of understanding supplicate: "*Our Lord, let not our hearts deviate after You have guided us and grant us from Yourself mercy. Indeed, You are the Bestower.*"

Aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqeem is the straight, direct path and upright way. Early scholars described it as: the way of Allah and His Prophet (ﷺ), the truth, the religion of Allah, the Book of Allah, what is approved by Allah and similar explanations. All are related and correct and indicate Islam.⁴² The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) affirmed, "*Allah has set forth a parable: a straight path leading to a destination. On each side of the path is a wall in which there are open doors with curtains hanging over them. At the end of the path a voice calls, 'Enter the path, all of you, and do not turn off from it.' Whenever someone intends to open the curtain on a door another voice calls from above, 'Beware! Do not open the curtain lest you [be tempted and] enter.'*" He then explained it, saying, "*The straight path is Islam, the walls are the limits imposed by Allah, the open doors are the things He has prohibited, the voice calling from the end of the path is the Book of Allah and the voice calling from above is Allah's conscience in the heart of every Muslim.*"⁴³

An authoritative and all-inclusive description of this path is also given elsewhere in the Qur'ān:

صِرَاطِ اللَّهِ الَّذِي لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ

*The path of Allah, to whom belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth.*⁴⁴

And He has said:

وَأَنَّ هَذَا صِرَاطِي مُسْتَقِيمًا فَاتَّبِعُوهُ وَلَا تَتَّبِعُوا السُّبُلَ فَتَفَرَّقَ بِكُمْ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ

*And this is My path which is straight, so follow it and do not follow other ways, for you will be separated from His [i.e., Allah's] way.*⁴⁵

This shows that Allah's straight path is one path and not several. Indeed, anything that departs or diverges from His path is misguidance. Mujāhid maintained that the other paths referred to innovations and uncertainties. And Imām ash-Shāṭibi explained, "The straight path is the path designated by Allah, and that is the Sunnah. All other paths are the paths of those who disagree and deviate from the straight path, and they are the people of innovation." Additional explanation is given in the following āyah.

7. The path of those upon whom صِرَاطَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ غَيْرِ الْمَغْضُوبِ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا الضَّالِّينَ **You have bestowed favor, not of those who have earned [Your] anger or those who are astray.**

In this final verse of the sūrah, Allah (ﷻ) expands on the meaning of *aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqeem* and provides additional detail.

⁴² Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned another meaning, which is: guidance on the Day of Judgement to the path (bridge) leading to Paradise. One who is guided in this life upon the straight path will be guided to the straight path to Paradise in the Hereafter. Stability on that path will depend on how firmly he had adhered to the straight path of Islam in the worldly life.

⁴³ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi - *ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁴⁴ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:53.

⁴⁵ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:153.

Şirāṭ (the path) is repeated, bringing attention to the clarification that follows. The pronoun, **al-ladheena**, may be translated as "those" or "the ones." **An'ama** is a verb meaning to bless or bestow favor, while the pronoun **ت** (You) affixed to it is its subject and refers to Allah, the Exalted.

Thus, the straight path is defined as: *"The way of those upon whom You [i.e., Allah] have bestowed favor."* But who are the ones honored by the Lord with His favor? Ibn Katheer answered that they are the people who adhere to Allah's commandments and refrain from what He has prohibited. And the Qur'ān defines them as:

الذين أنعم الله عليهم من النبيين والصديقين والشهداء والصالحين

*...The ones upon whom Allah has bestowed favor among the prophets, the steadfast affirmers of the truth, the martyrs and the righteous.*⁴⁶

Allah favored these noble believers when they demonstrated their sincerity towards Him. When they sought His guidance He guided them to the true religion; and when they accepted and followed His guidance He made known to them the way by which they could earn His favor; and when they took on that responsibility and adhered to His path He facilitated it for them and prepared for them great rewards. It is their example and their way to which the Muslim seeks guidance in his prayer.

The definition of the straight path is now completed with the exclusion of two other paths which lead in another direction and distance one from Paradise: that of people who have deserved Allah's anger and that of those who have gone astray.

Ghayr (not, other than, unlike) denotes the opposite of or an exception to what follows it. So the straight path is not that of those who have angered Allah by disobeying Him, nor it is that of those who are lost and confused due to ignorance. These are the two causes of deviation from the path of Allah: corruption of intention and action and corruption of knowledge and belief.

Al-maghdhūbi 'alayhim (the recipients or objects of anger) are mentioned first in view of the fact that their offense is greater than **adh-dhālleen** (those astray), for the latter could possibly be set right through the acquisition of knowledge whereas those possessing knowledge who refuse to act upon it are in fact rebelling against their Creator, earning and deserving His wrath.

It should be noted in this verse that in relation to the favor of Allah, He is addressed directly with the second person pronoun. But in relation to His anger, there is no direct reference to Allah. Instead, only the object of that anger is mentioned – those who have caused the anger, showing that the responsibility for what they have incurred is on none but themselves. Thus, Allah attributes favor to Himself, omits mention of who becomes angered, and attributes misguidance to those who choose to remain misguided.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, *"Those who have earned anger are the Jews and those who are astray are the Christians."*⁴⁷ This is undoubtedly correct as it was reported from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) with a sound chain of narrators.

⁴⁶ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:69. Aş-şāliḥeen includes all righteous servants of Allah from every age.

However, commentators have pointed out that the meanings are not restricted to these two factions alone and are more general in scope. One of the greatest manifestations of disobedience among the Jews has been that although they knew the truth they turned away from it, preferring falsehood.⁴⁸ But in fact, anyone who has access to Allah's guidance, deliberately refusing to follow it and thus obstructing others from the straight path may be included in this category.

And those who have strayed and erred are not limited to the Christians. They include every person who makes no effort to know the truth and is content to remain as he is in ignorance.⁴⁹ The verse makes no reference to Allah in this connection either, for He did not impose that condition upon them and they remain under obligation to seek information and enlightenment.

Both are categories of people whose ways should be avoided. The first fails to act upon knowledge and the second fails to acquire it. A Muslim must continually seek the help and guidance of Allah to keep him firm on the path of beneficial knowledge, correct actions and righteous deeds – *aş-şirāṭ al-mustaqeem*.

Allah guides those who wish to be guided, which is a great favor from Him, and leaves astray those who are unworthy and unwilling to receive His favor. But when He withholds from them His favor He will not deprive them of His justice. The sūrah has spoken first about mercy, then about guidance and finally about Allah's favor. His favor is the result of guidance, and guidance is His mercy. So he who observes the meanings of *al-Fātiḥah* in terms of knowledge, methodology and action will have succeeded in protecting himself and attained a degree of righteousness.

⁴⁷ Narrated by Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi who graded it as *ḥasan-ṣaḥeeḥ*.

⁴⁸ It has been said that the scholars among our own people who violate the law resemble them.

⁴⁹ Some among Muslims also go astray, such as those who worship Allah in erroneous and deviant ways without knowledge.

JUZ'U 'AMMA, THE 30TH PART OF THE QUR'ĀN

*Juz'u 'Amma*⁵⁰ is the most commonly recited and memorized portion of the Qur'ān. It contains thirty-seven sūrahs,⁵¹ all of which were revealed in Makkah with the exception of *al-Bayyinah* and *an-Naṣr*. Because these sūrahs were revealed during the earliest stages of the prophetic mission and were being recited primarily to an audience of unbelievers and skeptics, their objective is to awaken the unconscious and implant faith in the heart. Varying in length, all are relatively short sūrahs with essentially similar themes.

These early revelations came in powerful language consisting of short, concise but eloquent sentences; their literary style was so unique that it attracted a great deal of attention. Logical evidences supported the universal truths expressed within them. Their verses exposed the errors of the idolaters and criticized their blind adherence to a religion of unsanctioned customs. They convey basic principles of morality, ethics and righteous conduct taught by all prophets as an indispensable part of Allah's religion. And they refute the misconception that man is self-sufficient, independent of Allah and unaccountable to Him.

As is generally the case with Makkan revelation, the emphasis in Juz'u 'Amma is on essential beliefs – in particular, the issues of *tawḥeed*,⁵² the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ) and the life after death. *Al-Qiyāmah* (the Resurrection) is described vividly in several of its sūrahs as a terrifying, overwhelming event. Ibn 'Umar reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) had said, "*Whoever would like to perceive the Day of Resurrection as if with his own eyes may recite Sūrahs at-Takweer, al-Infīṭār and al-Inshiqāq.*"⁵³ Subject matter includes: the creative power of Allah as observed in the phenomena of nature on earth and in the heavens, the inevitable and complete manifestation of that power in the Hereafter, the Lord's mercy and countless favors to mankind, the arrogance and ingratitude shown by most of mankind, the consequences of belief and denial, threat against evildoers and promise of reward for the righteous.

There are also some brief references to earlier prophets and divine retribution upon those who opposed them. The unbelievers are admonished for their ignorance and immorality, their opposition to truth and their persecution of the believers. Allah warns that every individual will be held fully accountable for his actions and intentions at the final account and judgment, and that each will find just recompense for his deeds, both good and evil, in an eternal life to come.

⁵⁰ *Juz'* literally means a portion. In Islamic terminology it refers to one of the thirty subdivisions of the Qur'ān. A *juz'* is further divided into two halves, called a *hizb*, each of which is further subdivided into four quarters. The name of this 30th section, *'Amma*, is taken from the first word in its first sūrah.

⁵¹ The word *sūrah*, meaning a chapter of the Qur'ān, is derived from *sūr* or wall in Arabic. It literally means "something enclosed or contained – a separate entity." An *āyah* is a verse within the sūrah. Although its general meaning is a sign, each verse of the Qur'ān is in fact a sign from Allah.

⁵² Affirmation of the unity and exclusiveness of Allah.

⁵³ Narrated by Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhi and al-Ḥākim - ṣaḥeeḥ.

SŪRAH AN-NABA' (78) سُورَةُ النَّبَاِ

The name of this sūrah is taken from a word occurring in the second verse, *an-naba'*, which means the news or information. It reflects the sūrah's theme and subject matter as well, for *an-naba'* indicates news of the Resurrection and the Hereafter as described in revelation from Allah. It has also been referred to as *Sūrah 'Ammā*, based on its first word.⁵⁴ Its forty verses were revealed in Makkah, and like other sūrahs of the Makkan period, it forcefully declares and emphasizes the three fundamentals of belief: tawḥeed, prophethood and life after death.

The sūrah was revealed during the earliest period of Muḥammad's prophethood and following the revelation of Sūrah al-Ma'ārij. In the Qur'ān it is positioned after Sūrah al-Mursalāt, which threatens the deniers and concludes with the question, "*Then in what statement after it (i.e., the revelation) will they believe?*"

Surah an-Naba' begins immediately with another question: "*About what are they asking one another?*" This is in reference to the denial being expressed by people throughout Makkah upon hearing the information revealed in the Qur'ān. Their questioning is an expression of unbelief and rejection.

When the Prophet (ﷺ) first began to present Islam in Makkah, his message consisted primarily of three basic concepts: (1) that none should be considered an associate with Allah in His attributes of divinity, (2) that Allah had appointed him (ﷺ) to be His final messenger and (3) that this world will come to an end and another will be established wherein all generations are resurrected, called to account and compensated in full for everything done in the previous life.

The people of Makkah did not deny the existence of Allah. They believed in Him as the Supreme Creator and Sustainer, admitting that those they regarded as other gods were His creation. They insisted only that these "deities" also had some attributes and powers of divinity, such as the ability or benefit or harm someone, or that they could intercede with Allah.

But the Makkans were not prepared to accept the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ). They could not deny that during the 40 years he had lived among them before it, they had never known him to lie, deceive or adopt unlawful methods for selfish ends. They had always admitted that he was a man of wisdom, righteousness and moral superiority. But now they called him a liar regarding his announcement that he was a prophet appointed by Allah.

As for the concept of the Hereafter, they denied it most of all, expressing astonishment and skepticism, regarding it as inconceivable and impossible, mocking it on the streets and in their

⁵⁴ As shown in the case of *Al-Fātiḥah*, a sūrah can be known by more than one name. Sūrah titles are not an integral part of the Qur'ān. They were used as a means of identification among the Prophet's companions and later scholars, usually based on a distinguishing word or one defining subject matter. Although some names were used by the Prophet (ﷺ) in reference to a particular sūrah, they were not specifically designated by him as titles.

assemblies. Accordingly, the doctrine of the Hereafter has been emphasized most in this and other early sūrah.

The sūrah's final verses depict the final account as the Day of Truth in which Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, will permit intercession only to those who say what is correct. And it closes with warning of a near punishment on the Day when all deeds will be observable and the disbeliever will wish that he were dust.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ About what are they asking one another?

Sūrah an-Naba' begins with a reference to the denial by people throughout Makkah of information revealed in the Qur'ān. It opens with a question which conveys a sense of gravity to the matter in dispute; yet it is an indisputable matter. Most commentators agree that what was being questioned by the disbelieving Quraysh in Makkah was information about *al-Qiyāmah* (the Resurrection).⁵⁵ Through their arrogant questioning they were denying the return to their Lord, who had created them and given them life upon the earth.

The Arabic *'amma* is a contraction of two words: *'an* and *mā*, meaning "about what." The form of the verb *sa'ala* (*yatasā'alūn*) indicates reciprocal questioning, i.e., the disbelievers ask the believers and ask one another. Their questions are a sarcastic expression of unbelief and denial.

Āyah 2. عَنِ النَّبَأِ الْعَظِيمِ About the great news.

An-naba' is the news or information brought by the Prophet (ﷺ) from Allah (ﷻ). They are derisively questioning and disputing about the momentous and awesome news of the Hereafter, in particular the concept of human accountability. The adjective *'atheem* (tremendous and extraordinary) is added for greater emphasis, although the news in itself is sufficient to agitate the heart. As Allah said in a similar verse:

قُلْ هُوَ نَبَأٌ عَظِيمٌ . أَنْتُمْ عَنْهُ مُعْرِضُونَ

Say, "It is great news [from which] you turn away."⁵⁶

Āyah 3. الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ That over which they are in disagreement.

This verse qualifies the one before it. The people of Makkah had different views and beliefs regarding the Resurrection and Judgement promised by Allah. A few thought it might be possible, while most rejected the concept completely. As other verses elucidate:

⁵⁵ There is another opinion stating that it refers to the Qur'ān, although in the present context the Resurrection is most likely.

⁵⁶ Sūrah Ṣād, 38:67-68.

وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ.

*They said, there is not but our worldly life; we die and live, and nothing destroys us except time.*⁵⁷

فَالْأَوَّلُ مَا نَدْرِي مَا السَّاعَةُ إِنَّ نَظْنَؤْ إِلَّا ظَنُّؤْ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُتَّبِقِينَ

*They said, "We know not what is the Hour. We assume only assumption and we are not convinced."*⁵⁸

Mukhtalifūn describes a state of dispute and discord with others and among themselves. Most did not believe in a life after death at all, while uncertainty led some of them to speculate about the nature of resurrection, but there was no consensus on the matter.

Āyah 4. كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ No! They are going to know.

The answer comes from Allah as a severe warning and threat. He reproaches those who continue to doubt the Resurrection after they have been warned; and He confirms that they will indeed experience it, emphasizing the threat by means of repetition. Soon enough they will realize and be compelled to acknowledge the consequences of their defiance. *Kallā* is an emphatic expression of denial and reproach, meaning here: "It is not at all as they now suppose."

The near future is indicated by the letter *س* which implies that they will find out as soon as their souls are taken in death. Similarly, near the end of the *sūrah*, Allah has warned of a near punishment (عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا).

The Prophet (ﷺ) pointed out that for every person, *al-Qiyāmah* is as close as his own death, when the soul is liberated from the confines of earthly time and space. One of the desert Arabs asked him, "When is the [final] Hour?" He looked toward the youngest of them and said, "If this one lives, he will not reach old age before your Hour has come."⁵⁹

What is it that they are going to know? The object of the verb, *ya'lamūn* has been omitted for greater impact, and the meaning is understood to be: "They are going to know the truth of the matter, the reality and the consequence of their derision and disbelief." As 'Alī bin Abī Tālib said, "People are sleeping, and when they die, they come to attention." At death they will come to know for certain that resurrection is inevitable and consequently, that punishment is due to them for having rejected of their Lord's warnings. *Sūrah Qāf* affirms that the unbelievers will be told:

لَقَدْ كُنْتَ فِي غَفْلَةٍ مِّنْ هَؤُلَاءِ فَاكْشَفْنَا عَنْكَ غِطَاءَكَ فَبَصَرُكَ الْيَوْمَ حَدِيدٌ

*You were certainly unmindful of this, and We have removed from you your cover [of heedlessness], so your sight, today, is sharp.*⁶⁰

⁵⁷ *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:24.

⁵⁸ *Sūrah al-Jāthiyah*, 45:32.

⁵⁹ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁶⁰ *Sūrah Qāf*, 50:22.

Āyah 5. ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ Then [again], no! They are going to know.

Allah confirms that they will indeed experience resurrection. The word *thumma* has been added to convey a more forceful threat; and it is further emphasized by repetition of the previous verse. Allah (ﷻ) confirms that not only will they know, but they will experience that which they had denied.⁶¹ Some scholars have suggested that the verse is repeated to indicate that they will come to know the reality in two phases: at the time of death and in the Hereafter, when they see the Hellfire before them. But Allah knows best.

* * *

The sūrah then describes a few of the countless and miraculous creations of Allah, reminding man of His limitless ability. The Qur'ān states:

لَخَلْقُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ.

*The creation of the heavens and earth is greater the creation of mankind, but most of the people do not know.*⁶²

In this sūrah Allah reminds of His ability to create many various things, and that the earth was made suitable for man's temporary existence, having provided everything necessary for his wellbeing. A series of questions serves to draw attention to a purposeful creation, which is effective confirmation that the one who brought all this into being is equally able to produce another creation suitable for the eternal life of the Hereafter.

Āyah 6. أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا Have We not made the earth a resting place?

Although the earth was created in spherical form, Allah (ﷻ) made it habitable by spreading it out in relation to its inhabitants.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي مَدَّ الْأَرْضَ وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ وَأَنْهَارًا وَمِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ جَعَلَ فِيهَا زَوْجَيْنِ اثْنَيْنِ يُغْشِي اللَّيْلَ النَّهَارَ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ لِقَوْمٍ يُتَفَكَّرُونَ.

*And it is He who spread the earth and placed therein firmly set mountains and rivers; and from all of the fruits He made therein two mates; He causes the night to cover the day. Indeed in that are signs for a people who give thought.*⁶³

The earth, a tiny speck in the vast cosmos, is spread out to appear large and extensive to those upon it; its expanse is viewed and perceived as a *mihād*, a suitable place of rest and settlement during this temporary existence, providing everything necessary for life on its surface and then accommodating its creatures with a resting place after their death. As Allah said:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ كِفَاتًا أَحْيَاءَ وَأَمْوَاتًا وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا رَوَاسِيَ شَامِخَاتٍ وَأَسْقَيْنَاكُمْ مَاءً فُرَاتًا

Have We not made the earth a container of the living and the dead? And We placed

⁶¹ i.e., the punishment of the grave and punishment in the Hellfire.

⁶² Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:57.

⁶³ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:3.

*therein lofty, firm mountains and gave you to drink sweet water.*⁶⁴

The description points to an intent behind the present creation and suggests that there is more to come.

Āyah 7. وَالْجِبَالُ أَوْتَادًا And the mountains as stakes?

The Qur'ān draws on analogies that people can relate to. As tents were common at the time of revelation, it states that Allah made the mountains as stakes, with a function similar to those holding a tent in place.⁶⁵ The purpose of mountains has been stated in this and other sūrahs – to stabilize the land and balance the earth.⁶⁶ They regulate the motion of the earth and prevent its crust from excessive movement. As stated in Sūrah an-Naḥl:

وَأَلْقَى فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِكُمْ

*And He has cast into the earth firmly set mountains, lest it shift with you.*⁶⁷

Āyah 8. وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا And We have created you in pairs.

The verb used in this verse is *khalāqa*, (created) rather than *ja'ala* (made). It suggests that man is the primary creation and all else has been made for his benefit. *Azwāj* (s. *zawj*) may mean pairs, spouses, counterparts or categories and types. The perpetuation of most living species, including mankind, is contingent on the existence of two genders. And while the Creator exists alone with nothing resembling Him, His creation is governed by the principle of duality, as mentioned in the Qur'ān:

وَمِنْ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَا زَوْجَيْنِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ

*"And from all things We have created two counterparts – that perhaps you will be reminded."*⁶⁸

سُبْحَانَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْأَزْوَاجَ كُلَّهَا مِمَّا تُنْبِتُ الْأَرْضُ وَمِنْ أَنْفُسِهِمْ وَمِمَّا لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

*Praise be to Him who created all pairs – from what the earth grows and from themselves and from that which they do not know.*⁶⁹

In Sūrah ar-Rūm, Allah mentions a further purpose for mankind behind the creation of two mates – providing each spouse with a companion:

وَمِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا وَجَعَلَ بَيْنَكُمْ مَوَدَّةً وَرَحْمَةً

*And of His signs is that He created for you from among yourselves mates that you may find tranquility with them, and He placed between you affection and mercy.*⁷⁰

⁶⁴ Sūrah al-Mursalāt, 77:25-27.

⁶⁵ Modern research has shown the precision of this description. Mountains were found to have dense roots of up to 15 times their length extending deep into the earth's surface.

⁶⁶ Refer also to 13:3, 15:19, 16:15, 21:31, 27:61, 31:10, 41:10, 50:7, 77:27 and 79:32.

⁶⁷ Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:15. A more literal meaning of *rawāsī* is anchors.

⁶⁸ Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:49.

⁶⁹ Sūrah Yā Seen, 36:36.

⁷⁰ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:21.

Āyah 9. وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا And made your sleep [a means for] rest.

Sleep is a state similar to death, during which one is entirely dependent upon his Lord for continued life. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to supplicate before sleeping, *"In Your name my Lord, I have laid down my body and through You I rise. If You should keep my soul have mercy upon it, and if You should send it back, then protect it in the way You protect Your righteous servants."*⁷¹

Subāt combines the meanings of quiet, stillness and rest with that of separation. The sleeper is separated from the activities of his life and the soul is separated from the body. This recurrent period of rest serves to revive and restore the mind and body. It is among the miracles of Allah which remains a mystery to modern science.

Āyah 10. وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا And made the night a garment.

The rest that sleep provides is supplemented by the darkness of the night. It is described as a garment in view of the fact that it covers the earth like a blanket and covers the body, obscuring it and providing privacy during sleep. The physical universe operates in harmony with the needs of its creatures and indicates the design of a merciful Creator.

Āyah 11. وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا And made the day for livelihood.

While darkness serves to impose sleep, daylight encourages activity.⁷² The day has been provided by Allah as a period of exertion for people to seek provision and accomplish their objectives in life. He made it bright and illuminating so that they, as well as other living creatures, would be able to move about easily and attend to their affairs. As He stated in *Sūrah al-Isrā'*:

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ آيَتَيْنِ فَمَحَوْنَا آيَةَ اللَّيْلِ وَجَعَلْنَا آيَةَ النَّهَارِ مُبْصِرَةً لِّتَبْتَغُوا فَضْلًا مِّن رَّبِّكُمْ وَلِتَعْلَمُوا عَدَدَ السِّنِينَ وَالْحِسَابِ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَصَّلْنَاهُ تَفْصِيلًا.

*And We have made the night and day two signs, and We erased the sign of the night and made the sign of the day giving sight, that you may seek bounty from your Lord and may know the number of years and the account [of time]. And everything We have set out in detail.*⁷³

Āyah 12. وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شَدِيدًا And we built above you seven strong [heavens].

They are seven firm heavens in layers, one over the other, perfectly and precisely constructed without visible supports, as mentioned in the *Qur'ān*.⁷⁴ Filled with countless stars and planets, the nearest heaven is sufficient as evidence of an all-powerful Creator.

⁷¹ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁷² Even plants and simple cells function during the daylight and become still at night.

⁷³ *Sūrah al-Isrā'*, 17:12.

⁷⁴ See *Sūrah ar-Ra'd*, 13:2 and *Sūrah Luqmān*, 31:10.

أَفَلَمْ يَنْظُرُوا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَوْقَهُمْ كَيْفَ بَنَيْنَاهَا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا وَمَا لَهَا مِنْ فُرُوجٍ

*Have they not looked at the heaven above them, how We have structured it and adorned it and [how] it has no rifts?*⁷⁵

And Allah stated:

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِإِيدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ

*"And the heaven – We constructed it with strength, and it is We who expand [it]."*⁷⁶

The majority of Muslim scholars have held the opinion that all which is observable of the universe⁷⁷ is a portion of the nearest heaven, and beyond it are six more. And Allah knows best.

Āyah 13. وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا And made [therein] a burning lamp.

Sirāj is something which radiates light, and was generally referred to in the past as a lantern. In the text of the Qur'ān, however, this word denotes the sun. *Wahhāj* indicates the emission of light, heat and energy in surges or waves. The sun has been described as a burning lamp because it gives out the light and heat required by the earth's living creatures. In His wisdom, Allah placed the sun at a perfect distance from the earth to maintain life; neither too near to scorch it nor too far to let it freeze.

A similar description of the heavens is given in Sūrah Nūḥ:

أَلَمْ تَرَوْا كَيْفَ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا وَجَعَلَ الْقَمَرَ فِيهِنَّ نُورًا وَجَعَلَ الشَّمْسَ سِرَاجًا.

*Do you not consider how Allah has created seven heavens in layers and made the moon therein a [soft] light and made the sun a burning lamp?*⁷⁸

Āyah 14. وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا And sent down from the rainclouds pouring water.

The term *mu'ṣirāt* alludes to that which is saturated with liquid but retains and holds it back.⁷⁹ Most commentators are of the opinion that in this verse it refers to clouds laden with water preceding a rainfall.⁸⁰ There is an implication that the clouds release their water only when and where their Lord permits.

The adjective *thajjāj* describes the pouring of heavy rain from the clouds when Allah permits. It can also denote a heavy flow of blood, as in the *ḥadīth*⁸¹ when the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*The best ḥajj is al-'ajj,*⁸² *ath-thajj.*⁸³"

⁷⁵ Sūrah Qāf, 50:6.

⁷⁶ Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:47.

⁷⁷ Which includes what is known with the assistance of scientific instruments.

⁷⁸ Sūrah Nūḥ, 71:15-16.

⁷⁹ Similar to a sponge. Thus, a woman about to menstruate is called *mu'ṣirah*.

⁸⁰ A second interpretation, based on the definition of the verb *a'sara*, which denotes pressing, squeezing or wringing, is that it applies to winds that press the clouds causing precipitation.

⁸¹ Narrated by at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah.

Āyahs 15-16. تُنْخَرِجُ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا That We may extract thereby grain and vegetation and gardens of thick growth.

Scholars have stated that these two verses include every kind of plant that may grow on the earth. When the clouds release their abundance of stored water upon a dead land, it revives the earth and produces a growth of vegetation as provision for its living creatures. The reminder is reinforced by use of the word "extract" rather than "grow."

It is a clear indication of the Creator's ability to restore life to the dead, and that whatever exists on earth was created consciously for a temporary purpose. Similar passages confirm:

وَالَّذِي نَزَّلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً بِقَدَرٍ فَأَنْشَرْنَا بِهِ بَلْدَةً مَيْتًا كَذَلِكَ تُخْرَجُونَ.

*And [it is He] who sends down rain from the sky in measured amounts, and We revive thereby a dead land; thus will you be extracted.*⁸⁴

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) also explained that the second creation of mankind will be similar to the growth of plants from seeds, saying, "Then water will descend from the heavens, and they will grow as vegetation grows. There is no part of man which will not have decayed except for one bone, which is the base of the tail,⁸⁵ from which creation will be developed on the Day of Resurrection."⁸⁶

Āyah 17. إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفُصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا Indeed, the Day of Judgement is an appointed time.

After demonstrating something of His power, ability and wisdom, Allah, the Exalted, returns to the object of controversy among disbelievers and doubters – the great news of the Resurrection and Judgment. All the aforementioned phenomena are evidence that the one who created them initially is indeed capable of resurrection and recreation. Therefore, it is to be expected that humanity has been created for a purpose and that man is an accountable being.

Allah states here that the time (*meeqāt*) for the resurrection and judgment has already been determined by Him – an appointment to meet the Lord of the worlds. It is the Day when the whole universe will undergo drastic change and mankind will be gathered for the Judgment. Whether or not they had believed in it, all people will be extracted from their graves or wherever they had remained after death to face their account.

The literal meaning of *Yawm al-Faṣl* is the Day of Separation. It is the time of Allah's judgment when all things will become clearly differentiated and distinct from one another. Truth will be distinct from falsehood. Polytheists will be separated from their false gods. Followers will be separated from their leaders. Evildoers will be distinguished from the

⁸² In which voices are raised in talbiyah and dhikr.

⁸³ In which blood flows from the slaughter of sacrificial animals.

⁸⁴ Sūrah az-Zukhruf, 43:11. See also Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:19 and al-Mumtaḥinah, 50:9-11.

⁸⁵ *Ajbudh-dhanab*, described as being like a grain or a mustard seed.

⁸⁶ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

righteous. Hypocrites will be removed from the ranks of the believers. Each of the deviators will be placed with the heretical sects and parties to which they had belonged and identified with them. As the Qur'ān confirms:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَفَرَّقُونَ.

"And the day the Hour is established – on that Day they will separate."⁸⁷

And Allah will say:

وَامْتَازُوا الْيَوْمَ أَيُّهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ.

And stand apart today, you criminals.⁸⁸

Thus, their disgraceful position will become clear to all, denying them the advantage they would have attained had they remained among Allah's believing servants. The disbelievers who arrogantly challenged the Prophet to bring it on immediately are notified that it will occur only when Allah wills, and they will not escape it. Out of His generosity, Allah has allowed them time to return to Him and repent if they would only do so.

The time decreed by Allah is known to none but Himself.

قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَقْتِهَا إِلَّا هُوَ

Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him."⁸⁹

But He instructed His Messenger (ﷺ):

قُلْ عَسَى أَنْ يَكُونَ قَرِيبًا.

Say, "Perhaps it will be soon."⁹⁰

Āyah 18. يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا

The Day when the Horn is blown and you will come forth in multitudes.

When the appointed time arrives the whole universe will undergo awesome changes. All creatures will then be brought back to life on a newly created earth and all of mankind will be gathered for the Judgement. According to the Prophet (ﷺ), the angel, Isrāfeel will blow into the Horn to signal the resurrection.⁹¹ In this verse, the passive form of the verb indicates emphasis on the event itself rather than the blower of the Horn.

Ibn Katheer explained, "On the Day of Decision the earth will be exchanged for another earth and the heavens [as well], and the dead will emerge alive from their graves by the command of Allah and His call to them." As He said:

ثُمَّ إِذَا دَعَاكُمْ دَعْوَةً مِّنَ الْأَرْضِ إِذَا أَنْتُمْ تَخْرُجُونَ.

Then when He calls you with a single call from the earth, immediately do you come forth.⁹²

⁸⁷ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:14.

⁸⁸ Sūrah Yā Seen, 36:59.

⁸⁹ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:187.

⁹⁰ Sūrah al-Israa', 17: 51.

⁹¹ This follows the first blast of the Horn which will destroy the present universe.

⁹² Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:25.

Up to this point, Allah, the Exalted, has spoken of the nonbelievers in the third person. Now He changes to the second person, addressing everyone directly with information that "you will come forth in multitudes," i.e., large groups all together." They will be assembled along with their leaders or the prophet who had been sent to them.

Āyah 19. **وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا** **And the sky is opened and will become gateways.**

The Qur'ān then portrays some events of *al-Qiyāmah* as if they are being witnessed directly. The verbs in this and the following āyah are in past tense, which indicates that their occurrence is certain and inevitable. The firmament of the heaven will be opened, becoming doors and gateways through which the angels descend.

In another description Allah says:

وَيَوْمَ تَشَقَّقُ السَّمَاءُ بِالْغَمَمِ وَنُزِّلَ الْمَلَائِكَةُ تَنْزِيلًا

*And [mention] the Day when the heaven will be split open with clouds, and the angels will be sent down in successive descent.*⁹³

Āyah 20. **وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا** **And the mountains are driven away and will be as a mirage.**

The mountains, whose roots had extended deep into the earth will disintegrate and be turned to dust, dispersed and blown away by the wind. It is similar to the verse saying:

وَتَرَى الْجِبَالَ تَحْسَبُهَا جَامِدَةً وَهِيَ تَمُرُّ مَرَّ السَّحَابِ

*And you will see the mountains thinking them rigid, while they will pass as the passing of clouds.*⁹⁴

Their depiction as a mirage was explained by Ibn Katheer: "The observer envisions that they are something [solid] while they are nothing. And thereafter they will completely disappear, no essence of them remaining nor any trace."

Āyah 21. **إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا** **Indeed, Hell has been lying in wait.**

Many evidences have been taken by scholars from the Qur'ān and Sunnah to confirm that Paradise and Hell have already been created.⁹⁵ This verse is among them.

Mirṣād refers to a place of observation, monitoring or ensnarement. The Hellfire is described as waiting in ambush, watching and prepared for those who had denied it in order to take

⁹³ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:25.

⁹⁴ Sūrah an-Naml, 27:88. It is also alluded to in 18:47, 20:105-106, 56:5-6 and 69:14.

⁹⁵ Here, it is confirmed by use of the verb *kānat*. The gates of Hell will open at the arrival of its inmates, while the gates of Paradise will have opened prior to the approach of its inhabitants, eagerly awaiting them. Refer to Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:71 and 39:73.

them by surprise and capture them. It will seize them unaware, for they had never expected it, not having believed in its existence.

It waits to receive the evildoers who will remain therein for unlimited time with no relief. The Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that on Yawm al-Qiyāmah a narrow bridge will be erected over the pit of Hell. While the people destined for Paradise will succeed in crossing it, the unrepentant evildoers will be seized by claws like giant thorns along the path, pulling them into the Fire.⁹⁶

Āyah 22. لِلطَّٰغِيْنَ مَآبًا For the transgressors – a place of return.

The Hellfire waits to receive the transgressors who will then be seized, dragged and cast into its depths. This is an appropriate punishment in proportion to the crimes they had committed on earth, and is fully deserved by them. Their transgressions include unbelief, *shirk*,⁹⁷ hypocrisy, tyranny, oppression, and in general, any major sins that have not been forgiven. They have transgressed against Allah by denying Him or associating another with Him, and against people by being unjust to them. Allah will restore justice and will never treat those who denied Him and rejected His guidance and protection in the same way as those who had loved and obeyed Him.

Āyah 23. لِّلَّذِيْنَ فِيْهَا اٰخٰقَابًا To remain therein for ages [unending].

The evildoers who refused belief and guidance will remain therein for unlimited periods of time with no relief. Their efforts to escape will be futile, and their pleas for relief will be ignored.

Ahqāb is the plural of *ḥuqb*, which means a long, unspecified period of time. Some early scholars estimated a length for it⁹⁸ while others interpreted it as being endless. Even when considered to be a limited period, the fact that each period is followed by another indefinitely⁹⁹ confirms that the Hellfire will be everlasting.

Both interpretations have been applied according to the condition of its inhabitants. The Muslim believers who committed sins will not abide eternally in the Hellfire. They may serve time according to the wrongs they committed and then be released. If Allah wills, He can punish them in the Fire out of His justice and then bring them out of it due to His mercy and through the intercession of those allowed by Him. This is compatible with the first meaning. And it is much emphasized in the Qur'ān and Sunnah that those who deny and reject faith until death will remain in Hell forever. This is compatible with the second meaning.

⁹⁶ Narrated by al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁹⁷ The association of others with Allah in His divine attributes or through worship.

⁹⁸ Some have said 80 years, some 70 years and others 40 years, each day of these years being equal to 1000 years of earthly time. But Allah knows best.

⁹⁹ As shown by the indefinite form of the word in the Arabic text.

Āyahs 24-25. لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا **They will not taste therein any coolness or drink except boiling water and [foul] purulence.**

They will not find in the heat of Hell any coolness to relieve them. Instead, they will have *ḥameem* poured over them – water that has reached the utmost degree of heat or has boiled. As stated in Sūrah Muḥammad:

وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ

*And they are given to drink scalding water that will sever their intestines.*¹⁰⁰

Nor will they have any drink to relieve their thirst except *ghassāq*, a mixture of pus, sweat, tears, and blood from the inhabitants of the Hellfire. Though unbearably cold with an intolerable stench, their thirst will be so great that they will drink anything available to them. As described in Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah:

وَلَا طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ غِسْلِينٍ

*Nor [will they have] food except from the discharge of wounds.*¹⁰¹

Āyah 26. جَزَاءً وَفَاقًا **An appropriate recompense.**

This is a fitting and just consequence they have earned in exact proportion to the gravity of deeds and crimes they committed on earth. The penalty is justified as it is objective and equivalent to their sins of disbelief and shirk, their rejection of prophethood and denial of the resurrection. It is a punishment fully deserved by them, as the word *wifāq* indicates; indeed, there can be nothing more appropriate for those malicious, evil souls.

Āyah 27. إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا **Indeed, they were not expecting an account.**

They had allowed themselves to fall deeper and deeper into sin because they never expected to be called to account for their conduct and so denied Allah's revelation and His warnings. But Allah had kept track of everything they did, great and small, so they are condemned by their own records. Their arrogant defiance had gone so far as to dare the Prophet (ﷺ) to immediately produce what Allah had promised; otherwise he should not expect them to believe his message. The Qur'ān describes their attitude:

قَالُوا أَجِئْتَنَا لِنَأْفِكَنَا عَنِ آلِهَتِنَا فَأْتِنَا بِمَا تَعِدُنَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مِنَ الصَادِقِينَ

*They said, "Have you come to delude us away from our gods? Then bring us what you promise us, if you should be of the truthful."*¹⁰²

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

*And they say, "When is [the fulfillment of] this promise, if you should be truthful?"*¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ Sūrah Muḥammad, 47:15.

¹⁰¹ Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah, 69:36.

¹⁰² Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:22.

¹⁰³ Sūrah Yūnus 10:48, al-Anbiyā' 21:38, an-Naml 27:71, Saba' 34:39, Yā Seen 36:48 and al-Mulk 67:25.

وَإِذْ قَالُوا اللَّهُمَّ إِنْ كَانَ هَذَا هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ عِنْدِكَ فَأَمْطِرْ عَلَيْنَا حِجَارَةً مِنَ السَّمَاءِ أَوْ ائْتِنَا بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ.

*And they said, "O Allah, if this should be the truth from You, then rain down upon us stones from the sky or bring us a painful punishment."*¹⁰⁴

يَسْتَعْجِلُ بِهَا الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِهَا وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مُشْفِقُونَ مِنْهَا وَيَعْلَمُونَ أَنَّهَا الْحَقُّ

*Those who do not believe in it call for its immediate onset, but those who believe are fearful of it and know that it is the truth.*¹⁰⁵

Āyah 28. وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا And denied Our signs with [emphatic] denial.

Their denial, as the aforementioned verses affirm, was explicit, obstinate and persistent.¹⁰⁶ The nonbelievers assumed that they would never return to their Creator to face the consequence of their deeds; hence they refused to acknowledge the revelations that Allah had sent through His Messenger (ﷺ). As He said:

وَمَا تَأْتِيهِمْ مِنْ آيَةٍ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ إِلَّا كَانُوا عَنْهَا مُعْرِضِينَ. فَقَدْ كَذَّبُوا بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُمْ فَسَوْفَ يَأْتِيهِمْ أَنْبَاءُ مَا كَانُوا بِهِ يَسْتَهْزِئُونَ.

*And no sign comes to them from the signs of their Lord except that they turn away therefrom. For they had denied the truth when it came to them, but there is going to reach them the news of what they used to ridicule.*¹⁰⁷

Āyah 29. وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا But all things We have enumerated in a record.

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, had kept a precise account, transcribed by angels, of everything the deniers had said and done; so they will be condemned by their own words and deeds. Other verses explain further:

وَوُضِعَ الْكِتَابُ فَتَرَى الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُشْفِقِينَ مِمَّا فِيهِ وَيَقُولُونَ يَا وَيْلَتَنَا مَالِ هَذَا الْكِتَابِ لَا يُغَادِرُ صَغِيرَةً وَلَا كَبِيرَةً إِلَّا أَحْصَاهَا وَوَجَدُوا مَا عَمِلُوا حَاضِرًا وَلَا يَظْلِمُ رَبُّكَ أَحَدًا.

*And the record [of deeds] will be placed [open], and you will see the criminals fearful of that within it, and they will say, "Oh, woe to us! What is this book that leaves nothing small or great except that it has enumerated it?" And they will find what they did present [before them]. And your Lord does injustice to no one.*¹⁰⁸

They will be shaken to find their words, actions, even their intentions and thoughts completely enumerated and preserved in the register. Then each individual will be told:

أَفْرَأَ كِتَابَكَ كَفَىٰ بِنَفْسِكَ الْيَوْمَ عَلَيْكَ حَسِيبًا.

*"Read your record. Sufficient is yourself against you this Day as accountant."*¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁴ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:32.

¹⁰⁵ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:18.

¹⁰⁶ This is confirmed by addition of the noun having the same Arabic root as its verb.

¹⁰⁷ Sūrah al-An`ām, 6:4-5.

¹⁰⁸ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:49.

¹⁰⁹ Sūrah al-Israa', 17:14.

Āyah 30. فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَّزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا So taste [the penalty]; and never will We increase you except in affliction.

The evildoers will experience the reality of what they had denied and the consequence of their denial – punishment which will progressively increase in severity. Moreover, their arrogance toward Allah's warnings earned them humiliation: a voice taunting them, "Taste the result of your evil deeds and expect no relief, for your torment is only going to increase." 'Abdullāh bin 'Amr said, "Allah did not reveal any āyah more severe than this one against the inhabitants of the Hellfire. They will be in increasing torment forever." Other verses confirm:

زِدْنَاهُمْ عَذَابًا فَوْقَ الْعَذَابِ

We will increase them in punishment over [their] punishment.¹¹⁰

مَأْوَاهُمْ جَهَنَّمُ كُلَّمَا خَبَتْ زِدْنَاهُمْ سَعِيرًا.

Their refuge is Hell; every time it subsides We increase them in blazing fire.¹¹¹

وَلَا تَزِدِ الظَّالِمِينَ إِلَّا تَبَارًا.

And do not increase the wrongdoers except in destruction.¹¹²

Āyah 31. إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا Indeed, for the righteous is attainment [of security].

In contrast, the righteous who feared Allah on earth will have succeeded in securing the most complete attainment – escape from the calamity of the Hellfire, the fulfillment of their desires, the pleasures of Paradise and the approval of their Lord. The word *mafāz* denotes accomplishment, success, victory and a secure position, and is more suitable in this context than "reward" or "compensation." Ibn 'Abbās described it as a place of enjoyable recreation.

The righteous (*muttaqeen*) have been defined by scholars as believers in Muhammad (ﷺ) who do what he directed and refrain from what he prohibited. Ibn 'Abbās said, "They are the believers who avoid association of anything with Allah and who strive to obey Him – those who fear the punishment which would result from abandoning His guidance that they have known. They hope for Allah's mercy due to believing in what He revealed."

Those who are constantly conscious of Allah, endeavoring to earn His acceptance and avoid His displeasure will be rewarded for their patient endurance with what the Prophet (ﷺ) described in a ḥadīth qudsi as: *what no eye has seen, no ear has heard, and has never occurred to a human heart.*¹¹³ Nonetheless, the following verses contain allusion to some physical pleasures to give additional incentive, although their precise nature is unknown.

Āyahs 32-34. حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا . وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا . وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا Gardens and grapevines, and full-breasted [companions] of equal age, and a full cup.

¹¹⁰ Sūrah an-Nahl, 16: 88.

¹¹¹ Sūrah al-Israa', 17:97.

¹¹² Sūrah Nūh, 71: 28.

¹¹³ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

These are tangible things to which humans can relate. Ibn 'Abbās said, "Nothing in Paradise resembles anything in the life of this world except in name."

Ḥadā'iq (s. *ḥadeeqah*) are private orchards or gardens bordered by tall trees. Grapevines provide fruit and drink. *Kawā'ib* (s. *kā'ib*) are maidens with firm rounded breasts. They are all of the same age (*atrāb*), which is said to be thirty-three years – mature yet youthful. *Ka's* specifies a cup without handles containing wine, and the wine of Paradise is delicious and causes no intoxication. And it is filled to capacity in order to please and satisfy the people of Paradise.

Āyah 35. لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا **No empty speech will they hear therein or any falsehood.**

In contrast to this world, where believers endure insults and abuses, Paradise is an abode of peace, free of any imperfection and appropriate for eternal life. Thus, they will not hear within it any evil or improper speech – only good and pleasing words. This has been regarded by scholars as one of the major blessings obtained in Paradise. The believers will not be exposed to any speech which is useless or sinful, as stated in Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah:

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا تَأْثِيمًا إِلَّا قِيلًا سَلَامًا سَلَامًا.

*They will not hear therein ill speech or commission of sin - only a saying [of] peace, peace.*¹¹⁴

Āyah 36. جَزَاءً مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءٌ حِسَابًا **[As] reward from your Lord – [an adequate] gift [made due by] account.**

This is the abundant reward made due to the believers by the account of their good deeds and then increased by the generosity of Allah, their Lord.¹¹⁵ As far as the account is concerned, each good deed will earn a minimum of ten times its reward¹¹⁶ while a reward in excess of ten is given according to Allah's knowledge of His servant's righteousness, the sincerity of his intention, the type of deed done, the effort expended, and its suitability to the situation at hand. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "He who intended [to do] a good deed and did not do it – Allah writes it with Himself as a complete good deed; and if he intended it and did it – Allah writes it with Himself as ten good deeds up to seven hundred times or many times [over that]."¹¹⁷ When mentioning a reward "many times" in excess of 700, the Prophet (ﷺ) cited no limit.

In addition to what is due to them by account, there will be a further gift given out of kindness and mercy from Allah; a gift that is comprehensive, abundant and sufficient. The total reward is unlimited (as indicated in this verse by use of the indefinite form), meaning

¹¹⁴ Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:25-26.

¹¹⁵ This contrasts with the "appropriate recompense" which is deserved by the unbelievers as mentioned in Āyah 26.

¹¹⁶ For Qur'anic evidence see *Surah al-An'am*, 6:160.

¹¹⁷ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

that their Lord continues to give until they are completely satisfied. Allah grants believers generous excess in appreciation of their smallest deeds.

Āyah 37. رَبِّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنُ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, the Most Merciful. They do not have from Him [authority for] speech.

The reward is from their Lord, who is also the Lord of the universe and of all things. It is understood from this that Allah is the owner and sustainer of His creation; therefore the right to govern it is His absolutely. The mention here of the divine name "*ar-Raḥmān*" indicates that the favors granted to the righteous are a portion of His mercy – above and beyond the justice of His account. It is out of the mercy of Allah that He rewards the servant who intends to obey and please Him with much more than he deserves. His mercy is obtained by seeking and striving for it, by being grateful to Allah and by worshipping Him well. All creatures within the heavens or the earth will be in awe of Him at the time of judgment and none will have authority to speak except after obtaining His permission, as the Qur'ān revealed:

قُلْ لِلَّهِ الشَّفَاعَةُ جَمِيعًا لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ

Say, "To Allah belongs [the right to allow] intercession entirely. To Him belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth."¹¹⁸

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِي يَشْفَعُ عِنْدَهُ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ

Who is it that can intercede with Him except by His permission?¹¹⁹

يَوْمَئِذٍ لَا تَنْفَعُ الشَّفَاعَةُ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَرَضِيَ لَهُ قَوْلًا.

That Day, no intercession will benefit except [that of] one to whom the Most Merciful has given permission and has accepted his word.¹²⁰

Āyah 38. يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَقَالَ صَوَابًا

The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand in ranks, they will not speak except for one whom the Most Merciful permits, and he will say what is correct.

Ar-Rūḥ (the Spirit) refers to the angel Jibreel (Gabriel).¹²¹ Even the angels, when they stand in obedience before Allah, will not be able to speak or intercede for anyone unless He gives them permission. According to the texts of Qur'ān and ḥadīth, permission will be granted by Allah to angels as well as to prophets, martyrs, scholars, and righteous Muslims to intercede on behalf of others. A person's righteous deeds may also be allowed intercede for him. However, it is the final Prophet (ﷺ) who will have the greatest share of intercession. And

¹¹⁸ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:44.

¹¹⁹ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:255.

¹²⁰ Sūrah Tā Hā, 20:109.

¹²¹ Similarly, in Sūrah ash-Shu'arā' (26:193-194) the Trustworthy Spirit (*ar-Rūḥ al-Ameen*) is specified as the one who conveyed the revelation to the heart of Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).

there are conditions: that Allah is pleased with the intercessor and has allowed his intercession, and that He has permitted intercession for the one in need of it.

Whoever is given permission by Allah to speak on that Day will say only what is true and correct. An additional meaning is that the one benefited by intercession can only be one who spoke correctly, (the word of truth and tawḥeed لا إله إلا الله) during his life on earth.

Āyah 39. ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا That is the true [i.e., certain] Day; so whoever wills, let him take to his Lord a way.

This verse carries both warning and good tidings, for Allah confirms that the Day of Resurrection will be a day of truth and justice and that it will certainly occur. This information has been given so that anyone who wishes may follow the straight path leading to the approval of Allah or may return to Him in repentance. The literal meaning of *ma'āb* is a place or thing to which one returns. Here it refers to the final return to the Creator. A believer seeks to follow the way of life which leads to a good return – i.e., the final abode of Paradise. The āyah contains an invitation to take a direct route to Allah's forgiveness and His Paradise through correct beliefs and righteous deeds.

Āyah 40. إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا Indeed, We have warned you of a near punishment – on the Day when a man will see what his hands have put forth and the disbeliever will say, “Oh how I wish I were dust!”

In this closing verse, Allah (ﷻ) has warned all obstinate disbelievers about His punishment, which is inevitable and as near as a person's death, when he leaves the earthly confines of time and space..¹²² Similarly, He said:

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

*Indeed, they see it as distant while We see it as near.*¹²³

The unbearable torments of Hell await the deniers. What they have earned for their rebellion and tyranny on earth is ultimate justice. *"On that Day their Lord will fold up the heavens, taking them in His right hand; and He will fold up the earth, taking it in His left hand, saying, 'I am the Sovereign. Where are the tyrants? Where are the arrogant?'"*¹²⁴

When the unbeliever sees the record of his evil deeds before him and the torments of Hell, he will be filled with regret and cry out in great distress, ashamed and terrified. He will wish he had never been created or come into existence. And he will wish he had been nothing

¹²² The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated, "When one of you dies, he is shown his place [in the Hereafter] morning and evening. If he is from the people of Paradise, then among the people of Paradise. And if he is from the people of Hell, then among the people of Hell. And it will be said to him, 'This is your place until Allah resurrects you on the Day of Judgement.'" (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

¹²³ Sūrah al-Ma'ārij, 70:6-7.

¹²⁴ Part of a ḥadith narrated by Muslim.

more than dust in the world and that he could now be reduced to dust rather than face his punishment.

The hopeless condition of the unbelievers as described in this verse is precisely the subject of their questioning at the beginning of the sūrah. The Prophet (ﷺ) disclosed that all those with a grievance would have their rights restored on the Day of Resurrection, so much so that the hornless sheep would get its right from the horned sheep."¹²⁵ Commentators have added that when Allah passes judgment upon the animals for whatever occurred between them in the worldly life, He will restore justice among them. And after that He will then say to them, "Be dust," so they will all become dust. When he sees this, the unbeliever will cry out in anguish, *"Oh, how I wish I [too] were dust!"*

¹²⁵ Narrated by Muslim.

SŪRAH AN-NĀZĪ'ĀT (79) سُورَةُ النَّازِعَاتِ

The sūrah is known by its opening word: *an-Nāzī'āt*. It was revealed in Makkah following Sūrah an-Naba' and further affirms the Resurrection and life of the Hereafter.

At the outset of the sūrah, Allah (ﷻ) swears an oath by some of the angels who perform various tasks. In so doing He confirms the certainty of the Resurrection. Then He presents glimpses of the terrors of the Last Hour and of man's distress at that time.

The story of Prophet Mūsā and Fir'aawn (Pharaoh) is related to show the consequence of arrogance and denial of Allah's messengers. Allah seized the tyrant and his followers with severe punishment for his claim to be their god, in addition to their many previous transgressions – drowning them in the sea. This was to be an example to others in the future and a lesson for any who would fear Allah. And it was to dissuade and warn all those who would subsequently find themselves in positions of authority against similar behavior.

Then the Creator points out the weakness of mankind in comparison to the strength of many of His other creations. He describes His limitless creative power and how He developed the earth until it was suitable for man's habitation and a source of sustenance for him. The implication is that such a power, being none but Allah, Most High, is surely able to re-create anything at will.

When the great event of resurrection occurs, every individual will clearly remember everything he had done and endeavored to do upon the earth. The Prophet (ﷺ) was sent only to warn of its approach. On *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* life on earth will be shown to have been extremely brief, so all people are being warned to prepare for it while the opportunity still remains.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا By those [angels] who extract with violence

The sūrah begins with an oath¹²⁶ by the angels who extract souls at the time of death. Belief in angels is one of the six pillars of faith.¹²⁷ They have particular roles and various duties. Some of their actions are mentioned in these first few verses, illustrating their subservience to Allah and haste in implementing His commands.

The scholars of Ahl-al-Sunnah state that the angel of death¹²⁸ is a single angel in command of other angels who assist him. They carry out his orders, taking the souls of all those whose

¹²⁶ An oath sworn is a means of confirmation and removing doubt from the mind. In the Qur'ān, Allah swears by Himself, His creations, His signs or His revelation. One is immediately alerted by such an oath to the fact that something important is to be stated.

¹²⁷ Angels are servants of Allah who ceaselessly obey and worship their Creator, glorifying and praising Him. They do not have wills of their own and act only in obedience to their Lord's commands.

¹²⁸ It is said that his name is 'Azrā'eel, but there is nothing in the Qur'ān or authentic Sunnah to confirm it.

term of life has ended, so their action is attributed to him, as expressed in the āyah from Sūrah as-Sajdah:

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ.

Say, "The angel of death who is entrusted with you will take your souls. Then to your Lord you will be returned."¹²⁹

Among these angels are *an-Nāzi'āt*, who tear wicked souls violently from their bodies. The Prophet (ﷺ) described it thus: "The angel of death will sit at his head and say, 'O evil soul, come out to face anger from your Lord and wrath,' so it will disperse throughout his body [in fear]. Then he will rip it out as a pronged skewer is ripped out of damp wool, tearing the veins and nerves."¹³⁰ The soul destined for Hell is terrified of the meeting with its Lord¹³¹ for it has now become conscious that punishment is inevitable. It tries to elude death by retreating into the body and clinging to it. But the Extractors will not fail in their duty. They pull out the unwilling soul *gharqan*, as if it was drowning, from the deepest depths of the body in which it hides, tearing it out in a harsh and painful manner.

The Qur'ān describes similar scenes:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الظَّالِمُونَ فِي غَمَرَاتِ الْمَوْتِ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ بَاسِطُوا أَيْدِيهِمْ أَخْرِجُوا أَنْفُسَكُم...

And if you could but see when the wrongdoers are in the overwhelming pangs of death and the angels extend their hands, [saying], "Discharge your souls!"¹³²

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ يَتَوَفَّى الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَضْرِبُونَ وُجُوهَهُمْ وَأَدْبَارَهُمْ وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْحَرِيقِ. ذَلِكَ بِمَا قَدَّمْتُمْ أَيْدِيَكُمْ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ لَيْسَ بِظَلَّامٍ لِلْعَبِيدِ.

And if you could but see when the angels take the souls of those who rejected belief, striking their faces and their backs and [saying], "Taste the punishment of the Fire. That is for what [evil] your hands have put forth, and because Allah is never unjust to [His] servants."¹³³

Āyah 2. وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا And [by] those who remove with ease,

The second oath is by *an-Nāshiṭāt*, the angels who effortlessly remove the souls of the believers destined for Paradise. Continuing the previous hadith: "The angel of death will come and sit at his head and say, 'O good soul; come out to forgiveness and pleasure from your Lord.' So it will come out as [easily as] a drop comes out of the mouth of a jug."¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:11.

¹³⁰ Aḥmad.

¹³¹ The Messenger (ﷺ) stated, "Whoever would like to meet Allah – Allah will like to meet him. And whoever would not like to meet Allah – Allah will not like to meet him." (Al-Bukhari and Muslim) At the time of death the unbeliever will dislike that meeting intensely and fear it, for he will then have become aware that all he had previously denied is an inescapable reality.

¹³² Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:93.

¹³³ Sūrah al-Anfāl, 8:50-51.

¹³⁴ Aḥmad.

Righteous believers are keen to meet Allah and experience His justice, mercy and approval. As death approaches they receive good tidings of Allah's forgiveness, His acceptance of them and their final destination:

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ.

Indeed, those who have said, "Our Lord is Allah" and then remained on a right course – the angels will descend upon them, [saying], "Do not fear and do not grieve but receive good tidings of Paradise, which you were promised."¹³⁵

Thus, the good soul is removed easily without resistance as it is eager to be transported to its joyful home in the Hereafter.

Āyah 3. وَالسَّابِحَاتِ سَبْحًا And [by] those who glide [as if] swimming

While there are scholars who have held that the "swimmers" mentioned here are stars and planets, the more accepted view based upon the general context is that it also refers to angels. These angels are speeding to execute Allah's commands; and among them are those who take the souls of believers. Some commentators have suggested that they swim inside the believers' bodies in order to release their souls easily.

Āyah 4. فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا And those who race each other in a race

These angels compete with one another in performing good deeds and in obedience to Allah. They race to deliver revelation to the prophets before it can be intercepted by devils, and race to deliver the souls of the believers to Paradise.

Āyah 5. فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا And those who arrange [each] matter

Angels have particular roles and duties assigned to them by their Creator. Obedient angels perform various functions throughout the heavens and the earth, observing, administrating and protecting the universe and its creatures during the term Allah decreed for each of them to exist. Among them are Jibreel, entrusted with conveying divine revelation to the prophets, Mikā'eel, responsible for directing the winds and rainclouds and Isrāfeel, who will blow the Horn signaling the end of the world. There are angels charged with affairs of the womb, those who protect the inhabitants of the earth, those who record deeds, those who carry the Throne of Allah, those who take the souls at death, those who question people in their graves, and the custodians of Paradise and Hell.

Allah, the Exalted swears by angels, who are among the best of His creations, to the certainty of the Hereafter. Many of the early sūrahs contain oaths, such as those sworn by the sun and moon, day and night, or light and darkness. The scholars have reasoned that the purpose of the oaths sworn here is to confirm and lay emphasis on the resurrection and final recompense, as this is what is mentioned in subsequent verses.

¹³⁵ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:30.

Āyahs 6-7. يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ . تَتْبَعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ On the Day the blast will convulse [creation] there will follow it the subsequent [one].

Ibn 'Abbās explained, "These are the two blasts of the Horn – the first and the second. The violent convulsion of the first blast is overwhelming and will soon be followed by another. Based on similar verses from the Qur'ān, most commentators are of the view that the first blast makes the heavens, the earth and the mountains quake and shudder, causing their inhabitants to fall unconscious, excepting only those spared by their Lord. The sky ruptures and the stars scatter. The "*subsequent one*" refers to the second blast which follows it, at which all creatures are brought back to life."¹³⁶

Ubayy bin Ka'b related that when two thirds of the night had passed, the Prophet (ﷺ) would stand and say, "*O people, remember Allah, remember Allah. Ar-rājifah is coming, followed by ar-rādifah. Death is coming with all it comprises; death is coming with all it comprises.*"¹³⁷ For death is the bridge that takes one to the eternal life with its account, judgment and just compensation.

Āyahs 8-9. قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ . أَبْصَارُهَا خَاشِعَةٌ Hearts, that Day, are pounding; their eyes are humbled.

The scene described in these two verses is among the truths that the oaths commencing the sūrah are meant to establish. Those who denied the Day of Resurrection will be struck with terror once they see with their own eyes what they had always claimed was impossible. On that day, the hearts of doubters and unbelievers will experience various degrees of anxiety, apprehension, alarm and panic, causing them to beat uncontrollably. The eyes of those whose hearts are racing will be downcast in humiliation, disgrace and fear at the realization that they are about to be called to account – something they had always denied.

Āyahs 10-11. يَقُولُونَ أَنِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ . أَأَنَدَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا نَخِرَةً They are [presently] saying, "Will we indeed be returned to [our] former state [of life]? Even if we should be decayed bones?"

The reason for their fear is stated here in an abrupt shift of scene from the Hereafter to the present world. In a tone of denial the unbelievers cast doubt on the Resurrection. Similarly, they are quoted in other āyahs:

وَقَالُوا أَأَنَدَا كُنَّا عِظَامًا وَرُفَاتًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ خَلْقًا جَدِيدًا.

And they said, "When we are bones and crumbled particles, will we [truly] be resurrected [in] a new creation?"¹³⁸

¹³⁶ As stated in Sūrah al-Qalam, 68:39.

¹³⁷ At-Tirmidhi.

¹³⁸ Sūrah al-Israa', 17:49 and 17:98.

They derisively ask how this could be after they have been dead for so long that their bones have become hollow, decayed, crumbled and part of the earth's dust.

وَقَالَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَإِذَا كُنَّا تُرَابًا وَآبَاؤُنَا أَأَنْتَ أَلْمُخْرَجُونَ.

And those who rejected belief say, "When we have become dust as well as our forefathers, will we indeed be brought out [of the graves]?"¹³⁹

أَإِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا ذَلِكَ رَجْعٌ بَعِيدٌ.

"When we have died and have become dust, [we will return to life]? That is a distant [i.e., unlikely] return."¹⁴⁰

To the unbelievers, this is absurd and unimaginable. How, they ask, could someone be reconstructed once again after his death and decay, much less returned to life? While the natural disintegration of a dead body is a fact universally known and witnessed, no one had ever observed a reverse process.¹⁴¹ In their ignorance, non-believers of every age deny and sarcastically ridicule the concept of a life after death, declaring that it is something most improbable.

Āyah 12. قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ They say, "That, then, would be a losing return.

While the unbelievers refused to accept the fact that death is not final, they did admit, although in jest, that they could only be losers in the event of such an occurrence. Or after some thought, it could be conceded by a few of the doubters that a remote possibility might exist. In that case, the deniers would be in a most distressing situation inasmuch as they had not prepared for it at all, and they would not be able to escape the punishment of which they had been warned.

Āyahs 13-14. فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ . فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ Indeed, it will be but one shout, and suddenly they will be [alert] upon the earth's surface.

In these two āyahs, Allah confirms that at the decreed time they will at once be brought back to life. This will be when Allah commands the angel Isrāfeel to blow into the Horn, which is the second blast signaling the Resurrection. At that time the people of the first and last generations will all be brought before their Lord, standing and observing. This is as Allah said:

يَوْمَ يَدْعُوكُمْ فَتَسْتَجِيبُونَ بِحَمْدِهِ وَتَظُنُّونَ إِن لَّبِئْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا.

On the Day He will call you, and you will respond with praise of Him and think that you had not remained [in the world] except for a little.¹⁴²

¹³⁹ Sūrah an-Naml, 27:67.

¹⁴⁰ Sūrah Qāf, 50:3. Refer also to 23:35-36, 23:82-83, 37:16-17 and 56:47-48.

¹⁴¹ Except for the man whom Allah caused to die for 100 years and brought back to life to witness this in his donkey. (Refer to Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:259.)

¹⁴² Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:52.

As-sāhīrah was defined by many of the ṣaḥābah and tābi'een as the entire earth, the face of the earth or a level ground. After having remained for a time beneath it, each and every person will be brought to the earth's surface to account for his deeds. The Qur'ān says:

يَوْمَ تُبَدَّلُ الْأَرْضُ غَيْرَ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَاوَاتُ وَبَرَزُوا لِلَّهِ الْوَاحِدِ الْقَهَّارِ.

*The Day the earth will be replaced by another earth, and the heavens [as well], and they will come out before Allah, the One, the Prevailing.*¹⁴³

وَيَوْمَ نُسَيِّرُ الْجِبَالَ وَتَرَى الْأَرْضَ بَارِزَةً وَحَشَرْنَاهُمْ فَلَمْ نُغَادِرْ مِنْهُمْ أَحَدًا.

*And [warn of] the Day when We will remove the mountains and you will see the earth exposed and We will gather them and not leave behind from them anyone.*¹⁴⁴

The new earth will be flat and bare, concealing no one. Every human being created from the beginning to the end of the world will have been gathered upon it to face the justice of his Lord. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "On the Day of Resurrection, the people will be gathered on a whitish, level earth like [flat] bread. It will have no features recognizable by anyone."¹⁴⁵

Āyah 15. هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى Has there reached you the story of Mūsā?

The story¹⁴⁶ of Prophet Mūsā (Moses) is mentioned in several sūrahs, in different styles and with varying emphasis. In fact, it is the most recurrent and detailed of the Qur'ān's historical narratives. Here, there is no mention of Mūsā's brother, Ḥārūn, who accompanied and assisted him. It is but a brief account of his mission to Fir'aawn (Pharaoh),¹⁴⁷ who rejected guidance and continued in denial and tyranny until finally Allah seized him with a severe and powerful punishment. This was to be a lesson and a reminder to the disbelievers of Makkah and others of how Allah deals with those who oppose His prophets and messengers.

Āyah 16. إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى When his Lord called to him in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā,

According to most commentators, "the sacred valley of Ṭuwā" indicates that the name of the valley was "Ṭuwā." It was made sacred when Allah spoke to Mūsā there for the first time; and it was blessed a second time when Mūsā led the Children of Israel out of Egypt and brought them to that valley. It was most likely located next to the mount called Jabal aṭ-Ṭūr in Sinai, where Prophet Mūsā received the tablets containing legislation from Allah.

¹⁴³ Sūrah Ibrāheem, 14:48.

¹⁴⁴ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:47.

¹⁴⁵ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

¹⁴⁶ The Qur'ān makes use of the story's natural attraction to impart certain lessons and implant them in the mind of the reader or listener.

¹⁴⁷ More details of this encounter are found in 19: 9-48, 26: 10-17, 27: 7-12, and 28: 29-35.

Āyah 17. اذْهَبْ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ [Saying,] "Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed."

Among the most significant teachings in the Qur'ān are those concerning the characteristics of oppressors and the methods they use to subjugate the masses. A noteworthy example is found in the encounter of Mūsā with Fir'awn, mentioned in over 70 different places in the Qur'ān, and in over 27 sūrahs.

Transgression and tyranny bring about corruption and anger Allah. Fir'awn had enforced a caste system among his subjects, oppressing the weak and reducing them to slavery, as stated in Sūrahs al-Qaṣaṣ and az-Zukhruf. So Allah instructed Mūsā to go to the oppressive ruler in an attempt to turn him away from transgression and invite him to acknowledge his Lord who created and sustained him. This has been the primary duty of prophets in every age.

Āyahs 18-19. فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ . وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ "And say to him, 'Would you [be willing to] purify yourself and let me guide you to your Lord so you would fear [Him]?'"

Prophet Mūsā was sent to teach and guide. In spite of Fir'awn's despotism, Mūsā was instructed to invite him to Allah with peaceful and diplomatic speech. As detailed in previous sūrahs, his Lord imparted to Mūsā the correct method of *da'wah*. In dealing with disbelieving oppressive powers, the *da'wah* worker must take care to observe courtesy and kindness while inviting them to faith; and education by example is required. His speech must be modest and humble but always true and direct.

Mūsā offered to teach Fir'awn how to purify himself – how to adopt pure belief, pure morality and pure righteous deeds. It has been pointed out that when the Qur'ān uses the word *tazakkā* (to purify oneself), it means to adopt the way acceptable to Allah, i.e., Islam. And having been guided to knowledge of the Lord of the universe with His attributes of power and perfection, one would obviously fear His displeasure.

Āyah 20. فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ And he showed him the greatest sign.

Prophet Mūsā was commanded to present the message of truth to Fir'awn. But his gracious approach could not win over the heart hardened by tyranny and rebellion against his Lord. So Mūsā then showed him the miracle of his staff turning into a great serpent. Verses in other sūrahs mention an additional sign: his hand becoming white, but without disease. These signs were evidence of Mūsā's prophethood.

Āyah 21. فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ But he denied and disobeyed.

Fir'awn refused and rejected all counsel by the messenger sent to him from Allah. He had deceived his people into believing that there was no power other than his own whose command could be enforced; but in reality, no tyrant can oppress a people that knows its true Lord, believes in Him and refuses to submit to any other. He in turn was deceived by his

people's ignorance and blind obedience into imagining that he was well within his right. But in the words of the Qur'ān:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ افْتَرَى عَلَى اللَّهِ كَذِبًا أَوْ كَذَّبَ بِالْحَقِّ لَمَّا جَاءَهُ

*Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie about Allah or denies the truth when it has come to him?*¹⁴⁸

Fir'awn knew that Mūsā had brought him the truth, but knowledge in the heart and mind will not produce faith without sincerity. Worldly distinction and advantage prevented him from acknowledging his Creator. And faith requires action – submission to the truth and compliance with it. This he adamantly refused.

Āyahs 22-23. ثُمَّ أَذْبَرَ يَسْعَى . فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَى Then he turned his back, striving. And he gathered [his people] and called out,

In his conceit and passion for power, Fir'awn was determined not to accept the truth or submit to his Lord. The message conveyed by Prophet Mūsā would have eliminated his claim of sanctity and reduced him to the level of other human beings, undermining his authority and possibly decreasing some of his worldly assets. Moreover, he would have had to follow Mūsā's teachings and release the Children of Israel from bondage.

So he turned his back on Mūsā and plotted against him. This is the meaning given by most commentators for "*yas'ā*" (striving).¹⁴⁹ The plot devised by Fir'awn is described elsewhere in the Qur'ān. In an effort to defeat Mūsā and humiliate him, he summoned his most skillful magicians from every part of the land, commanding them to produce snakes from their ropes and sticks before a large assembly of people. This was to convince everyone that Mūsā was not a prophet but merely a magician, and that turning his staff into a serpent could be done by other magicians as well. But Allah turned this plan against him when the defeated magicians had to admit that what Mūsā did could not have been magic and was no less than a miracle.

Āyah 24. فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَى And said, "I am your most exalted lord."

Fir'awn had denied the message, disobeyed Allah and finally declared himself to be the supreme lord of his people, committing the greatest injustice, which is major *shirk*. This declaration by Fir'awn has also been mentioned in other verses of the Qur'ān.¹⁵⁰ He stood before the population, announcing that he was their lord and master; indicating that they must defer to his every wish and endure his oppression and exploitation. In keeping with state religion and tradition, the Pharaoh was considered to be a divine being, a visible god upon the earth. There is clear evidence in the Qur'ān that he himself worshipped other gods¹⁵¹ and consequently, it is understood that he was referring to his absolute authority

¹⁴⁸ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:68.

¹⁴⁹ Others maintained that it meant "running" away after seeing Mūsā's staff transformed into a serpent.

¹⁵⁰ Refer to Sūrah ash-Shu'arā', 26:29 and al-Qaṣaṣ, 28:38.

¹⁵¹ When his supporters said to him: "Will you leave Moses and his people free to cause corruption in the land, and abandon you and your gods?" (Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:127)

within the land he ruled. He recognized no power superior to himself, and demanded a blind obedience akin to worship.

Āyah 25. فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَى So Allah seized him in exemplary punishment for the last and the first [transgression].

In a *ḥadīth qudsī*, the Prophet (ﷺ) mentioned that his Lord had stated, "*Pride is My cloak and grandeur is My garment; whoever competes with Me for one of them – I will throw him into the Hellfire.*"¹⁵² Thus, Allah punished Fir'aun with severe vengeance for his two most grave transgressions. The final one is mentioned before the first, showing its greater evil and depravity.

Many scholars have explained the last transgression as being his public declaration, "*I am your most exalted lord.*" The first has been described as his previous statement in Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ: "*I have not known you to have a god other than me.*"¹⁵³ Allah punished him for these two blasphemous statements. Others have held that the first transgression referred to his oppression of the people and denial of Prophet Mūsā.

According to another interpretation, the "last" and "first" are said to refer to *nakāl* (exemplary punishment) and are defined as the greater punishment of the Hereafter and the retribution of this worldly life when Fir'aun and his followers were drowned in waters of the sea. Allah Almighty made an example of him in the world by seizing him with this lesser penalty before that of the next life, serving as a warning for any who might be like him to fear the wrath of their Creator. The punishment of the life to come is mentioned first as it is more dreadful, extreme and permanent.

Āyah 26. إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَن يَخْشَى Indeed in that is a lesson [i.e., warning] for whoever would fear [Allah].

While Allah extends time for the oppressor, enabling him to acquire additional sins and greater punishment,¹⁵⁴ He will not permit this condition to continue indefinitely. Justice will surely prevail in the Hereafter and may be partially restored in this life as well. The conclusion of this event is described in Sūrah al-A'rāf:

وَأَوْرَثْنَا الْقَوْمَ الَّذِينَ كَانُوا يُسْتَضَعُونَ مَشَارِقَ الْأَرْضِ وَمَغَارِبَهَا الَّتِي بَارَكْنَا فِيهَا وَتَمَّتْ كَلِمَةُ رَبِّكَ الْحُسْنَى عَلَى بَنِي إِسْرَائِيلَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَدَمَرْنَا مَا كَانُوا يَصْنَعُونَ فِرْعَوْنَ وَقَوْمَهُ وَمَا كَانُوا يَعْرِشُونَ.

And We caused the people who had been oppressed to inherit the eastern regions of the land and the western ones, which We had blessed. And the good word [i.e., decree] of your Lord was fulfilled for the Children of Israel because of what they had patiently

¹⁵² Muslim. A *ḥadīth qudsī* (sacred *ḥadīth*) is a revelation from Allah which is related in the words of the Prophet (ﷺ).

¹⁵³ Sūrah al-Qaṣaṣ, 28:38.

¹⁵⁴ As stated in Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:178.

*endured. And We destroyed [all] that Pharaoh and his people were producing and what they had been building.*¹⁵⁵

Although he had reached the height of power and glory, none of that could save Fir'awn from the anger of Allah. The swift and total annihilation of the tyrant's earthly power by the will of his Lord serves as a warning to the nonbelievers of Quraysh as well as those of every age to come. Only those who know their true Lord and fear Him will benefit from the lessons of history. Those who do not fear Allah will continue in their misguided ways until they reach their appointed end, when they will face His justice and suffer the penalty they had earned during the life of this world.

Āyah 27. أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خُلُقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا Are you a stronger creation or is the heaven? He [Allah] constructed it.

Here the deniers are addressed directly and asked: "What is your 'power' against that of the magnificent heaven or of its Creator? Do you think that your resurrection will be difficult for Him who created you in the first instance? Allah, who created you previously within the realm of His infinite universe, cannot be powerless to create you once again. This logic is repeated throughout the Qur'ān, stating that the present creation is in itself a clear proof that He is easily able to create and re-create as He wills. Consider, for example:

أَوَلَيْسَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يَخْلُقَ مِثْلَهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَهُوَ الْخَلَّاقُ الْعَلِيمُ.

*Is not He who created the heavens and the earth able to create the likes of them? Yes, and He is the Knowing Creator.*¹⁵⁶

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَمْ يَعْصِ بِخَلْقِهِنَّ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتَىٰ

*Do they not see that Allah, who created the heavens and earth and did not fail in their creation, is able to give life to the dead?*¹⁵⁷

أَفَعَيِينَا بِالْخَلْقِ الْأَوَّلِ بَلْ هُمْ فِي لَبْسٍ مِنْ خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ.

*Did We fail in the first creation? But they are in confusion over a new creation.*¹⁵⁸

Ashadd (stronger, sturdier) may also be translated as "more difficult." The implication is that the creation of man is nothing in comparison to that of the vast universe. *As-samā'*, meaning elevation, refers to all creation that is above and beyond the earth, most of which still remains unknown to man. And the word "*banā*" (built or constructed) itself suggests strength and firmness. It is none but Allah who constructed the heavens containing countless stars and planets, innumerable solar systems and galaxies, all held together in perfect harmony. It is the structure containing and precisely positioning the earth to make it conducive to life.

¹⁵⁵ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:137.

¹⁵⁶ Sūrah Yā Seen, 36:81.

¹⁵⁷ Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:33.

¹⁵⁸ Sūrah Qāf, 50:15. See also 29:20, 19:67, 56:62, 29:19, 30:27 and 21:104.

Āyah 28. رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا He raised its ceiling and proportioned it.

The Creator goes on to describe His construction of the vast universe, emphasizing its immensity, precision and balance. Another āyah¹⁵⁹ has stated that He raised the heavens without visible pillars.

Samk denotes a dimension of height, indicating the expanse or "thickness" of that which surrounds the earth and lies beyond it. Some commentators have interpreted *samk* to mean the upper extent of the nearest heaven to the earth. Others include the expanse of all the seven heavens. Allah has balanced and equalized this vast heaven, enabling it to remain operative for as long as He wills.

Āyah 29. وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا And He darkened its night and extracted its brightness.

Allah created the heaven in a state of darkness and then produced light within it – stars emitting light and planets reflecting it. These words can apply to the earth as well. More specifically, the sun projects the light of day onto the earth from within the surrounding darkness. Ibn 'Abbās noted, "Allah made its night dark and extremely black, and its day bright, luminous and clear."

Āyahs 30-31. وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا . أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا And after that He spread the earth. He extracted from it its water and its pasture.

Spreading the earth refers to proportioning it, leveling its surface, preparing it to be habitable, suitable for walking and travel and for building and cultivation. The area of the earth's surface in comparison to the size its inhabitants allows them to feel that it is horizontal and relatively flat, affording them balance and security. Thus, the Creator has spread the earth before them as a vast expanse despite its spherical shape. Early scholars understood this fact from several verses of the Qur'ān. Ibn Taymiyyah stated, "There is a consensus of opinion going back to the second generation students of Aḥmad bin Ḥanbal and corroborated in the Book [of Allah] and Sunnah that planets are spherical and the earth spins. A statement of Ibn 'Abbās supports this." And he added, "They confirm that the earth in all its movements resembles a sphere."

After leveling the earth, Allah produced life-sustaining water from within it. The exact origin of the earth's water is still unknown, although scientists have developed several theories about it. From this water He created life¹⁶⁰ and produced pastures, which alludes here to the plants upon which animals feed and which directly or indirectly sustain human life.

Āyah 32. وَالْجِبَالَ أَرْسَاهَا And the mountains He set firmly

Mountains have foundations deep under the surface of the ground. The word "*arsāhā*" in this verse points to the fact that Allah has anchored, fixed and secured the mountains within

¹⁵⁹ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:2.

¹⁶⁰ As stated in Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:30.

the earth by means of deep, heavy roots.¹⁶¹ Other āyahs state that mountain roots serve to stabilize the earth's crust.¹⁶²

Āyah 33. مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ As enjoyment [provision] for you and your grazing livestock.

In these verses evidences are given in support of the Resurrection and Hereafter from two standpoints. First, that it is not at all a difficult undertaking for the Creator who built this vast universe with such precise balance and made the earth with its appropriate provisions. And second, that the clearly visible signs pointing to wisdom in the creative ability of Allah indicate that nothing happens within the heavens and earth without purpose, but rather, according to a precise plan.

This reminder that the earth was created, structured and prepared for man's benefit should evoke gratitude to the wise and generous Creator. For it is He who spread the earth, caused its springs and rivers to flow, caused its plants and crops to grow and anchored the mountains to stabilize and make it habitable. All of this provides benefit and enjoyment for mankind during a limited period of temporary residence, until the decreed term comes to an end.

Āyah 34. فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَّةُ الْكُبْرَى But when there comes the greatest Overwhelming Calamity

Aṭ-ṭāmmatul-kubrā refers to *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, the Day of Resurrection. *Ṭāmmah* denotes a grave and awesome catastrophe which will afflict everyone and overwhelm and encompass every matter. It is further emphasized by the word *kubrā* (greatest), which confirms that *ṭāmmah* is not sufficient to fully describe its intensity and severity. When that tremendous event occurs all the comforts of earthly life will be forgotten and every individual will find before him his account, judgment and recompense.

Āyah 35. يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى The Day when man will remember that for which he strove,

On that Day every person will become acutely aware of all he had forgotten or ignored of his past worldly life. And he will know the truth about every matter in which he was involved and the motivation behind each of the deeds he had done. As described in similar verses:

يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى.

*That Day, man will remember, but how [useful] to him will be the remembrance?*¹⁶³

Alas, it will then be too late for any benefit.

¹⁶¹ Mountain roots extend below the surface of the earth as far as 10 to 15 times their height. This was not known at the time the Qur'ān was revealed, but only recently after modern geological research.

¹⁶² Refer also to Āyah 7 of the previous sūrah, *an-Naba'*.

¹⁶³ Sūrah al-Fajr, 89:23.

يُنَبِّئُ الْإِنْسَانَ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ.

*Man will be informed that Day of what he sent ahead and kept back.*¹⁶⁴

At the time of Judgment he will find every deed he had done present before him, to be placed upon the balance. And he will become aware of that which he did not do or which he had delayed.

ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ مَرْجِعُكُمْ فَيُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ إِنَّهُ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ.

*Then to your Lord is your return, and He will inform you about what you used to do. Indeed, He is Knowing of that within the breasts.*¹⁶⁵

This fact is mentioned throughout the Qur'ān.¹⁶⁶ Allah, the Exalted, will make known to all people the true intent, nature and value of their deeds.

Āyah 36. *وَبُرِّزَتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَنْ يَرَىٰ* **And the Hellfire will be exposed for [all] those who see.**

Moreover, the Hellfire will be displayed and brought near enough for everyone, both believers and nonbelievers, to see with their own eyes. Allah has said:

وَإِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَىٰ رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا.

*And there is none of you except he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed.*¹⁶⁷

Everyone will observe the Hellfire, but the people of Paradise will not be harmed by it. In fact, this experience will serve to increase their gratitude and joy at having escaped its horrors and agonies. Those destined to enter it, however, will suffer the additional torment of dread and apprehension at this preview.

Al-Jaheem is one of the names of Hell and denotes an extremely hot blazing fire. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) stated, "*The Hellfire will be brought, being led from seventy thousand halters – at each one, seventy thousand angels pulling it.*"¹⁶⁸

Āyahs 37-39. *فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَىٰ . وَآثَرَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا . فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ .* **So as for he who transgressed and preferred the life of the world, then indeed, the Hellfire will be [his] refuge.**

After having seen it and suffered the dread of what lies before them, those transgressors who had not repented will have no refuge other than the blazing fire of Hell. This is the result of

¹⁶⁴ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:13.

¹⁶⁵ Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:7.

¹⁶⁶ Refer also to 5:105, 6:60, 6:108, 6:159, 6:164, 9:94, 9:105, 10:23, 24:64, 29:8, 31:15, 31:23, 41:50, 58:6, 58:7 and 62:8.

¹⁶⁷ Sūrah Maryam, 19:71.

¹⁶⁸ Muslim.

their preference of worldly matters over those of the Hereafter; for people with an excessive desire for the pleasures of this world are inevitably afflicted by a breakdown in their moral values, leading to deceitful manners and defective conduct, oppression and tyranny. And it is what keeps them from submitting to their Lord and accepting His directives.

The scholars have explained that *taghā* means to transgress the limits set by Allah with regard to worship as well as in dealings with people, neglecting one's religious duties and behaving defiantly. The Qur'ān repeatedly confirms that those who have been overly concerned with the worldly life and its temporary benefits will find that their destination is Hell.

Āyah 40-41. وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ . فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ **But as for he who feared the position of his Lord and prevented the soul from [unlawful] inclination, then indeed, Paradise will be [his] refuge.**

Those believers who feared Allah and His judgment of them during their earthly lives will have disciplined and restrained their souls from following unlawful passions and preferences. *Maqām* can have two connotations: it may refer to the Lord's exalted position above His creations or to the standing for account before Him. Fear of the account and judgment on the Day of Resurrection prevents believers from transgressing and following their own desires and inclinations. Whenever they should commit a sin out of weakness, they are quick to repent and correct themselves. Thus, they are reassured that their destination is Paradise.

Āyah 42. يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا **They ask you about the Hour -- when is its arrival?**

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was often asked when the final Hour would occur – more literally, when would be its "anchorage" – its coming to rest or establishment. When this question was asked, the Prophet (ﷺ) often replied, "*What have you prepared for it?*"¹⁶⁹ But most often it was asked in a sarcastic manner by the non-believers. It illustrates the skepticism of those challenging him concerning the Hereafter and their denial of the fact that it would ever come. They were attempting to weaken the Prophet's position by demanding an answer he could not give.

Āyahs 43-44. فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرَاهَا . إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَاهَا **In what [position] are you that you should mention it? To your Lord is its finality.**

Allah did not reply to the unbelievers, but only with a question directed to His Messenger. It confirmed that he (ﷺ) was not in a position to give any answer because such knowledge belongs only to the Creator. This fact is stated in other verses as well:

¹⁶⁹ One man answered, "Not much, except that I love Allah and His Messenger." The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "A person will be with those he loved." (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ رَبِّي لَا يُجَلِّيهَا لِوَفْتِهَا إِلَّا هُوَ ثَقُلَتْ فِي السَّمَاءِ
وَالْأَرْضِ لَا تَأْتِيكُمُ إِلَّا بَغْثَةً يَسْأَلُونَكَ كَأَنَّكَ حَفِيٌّ عَنْهَا قُلْ إِنَّمَا عِلْمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ.

They ask you, [O Muḥammad], about the Hour: when is its arrival? Say, "Its knowledge is only with my Lord. None will reveal its time except Him. It lays heavily¹⁷⁰ upon the heavens and the earth. It will not come upon you except unexpectedly." They ask you as if you are familiar with it. Say, "Its knowledge is only with Allah, but most of the people do not know."¹⁷¹

As the Prophet (ﷺ) had no knowledge of it, how could he inform them? Allah, the Exalted will bring on that Hour, ending the world whenever He wills, and He has the final decision about all things. It is a matter so tremendous that the question of its exact time seems foolish and inappropriate. *Muntahāhā* (its end or finality) refers both to ultimate knowledge about it and to the impelling cause and time of its termination.

Āyah 45. إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنْذِرٌ مِّنْ يَّخْشَاهَا You are only a warner for those who fear it.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was appointed by Allah to remind mankind of the Day of Account. He was told:

إِنْ أَنْتَ إِلَّا نَذِيرٌ.

You, [O Muḥammad], are not but a warner.¹⁷²

لِنُنْذِرَ قَوْمًا مَّا أَتَاهُمْ مِنْ نَّذِيرٍ مِّن قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ.

That you may warn a people to whom no warner has come before you [so] perhaps they will be guided.¹⁷³

His duty was to convey the warnings of his Lord's power to the people but not to make them believe or obey. In this āyah he is informed that only those who fear that difficult Day will benefit from the warnings. Similarly, Allah has said:

وَمَا تُغْنِي الْآيَاتُ وَالنُّذُرُ عَنْ قَوْمٍ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ.

And of no avail will be signs or warners to a people who do not believe.¹⁷⁴

Āyah 46. كَانَتْهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحَاهَا It will be, on the Day they see it, as though they had not remained [in the world] except for an afternoon or a morning thereof.

When they are gathered for the Judgement, people will perceive that the period of their earthly life was indeed very brief. Looking back, it will seem to them as if it was no more than part of a day. 'Ashiyyah is the time from noon until sunset, while *dhuḥā* is the period from

¹⁷⁰ i.e., it is a source of concern, worry or fear.

¹⁷¹ Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:187.

¹⁷² Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:23.

¹⁷³ Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:3.

¹⁷⁴ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:101.

sunrise until noon. The wretched souls who had been fighting intensely for the pleasures of this world, preferring them over the life to come, will then clearly see their error:

قَالَ كَمْ لَبِثْتُمْ فِي الْأَرْضِ عَدَدَ سِنِينَ. قَالُوا لَبِثْنَا يَوْمًا أَوْ بَعْضَ يَوْمٍ فَاسْأَلِ الْعَادِّينَ. قَالَ إِنْ لَبِثْتُمْ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا لَوْ أَنَّكُمْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ. أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ.

*[Allah] will say, "How long did you remain on earth in number of years?" They will say, "We remained a day or part of a day; ask those who enumerate." He will say, "You stayed not but a little – if only you had known. Then did you think We created you uselessly and to Us you would not be returned?"*¹⁷⁵

The transitory and short-lived nature of the present existence has been emphasized throughout the Qur'ān. Allah disclosed:

وَفَرَحُوا بِالْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا مَتَاعٌ.

*And they rejoice in the worldly life, while the worldly life is not, compared to the Hereafter, except [brief] enjoyment.*¹⁷⁶

قُلْ مَتَاعُ الدُّنْيَا قَلِيلٌ وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ لِمَنِ اتَّقَى.

*Say, "The enjoyment of this world is little, and the Hereafter is better for one who fears Allah."*¹⁷⁷

فَمَا مَتَاعُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا فِي الْآخِرَةِ إِلَّا قَلِيلٌ.

*And what is the enjoyment of worldly life compared to the Hereafter except a [very] little.*¹⁷⁸

So believers are urged not to become overly attached to the present life, but to take from it that which enables them to attain a good status in their eternal one.

¹⁷⁵ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:112-115. This recurs in 10:45, 17:52, 20:103-104, 30:55 and 46:35.

¹⁷⁶ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:26.

¹⁷⁷ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:77.

¹⁷⁸ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:38.

SŪRAH 'ABASA (80) سُورَةُ عَبَسَ

The scholars are unanimous about the occasion that prompted the revelation of this *sūrah*. It happened that one of the influential chiefs of Makkah was sitting with the Prophet (ﷺ), who was trying to persuade him to accept Islam.¹⁷⁹ At that moment, a blind man approached him to seek explanation of a particular point. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was irritated at the interruption and ignored him. Thereupon Allah revealed this *sūrah*.

In the opening verses Allah *ta'ālā* shows disapproval the Prophet's annoyance on this occasion toward the blind man who had come seeking knowledge. He points out that such a humble person might actually benefit from the Prophet's time and effort more than others. And although the Prophet (ﷺ) was more concerned at that moment with trying to win over an influential but arrogant person, the fact remains that it is Allah who guides whom He wills.

A feature of the Qur'n's methodology is to make use of particular incidents to establish permanent values and standards. The issue presented here is not merely how people should be treated; it is also how they should be evaluated. The basic principle stated in the Book of Allah is:

إِنَّ أَكْرَمَكُمْ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ أَتْقَاكُمْ.

Indeed, the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous¹⁸⁰ of you.

Next, there is reference to the Qur'ān as a reminder for mankind, followed by a discussion of the ungrateful attitude and denial of most men toward their Lord. Accordingly, they are reminded of their origin and how Allah placed them on the path of life, how He provides their sustenance, how He causes their death and resurrection; and how most of them fail to do what He expects of them.

The next section directs man to reflect upon one of the sources of his continued existence, which is food. And the final section touches upon the Day of Resurrection, when faces will provide a clear indication of what is going to happen to their souls.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى He frowned and turned away

The *sūrah* opens with criticism of the Prophet's manner on a specific occasion. The verbs describing his gesture are in the third person, showing regard for him and initially softening the tone of admonition before addressing him directly.

This incident took place during a period when the disbelieving chiefs were still occasionally willing to meet and have dialogues with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in hopes of deterring him from the propagation of Islam.

¹⁷⁹ Said to be al-Walīd bin al-Mughīrah, or a group that included al-Walīd, Abū Jahl, Umayyah bin Khalaf and 'Utbah and Shaybah, the sons of Rabee'ah.

¹⁸⁰ Literally: "he among you who is most conscious of Allah and cautious in conduct." *Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt*, 49:13.

It is reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) had been explaining the religion to one or more of the prominent leaders of the Quraysh. He was hoping that the most influential members of society who opposed him could be persuaded to accept his message of *tawḥeed*. The acceptance of Islam by such individuals would mean the elimination of most obstructions to its spread in Makkah and the rest of Arabia. The Prophet (ﷺ) was absorbed in this conversation, and according to more than one narration, was asking, "Do you see anything wrong in what I say?" The chief replied, "No." It was a significant moment.

Āyah 2. أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى Because there came to him the blind man, [interrupting].

That man was 'Abdullāh bin Umm Maktūm, a maternal cousin of the Prophet's wife, Khadījah. He was one of those who had accepted Islam during its early period in Makkah and had a deep desire to learn whatever he could. He approached the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), and unaware that he was occupied, began requesting his guidance on a matter.¹⁸¹ Unwilling to be interrupted at that moment, the Prophet showed displeasure in a way that could not be seen or known to the blind man.

But Allah sees and knows, and it was a mistake that had to be corrected inasmuch as His Messenger was to be the example of ethics and moral conduct for the entire *ummah*. One perceives here that Allah (ﷻ) is aware of the most subtle acts and gestures and takes precise account of them. These verses were to remain as a lesson and admonition for all people thereafter. The Lord of the worlds had made *taqwā* the criterion for evaluating His servants rather than lineage, class, influence or wealth.¹⁸² And this is the standard that mankind should assume and implement.

Āyahs 3-4. وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكَّى . أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى But what would make you perceive that perhaps he might be purified, or be reminded and the remembrance would benefit him?

Here the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is addressed directly, but in a gentle manner. The one he ignored had been making an effort to be guided and purified; and he feared Allah. His disability may have made him appear less able to assist the cause of Islam, yet he was most receptive of the Prophet's words, and in fact had already learned and benefited from them greatly. But it was a matter that had momentarily escaped the Prophet's consideration. He held no disregard for the blind man; on the contrary, he had sufficient confidence in his faith to turn attention to persuading those without faith.

Knowledge purifies the Muslim from ignorant wrongdoing and erroneous attitudes. And reminders reinforce the knowledge that benefits a believer. Ibn Umm Maktūm would benefit from the Prophet's instruction; therefore he was more deserving of his attention, and in the sight of Allah was far superior to the self-satisfied and unreceptive disbelievers.

¹⁸¹ A few narrations state that he was asking the Prophet (ﷺ) to teach him some of the Qur'ān.

¹⁸² As stated in Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:13.

Āyahs 5-7. أَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَغْنَى . فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى . وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزَكَّى . As for he who thinks himself without need – to him you give attention. And not upon you [is blame] if he will not be purified.

The unbeliever who thought himself self-sufficient and in no need of his Lord's guidance would not accept the Prophet's message. The prominent chiefs of Quraysh had only met with him in order to negotiate and try to impose their own terms. They had been using all their wealth, power and influence to obstruct the advancement of Islam and prevent people from accepting it. Nevertheless, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) hoped they might see the truth.

Despite his noble intention, the Prophet (ﷺ) stood corrected by his Lord. He was deeply affected by this incident, and immediately recited the words of this revelation. At such an early and critical time for Islam, only a person confident of his Lord's support and protection could have made known this criticism of himself. Allah was guiding and directing His Messenger, correcting his few human errors in order to make of him the best example of conduct to be followed by all mankind.

Allah reassured His Messenger (ﷺ) that he would not be blamed if he failed in his efforts to bring people to Islam. He was responsible only for conveying the message, not for their ultimate guidance, for that was in the hand of his Lord. Once he had conveyed the message, it was the responsibility of those who heard it to accept the truth and adhere to it. And those who refuse to be guided and purified merely damage their own souls.

Āyahs 8-10. وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى . وَهُوَ يَخْشَى . فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى . But as for he who came to you striving [for knowledge] while he fears [Allah] – from him you are distracted.

The view that Islam should be advanced by winning over the powerful and influential members of society is not necessarily practical, for often they are the most obstinate and difficult to persuade, especially when worldly interests are involved. No particular group or individual ought to be singled out for *da'wah* or education to the exclusion of others, for knowledge is the right of every human being. The meaning conveyed in these verses is one of respect and fair treatment for all, and it soon became a basic principle of Muslim ethics in their society.

These verses are among the ones which demonstrate the Prophet's credibility, and that he did not speak of his own accord;¹⁸³ nor did he withhold or conceal any of the revelation – even that which reproached him personally. After this revelation, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) did not cease to honor 'Abdullāh bin Umm Maktūm. He would greet him, saying, "*Welcome to him on whose account my Lord rebuked me,*" and lay out his cloak for him to sit on. He would ask him about his affairs, fulfill his needs and take him into his council.

Ibn Umm Maktūm was later sent by the Prophet (ﷺ) along with Muṣ'ab bin 'Umayr to Madinah to teach the people Islam. He was appointed with Bilāl to call out the *adhān* for prayer. And although exempted from *jihād* due to his blindness, he refused to remain at

¹⁸³ They also disprove the claim that he might have authored the Qur'ān.

home and served as a standard bearer for the Muslim armies. He was martyred in battle during the caliphate of 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb.

Āyah 11-12. كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ . فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ . No! Indeed, they are a reminder. So whoever wills may remember it.

The following verses begin with an emphatic expression of negation and refusal. *Kallā* is used to convey a forceful disagreement with what was stated or implied previously.¹⁸⁴ No, this cannot be so. In no way is it acceptable to favor certain people over others on account of their social standing, even when the objective is a noble one. Thus, a new moral ethic was established within the Muslim *ummah*. Respect and appreciation for people was now to be based upon faith and *taqwā* rather than worldly considerations. This was a huge social revolution.

These verses serve as a reminder for whoever would remember the admonition, and whoever would remember Allah. The Qur'ān itself has been called a reminder, for it reminds man of his Lord, his purpose on earth and of the conduct he should adopt.

Āyahs 13-16. فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ . مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ . بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ . كِرَامٍ بَرَرَةٍ . [It is recorded] in honored texts, exalted and purified, [carried] by the hands of messenger-angels, [who are] noble and dutiful.

The Qur'ān's verses are recorded in *al-lawḥ al-mahfūth*, a noble, elevated record containing pure and honored texts which have been kept secure from human interference and alteration. Another meaning conveyed by Ibn Kathir is that the verses are recorded in a Book containing honored sheets or pages, referring to the Qur'ān. "Exalted" means elevated in status, and "purified" means excluding the human additions and deletions found in previous scriptures.

Safarah are ambassadors, those who travel to deliver communications, and refers to the noble and obedient messenger-angels who were entrusted with the revelation – to guard and deliver it precisely in order to rectify matters among mankind.¹⁸⁵ This word is a plural form of *safeer* (ambassador) and also of *sāfir* (scribe). So another legitimate meaning derived from the verses is: "[Written] in honored pages, exalted and purified, by the hands of scribes, [who are] noble and dutiful." And these also are angels.

Āyah 17. قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ . Destroyed [i.e., cursed] is man; how ungrateful is he.

From here onward the rebuke is directed toward the disbelievers who were rejecting the invitation of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). But the āyah also suggests that mankind in general is for

¹⁸⁴ Similar to the English "Not at all!" or "Certainly not!"

¹⁸⁵ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever recites the Qur'ān being skillful in it will be with the honorable messenger-angels. And whoever recites the Qur'ān with hesitation as it is difficult for him will have a double reward." (Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim)

the most part disbelieving and ungrateful. The verb's passive voice acts as an interjection, meaning: "How cursed (more literally: put down and destroyed) he is," or possibly a supplication: "May he perish." Either way, it expresses dismay at this attitude of denial and ingratitude toward one's Creator.

Man is described as having *kufr*, which can mean ungratefulness as well as unbelief, and both are intended here. *Mā akfarah* may be translated as "How ungrateful and unbelieving he is!" or "What made him so ungrateful and unbelieving?" Both meanings are grammatically sound. How amazing that after being exposed to the clear evidence of the Qur'ān, man could still deny the favor of his Lord. So Allah replies to human conceit in the following verses with some reminders.

Āyahs 18-19. مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ . مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَّرَهُ From what thing [i.e., substance] did He create him? From a sperm-drop He created him and destined for him.

Allah reminds proud man of his humble origin – how he was created from a fluid distasteful in his own view, for *nutfah* is a drop of semen. Similarly, in Sūrah al-Mursalāt He said:

أَلَمْ نَخْلُقْكُمْ مِنْ مَّاءٍ مَهِينٍ

"Did We not create you from a liquid disdained?"¹⁸⁶

Man had no part in his own creation and no choice about it. He was created from a despised fluid and then formed and precisely proportioned according to the will of his Creator. The life he lives was predestined by his Lord as well: the length of his lifespan, the amounts and varieties of his provision, the deeds he is enabled to do and whether he will ultimately be happy or unhappy in the next life. Yet, he still has the audacity to deny and rebel against his Lord. As stated in Sūrah Yā Seen:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الْإِنْسَانُ أَنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُ مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ فَإِذَا هُوَ خَصِيمٌ مُبِينٌ

Does mankind not consider that We created him from a sperm-drop – then at once he becomes a clear adversary?

Āyah 20. ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ Then He eased the way for him.

Here man is reminded that after his creation, Allah set him upon the path of life. He eased the way from his mother's womb into the world by causing the remarkable event of his birth. Then He eases the way through life by making His guidance available to all people; but most of them remain ungrateful and heedless. Ibn Katheer quotes Mujāhid¹⁸⁷ as saying that easing his way is similar to Allah's statement:

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا.

Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶ Sūrah al-Mursalāt, 77:20.

¹⁸⁷ A *tābi'ee* scholar and student of Ibn 'Abbās.

¹⁸⁸ Sūrah al-Insān, 76:3.

Man has been given the ability to recognize and follow the straight path ordained for him by his Creator. Allah made the path of life smooth and easy for man, and He directed him on that path by outlining it, clarifying it and making it easy to follow. Allah honored mankind with His guidance and with the ability to choose, follow it and be rewarded; yet most of them refuse.

Āyahs 21-22. ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ . ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ Then He causes his death and provides a grave for him. Then when He wills, He will resurrect him.

When the decreed term of life is complete, it can never be extended. The Creator will send the angel of death at an appointed time to take the soul of every human being He brought into this world; the freedom and capability He granted to each one will be taken back.

Every person is brought into this life, eased through it and caused to die by the will of Allah. Out of His mercy, Allah taught mankind the proper manner to dispose of a lifeless body by sending a crow to demonstrate the excavation of a grave. This is described in Sūrah al-Mā'idah.¹⁸⁹ The grave is among the greatest blessings of this world, for it conceals the body when it is in a state of decay and deterioration that one would not like others to observe.¹⁹⁰

Similarly, man will be resurrected whenever Allah wills. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Every part of a son of Adam is consumed by the earth except for the base of the tail."*¹⁹¹ He was created from it, and he will be reassembled from it."¹⁹² And he said, *"There is no part of man which will not have decayed except for one bone, which is the base of the tail, from which creation will be developed on the Day of Resurrection."*¹⁹³

After his brief period of relative freedom upon the earth, man will once again be compelled submit to his Lord. None can escape His decree of death and what follows of resurrection, account and recompense.

Āyah 23. كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَا أَمَرَهُ No! He [i.e., man] has not yet accomplished what He commanded him.

Kallā denotes an emphatic denial of something that preceded. It refers to the hypocrite's hollow claim that he has fulfilled his religious duties toward his Lord and the members of his society. But man, and in particular the disbeliever, has not and will not fulfill the obligations enjoined on him by his Lord and will most likely die in that state.

¹⁸⁹ Sūrah al-Mā'idah, 5:31.

¹⁹⁰ The body of a deceased person is to be honored by covering and burying it so that its decomposition will not be observed by the living, nor will its odor harm them. Other means of disposal, such as cremation, are not permissible.

¹⁹¹ *‘Ajbudh-dhanab*, described as being like a tiny grain or mustard seed.

¹⁹² Muslim.

¹⁹³ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

On the other hand, a believer perceives that as much as he tries, he will never be able to worship Allah as He should be worshipped. No human being is free of errors and limitations, but the believing servant strives to fulfill his obligations to the best of his ability in an effort to earn his Lord's approval. And while regretting his failures, he can expect that his striving with sincere intention will be appreciated and rewarded; so he relies for salvation on the forgiveness, mercy and generosity of his Creator.

Āyahs 24-26. فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ . أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا . ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا . Then let mankind look at his food – how We poured down water in torrents; then We broke open the earth, splitting [it with sprouts].

Allah reminds man of His favor to him in providing him with various delicious kinds of food, and also of His re-creative ability which is evidenced in the generation of plant life from the dry earth. The Creator of man is also his Sustainer, providing the means of his continued existence.

The process of food production begins with rainfall. Initiated by Allah at some time during the earth's formation, the cycle of precipitation was established as a regular phenomenon to sustain life on the planet. Anyone reflecting on the growth of seeds and plants can recognize a divine plan. Rainwater penetrates the soil, and by the will of Allah tender sprouts miraculously push through the solid ground and grow to provide food for man as well as for creatures of the earth.

Āyahs 27-32.

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا . وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا . وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا . وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا . وَفَاكِهَةً وَأَبًّا . مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

And We caused to grow within it grain and grapes and herbage and olive and palm trees and gardens of dense shrubbery and fruit and grass – as enjoyment for you and your grazing livestock.

These verses contain a description of various kinds of vegetation. Those mentioned here were among the most common ones to people at the time and place of the Qur'ān's revelation. *Habb* refers to all types of seeds and grains. Grapes are known. *Qadhb* are the moist green herbs upon which animals graze. Olive and palm trees were known to the Arabs; they provide fruits, juice, oil, seeds and shade.

The gardens referred to as *ghulb* have been described as date-palm orchards, but more generally would include a thick growth of trees, vines and various other plants mixed and intertwined. *Fākihah* includes every type of fruit and also implies enjoyment.

Abb was known to be the kind of grass and herbage that is eaten by grazing animals but not humans. It is narrated with an authentic chain that when 'Umar bin al-Khaṭṭāb was reciting this sūrah he paused and said to himself, "We have known what *fākihah* is, but what is *abb*?" Then he said, "By your life, O Ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, this is indeed overdoing it." He meant that a

detailed explanation was unnecessary,¹⁹⁴ given that *abb* was understood to be a plant that grew from the earth. When Abū Bakr was asked about this āyah, he said, "What earth could carry me and what sky could cover me if I said about the Book of Allah that which I did not know!"

Like the same words in the previous sūrah, Āyah 32 points to the wisdom in Allah's creation and indicates that nothing is created without a purpose. In these brief verses the vegetation of the earth is presented as indication that the growth of rich crops and lush green gardens from the dry earth is not a haphazard occurrence; rather, there is wisdom, design and power behind it. And while this provision is well suited to the temporary nature of worldly existence, the Creator has informed His believing servants that the provision of the next life will be infinitely better and more enduring.

Āyah 33. فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاعَةُ But when there comes the Deafening Blast

The Qur'ānic description moves on from the comforts of this world to the terrors which introduce the next. *Aṣ-Ṣākh-khah* is explained as a deafening noise or the piercing blast of the Horn which signals the Resurrection. It will deafen the ears of those who had refused to hear the message and they will now hear nothing but the violent blast of the Horn. It is also among the names for *Yawm al-Qiyāmah* (the Day of Resurrection).

Āyahs 34-37.

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ • وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ • وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ • لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ

On the Day a man will flee from his brother and his mother and his father and his wife¹⁹⁵ and his children – for every man, that Day, will be a matter adequate for him.

On the Day of Resurrection every person will be concerned only with himself. He will not even want to encounter those who were closest to him in the world and will run away from them. One explanation given is that a believer will flee from his polytheistic relatives fearing blame for being related to them. Another is that when he sees the evil consequences of committing sin to appease others, he would flee from all of them lest they witness against him.

The most common interpretation is that every person will be so terrified of his account that he will flee from all those he had once loved, unwilling to share with them a single good deed. He will flee from them fearing they would request his help or demand a right from him that he had neglected during the worldly life. The family members are mentioned one by one to emphasize the anguish and pain of that situation.

Every person on that Day will have enough distress and worry to distract him from the affairs

¹⁹⁴ As generally, one should focus on fundamental issues rather than superfluous information having no practical benefit.

¹⁹⁵ Literally, his companion, implying a friendly and intimate relationship.

of others. Each one will be totally occupied and immersed in his own condition, forgetting all else. The crucial matter of the final account and judgment will now be the only concern, and it is sufficient to occupy one completely.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "You will be gathered barefoot, naked, walking and uncircumcised." His wife, 'Ā'ishah, said, "O Messenger of Allah, will we be seeing each other's nakedness?" He replied, "For every man, that Day, will be a matter adequate for him. He will be too occupied to look."¹⁹⁶

Then, in the two āyahs that follow, comes a description of how the faces of the righteous and the wicked will reflect their respective conditions. As it was stated in Sūrah Aali 'Imrān:

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ

*On [that] Day faces will turn white and faces will turn black.*¹⁹⁷

It will then be clearly evident which of them had been righteous and which had been sinful and corrupt.

Āyahs 38-39. وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ . ضَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ

[Some] faces, that Day, will be bright – laughing, rejoicing at good news.

These are the faces of the righteous, the likes of the blind man, Ibn Umm Maktūm who was mentioned at the beginning of the sūrah. Perhaps these people were never noticed in this world. Or perhaps they were disdained and mistreated. But now their faces will be lit up, reflecting happiness and relief from all problems and worries. Their laughter expresses the utmost pleasure felt in their hearts when they receive the good tidings of Paradise and of the approval of their Lord.

Āyahs 40-42. وَوُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ . تَرْهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ . أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ

And [other] faces, that Day, will have upon them dust. Blackness will cover them. Those are the disbelievers, the wicked ones.

And the faces of the wicked deniers will be blackened as if with dust and smoke, reflecting the evil in their souls and reflecting their shame and humiliation. Those were the arrogant, self-satisfied ones who ignored and rejected the Prophet's invitation to truth and moral principles. Not only were they deniers of faith (*kafarah*), but persistent, rebellious and spiteful sinners (*fajarah*). It is most fitting that their compensation should be debasement and humiliation.

¹⁹⁶ Al-Bukhāri.

¹⁹⁷ Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:106.

SŪRAH AT-TAKWEER (81) سُورَةُ التَّكْوِيرِ

The sūrah's name is based on the word *kuwwirat* in the first verse. It has two themes: the resurrection and the revelation. 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever would like to see the Day of Resurrection as if with his own eyes may recite *Sūrahs at-Takweer, al-Infiṭār and al-Inshiqāq*."¹⁹⁸

Al-Qiyāmah (the Resurrection) is signaled by a universal upheaval affecting the heavens, the earth and all their inhabitants. The word *idhā* (when) has been used twelve times within these first fourteen verses in reference to the happenings of that Day. The sun will lose its light, the stars will scatter, the mountains will be destroyed, people will become unmindful of their most valuable possessions, the beasts will be gathered together, and the seas will boil. Then souls will be reunited with their bodies, the records will be laid open and the people will be called to account. Every human being will be confronted with whatever good or evil he had done during his worldly existence.

In the second part of the sūrah, the people of Makkah are informed that what the Prophet (ﷺ) is telling them is true. It is neither the words of a madman nor of a devil; rather, it is a divine revelation conveyed by a noble and trustworthy angel who was appointed by his Lord. And its purpose is to remind and guide anyone who would like to follow Allah's straight and upright path leading to eternal benefit.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ When the sun is wrapped up [in darkness]

Various meanings have been given for *kuwwirat*, which describes in the passive voice what will happen to the sun on the Last Day. Among them are: it will be darkened, its light extinguished, it will be folded up, swallowed, sunken in or shriveled. Ibn Katheer has preferred the more literal meaning: that it will be twisted, wound up or wrapped, similar to the wrapping of a turban. This would cause its light to die and disappear. But Allah knows best. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "*The sun and moon will be wrapped up on the Day of Resurrection*."¹⁹⁹ These are clear statements to any who worship these heavenly bodies that they are no more than Allah's creations and He will do away with them once they have served their purpose.

Āyah 2. وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ And when the stars fall, dispersing

The system presently holding the galaxies together will fail; the stars will break away and fall, pouring out, scattering, dispersing and losing their brilliance. Ubayy bin Ka'b deduced from verses in the Qur'ān that there would be six signs before the Day of Resurrection: "People

¹⁹⁸ Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhi and al-Ḥākim - ḥasan.

¹⁹⁹ Al Bukhārī.

will be in their markets when the sun's light will disappear. Then the stars will disperse. Then the mountains will fall upon the surface of the earth. And the earth will move, shake and become disordered. The jinn will then flee in fright to humans and humans to the jinn. And the animals, birds and wild beasts will mix together and will surge over one another." This was his opinion, and Allah knows best.

Āyah 3. وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ And when the mountains are removed

This universal event will also affect the mountains that were once firmly planted within the depths of the earth. They will be destroyed and the earth left as a level plain. Additional descriptions are given in the Qur'ān:

وَبُسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بَسًّا

*And [when] the mountains are broken down, crumbling...*²⁰⁰

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا

*And [when] the mountains are removed and will be [but] a mirage.*²⁰¹

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الْجِبَالِ فَقُلْ يَنْسِفُهَا رَبِّي نَسْفًا

*And they ask you about the mountains, so say, "My Lord will blow them away with a blast."*²⁰²

Āyah 4. وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ And when full-term she-camels are neglected

The most valued possession to Arabs of the Prophet's time was a camel ten months pregnant and nearing delivery. She would normally be protected and closely attended to, for soon she would provide her owner with an additional camel and abundant milk. But this prized possession will be completely abandoned during the pervasive terror. The neglect of such a camel indicates that people will be distracted from the most important of their worldly concerns by the overwhelming events of that Day.

Āyah 5. وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ And when the wild beasts are gathered

Some commentators were of the view that during this great upheaval panic would drive the wild beasts together, making them forget their rivalry, hostility and hunger. All kinds of beasts and animals would come together in one place.

Others have said it refers to the gathering at the time of Judgment, similar to Allah's words:

وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُمَمٌ أَمْثَلُكُمْ مَا فَرَّطْنَا فِي الْكِتَابِ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِمْ يُحْشَرُونَ.

And there is no creature on [or within] the earth or bird that flies with its wings except

²⁰⁰ Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:5.

²⁰¹ Sūrah an-Naba', 78:20.

²⁰² Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:105.

*[that they are] communities like you. We have not neglected in the Register a thing. Then unto their Lord they will be gathered.*²⁰³

Ibn 'Abbās added that everything Allah created will be gathered, even the flies; and the gathering of the animals and every other thing means their demise thereafter,²⁰⁴ except for the jinn and human beings.

Āyah 6. وَإِذَا الْبَحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ And when the seas are filled with flame

Among the happenings preceding the Resurrection are that the seas will burn. Ibn 'Abbas said, "They will become a raging fire that surrounds the people in the gathering area." And he said, "Allah will send a scorching wind which will ignite them and they will become a blazing fire." It was reported that 'Alī said to a Jew, "Where is Hell?" The man replied, "The sea." 'Alī said, "I think he spoke the truth, for Allah has said:

وَالْبَحْرُ الْمَسْجُورُ

*And by the sea set on fire...*²⁰⁵

The word *sujjirat* has been explained by commentators as: dried up, fueled, exploded or filled. Another interpretation of the āyah has been given as: "*when the seas have overflowed*," i.e., they have boiled over into one another.

Āyah 7. وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ And when the souls are paired

From here the second phase of the Resurrection is described. Two meanings may be understood from this verse. First, that every soul will be joined with its body once again, as it had been in the world. And second, that each soul will be paired with another similar soul, good with good and evil with evil. It can also mean that every soul will be joined with whatever group or sect it used to belong to in the previous life. This was the opinion of 'Umar and others of the *ṣaḥābah* and is based on verses in Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah²⁰⁶ mentioning three categories of people, as well as the ḥadīth stating that in the Hereafter a person will be with those he loves."²⁰⁷ And as Allah said:

وَيَوْمَ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ يُنْفَرُونَ.

*"And the day the Hour is established – on that Day they will separate."*²⁰⁸

In other words, they will be distinguished from one another and separated into groups according to their beliefs, their deeds or some other assessment.

²⁰³ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:38.

²⁰⁴ After justice is restored among them they will become dust, as mentioned in Sūrah an-Naba' commentary.

²⁰⁵ Sūrah aṭ-Ṭūr, 52:6.

²⁰⁶ Refer to Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:7-11.

²⁰⁷ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

²⁰⁸ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:14.

Āyahs 8-9. وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ • بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ And when the girl [who was] buried alive is asked for what sin she was killed

Al-maw'ūdah is the female infant or young girl that people of the pre-Islamic time of ignorance would dispose of by burying her in the ground. They did this due to fear that a daughter might eventually bring them shame, poverty or humiliation upon having to give her to a man in marriage. A male child was seen to be a future asset to the family and the tribe, whereas the female was a liability. Allah described this attitude elsewhere in the Qur'ān:

وَإِذَا بُشِّرَ أَحَدُهُم بِالْأُنْثَىٰ ظَلَّ وَجْهُهُ مُسْوَدًّا وَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ. يَتَوَارَىٰ مِنَ الْقَوْمِ مِنْ سُوءِ مَا بُشِّرَ بِهِ أَيُمْسِكُهُ عَلَىٰ هُونٍ أَمْ يَدُسُّهُ فِي التُّرَابِ أَلَا سَاءَ مَا يَحْكُمُونَ

*And when one of them is informed of [the birth of] a female, his face becomes dark, and he suppresses grief. He hides himself from the people because of the ill of which he has been informed. Should he keep it in humiliation or bury it in the ground? Unquestionably, evil is what they decide.*²⁰⁹

This harsh and cruel custom was explicitly prohibited in Islam and declared a major sin like any other type of murder. Allah expresses condemnation of the practice by stating that at the time of Judgement those girls who were buried alive will be questioned as to why this was done to them. Obviously this alludes to the fact that they were killed unjustly without having committed any sin or crime. Commentators have added that if the victim will be asked about her murder, what can the one guilty of it expect when he stands for the account before his Lord. Surely, he will have to confess and be duly punished for it.

Āyah 10. وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ And when the pages are spread

On that Day, the records on which people's deeds were recorded will be opened and made public. Evil plots and secrets will become known to all. This is another aspect of the great upheaval which will envelop the whole universe, and is among the fearful events which will fill hearts with dread on the Last Day. Scholars from the *tābi'een* included some additional information derived from the Qur'ān. *Adh-Dhahḥāk* said, "Every person will be given his page in his right hand or his left hand." And *Qatādah* said, "O son of Adam, it is recorded, then it is rolled up; then it will be handed to you on the Day of Resurrection. So let every person look to what he dictates to be written on his page."

Āyah 11. وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ And when the sky is stripped away

And among the great events which will engulf the universe at the time of the Resurrection is that the familiar protecting and life-sustaining cover of atmosphere surrounding the earth will be removed, peeled off; and the heavens will be separated from the earth. People will then be separated from all that was familiar to them and the universe will have undergone a total transformation.

²⁰⁹ Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:58-9.

Āyah 12. وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ And when the Hellfire is set ablaze

The Qur'ān confirms that Hell has already been created and is waiting to receive the wicked who did not repent from their sins.²¹⁰ It will be ignited during this universal upheaval and then fueled with the people who enter it, along with the stone idols and false gods they had worshipped.²¹¹ Abū Hurayrah reported: "When the Prophet (ﷺ) said, 'Your [ordinary] fire is one of seventy portions of the Hellfire,' someone asked, 'O Messenger of Allah, would not this [worldly fire] be sufficient [to burn the evildoers]?' Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) replied, 'The Hellfire has sixty-nine more portions than ordinary fire, and all of them are as hot as this [worldly fire].'"²¹²

Āyah 13. وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ And when Paradise is brought near,

Paradise has also been created and it is being attended by angels. Allah has described it as being "Prepared for al-muttaqeen (the righteous)."²¹³ As its inhabitants approach they will find its gates have been opened to receive them. It will be brought near to honor them, and so they can observe it and rejoice before entering.

Āyah 14. عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْضَرَتْ A soul will [then] know what it has brought [with it].

Allah informs mankind that when all of the aforementioned has taken place, every individual will become fully aware of each deed he did during his lifetime on earth as well as the benefit and harm that resulted from his deeds. *What it has brought* refers to all that was done in the worldly life, considering that one's deeds accompany the soul to the next life. As described in other āyahs:

يَوْمَ تَجِدُ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ مُّحْضَرًا وَمَا عَمِلَتْ مِنْ سُوءٍ تَوَدُّ لَوْ أَنَّ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَهُ أَمَدًا بَعِيدًا

*On the Day every soul will find what it has done of good present [before it] and what it has done of evil, it will wish that between itself and that [evil] was a great distance.*²¹⁴

يُنَبِّئُ الْإِنْسَانُ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِمَا قَدَّمَ وَأَخَّرَ

*Man will be informed that Day of what he sent ahead [of deeds] and what he kept back.*²¹⁵

²¹⁰ Refer to Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:131 and Sūrah an-Naba', 78:21-22.

²¹¹ Refer to Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:24, Sūrah at-Taḥreem, 66:6, Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:98-99 and Sūrah ash-Shu'arā', 26:91-95.

²¹² Al-Bukhārī.

²¹³ Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:133.

²¹⁴ Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:30.

²¹⁵ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:13.

Āyahs 15-18. فَلَا أَقْسِمُ بِالْخُنَّسِ · الْجَوَارِ الْكُنَّسِ · وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ · وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ

So I swear by the retreating stars – those that run [their courses] and disappear; and by the night as it closes in and by the dawn when it breathes

The word "*lā*" preceding the verb has been used to emphasize the oath that Allah swears by several notable phenomena. *Al-khunnas* are the stars or planets that withdraw or disappear in the light of day. After a brief absence they reappear at another point and become *al-jawār al-kunnas*, sweeping across the sky in swift movement before setting. Then He swears by the night whose darkness gradually descends and covers everything. '*As'asa* suggests gently pressing down, but it may also mean the opposite, i.e., gradually lifting or departing.²¹⁶ Both interpretations can be found in Qur'ānic commentaries. Finally, Allah swears by the daybreak when life is renewed. The word *tanaffasa* describes the early morning as breathing – as though it is alive, spreading its light and causing living things to stir and awaken. It conveys a sense of energy and activity.

The oath sworn here is to confirm and emphasize the nature of the revelation, the messenger-angel bringing it and the human messenger receiving and delivering it. This is clarified in the verses that follow.

Āyahs 19-21. إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ · ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ · مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ

[That] indeed, it is a word [conveyed by] a noble messenger possessed of power, and with the Owner of the Throne is secure [in position], obeyed there [in the heavens] and trustworthy.

The object of Allah's oath is confirmation that this Qur'ān is a statement from Him which is conveyed by a noble and reliable messenger, the angel Jibreel (Gabriel), who had been granted distinct power and authority by Allah and is obeyed by the other angels and inhabitants of the heavens.

Ibn 'Abbās mentioned an example of Jibreel's power: how he lifted all the wicked people who opposed Lūṭ with two of his wings and threw them down against the earth. And the power of his authority was demonstrated during the Prophet's night ascent (*mirāj*) when he ordered the keepers of Paradise and the keepers of Hell to open their gates and they did so. Qatādah added, "He is not one of the ordinary angels, but from the high ranking, prestigious angels. He is distinguished and so was chosen for the delivery of this magnificent message." He is also described in Āyah 21 as being *muṭā'* (obeyed by others) and *ameen* (trustworthy), the same qualities attributed to Muḥammad (ﷺ) among human beings. Both messengers conveyed the words of Allah precisely as He commanded.

²¹⁶ Scholars of the Arabic language have explained that the word '*as'asa* can be used to mean both advancing and retreating.

Āyahs 22-23. وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ • وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ And your companion is not at all mad. And he has already seen him [i.e., Jibreel] in the clear horizon.

Moreover, Allah declares that His human messenger, Muḥammad (ﷺ), was not possessed by jinn as the disbelievers claimed. On the contrary, he had been blessed with extraordinary intellect, wisdom and dignity. Moreover, he had seen the angel and received the message directly from him. And he had also seen him on the eastern horizon in his true angelic form as Allah created him, with his 600 wings extended and covering the skyline.²¹⁷

Āyahs 24-25. وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ • وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ And he is not a withholder of [knowledge of] the unseen. And it is not the word of a devil, expelled [from the heavens].

Allah affirms that Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), who was acknowledged even by his enemies to be honest and trustworthy, had not withheld or neglected to convey anything that was revealed to him of the Qur'ān. He could not logically be accused of doing so. On the contrary, he announced it, conveyed and offered it to everyone who would listen. And Allah concludes His oath with denial of the claim by disbelievers that the Qur'ān had been communicated to him by a devil. As explained in other verses:

وَمَا تَنْزَلَتْ بِهِ الشَّيَاطِينُ • وَمَا يَنْبَغِي لَهُمْ وَمَا يَسْتَطِيعُونَ • إِنَّهُمْ عَنِ السَّمْعِ لَمْعَزُولُونَ.

*And the devils have not brought it [i.e., the revelation] down. It is not allowable for them, nor would they be able. Indeed they, from [its] hearing, are isolated.*²¹⁸

Āyah 26. فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ So where are you going?

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic urges his servants to consider the course of their lives and the consequences of their decisions. The disbelievers are warned that they are distancing themselves from the truth and from their Lord with their denials and false accusations. The meaning is essentially: "Toward what destination are you traveling in your rejection of the Qur'ān and your accusations against the Prophet (ﷺ)? What can you expect from that? Surely, you have strayed far from the path of your Lord." Ibn Katheer offers another meaning: "Where has your intellect gone in your denial of this Qur'ān, while it is so clear, obvious and evident as being the truth from Allah?"

Āyahs 27-28. إِنَّ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ • لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ It is not except a reminder to the worlds for whoever wills among you to take a right course.

Finally, Allah states once again that the Qur'ān is but a reminder for all mankind, to guide

²¹⁷ As described in Sūrah an-Najm, 53:6-10. The Prophet (ﷺ) later saw Jibreel once again in his true form, as mentioned in the same sūrah, 53:13-16.

²¹⁸ Sūrah ash-Shu'arā', 26:210-212. The devils were driven away and prevented from hearing the Qur'ān when it was being revealed to the Messenger of Allah, as they mentioned in Sūrah al-Jinn, 72:8-10.

those who wish to follow the right course and enable them to earn His acceptance and reward. From the beginning of its revelation in Makkah, the Qur'ān declared the universal nature of this final message; so whoever seeks guidance from his Creator must follow its instruction, for there is no longer valid guidance from Him in any other source.

It was reported that when these words were revealed, Abū Jahl²¹⁹ said, "Then the matter is up to us – if we wish to take a right course we will, and if we wish not to take a right course we will not." After that Allah revealed the following āyah:

Āyah 29. وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ And you do not will except that Allah wills – Lord of the worlds.

Everything in existence is subject to the will of Allah and no being has a will independent of His. Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "By Allah, the Arabs never wished for Islam, but Allah willed it for them."

But while every person's destiny in this life and in the Hereafter is predetermined by Allah, it is also the direct result of human choices and efforts, and this is also what Allah has willed and decreed. Ibn Katheer said, "Allah is most knowledgeable of those who deserve to be guided. So He makes guidance easy for them and predestines for them that which will be a cause for it. But those who deserve misguidance, He withholds guidance from them." Other commentators explained that those undeserving of guidance are the ones who ignore and reject it.

Although human deeds are decreed by their Creator and known to Him, He does not compel anyone to take a particular direction. Rather, He gives options concerning various courses of action, which means that man's decisions are within the framework of Allah's will.

The Creator of mankind provided guidance, but He willed to honor His servants with a free choice regarding whether or not to follow His instruction. Additionally, He informed them about the consequences of that choice, be it right or wrong, good or evil. The decision, by Allah's will, belongs to each individual, who will eventually reap the fruits of his choice. And hence, by Allah's will, every man is responsible for his own ultimate destiny.

²¹⁹ An uncle of the Prophet (ﷺ) who was a malicious enemy of Islam.

سُورَةُ الْاِنْفِطَارِ (82) SŪRAH AL-İNFİTĀR

The sūrah's name is derived from the verb *infaṭarat* in the first verse. It was revealed in about the same period as *at-Takweer* and shares its theme of *al-Qiyāmah* (the Resurrection).²²⁰

It begins by describing some events of *Yawm al-Qiyamah*: the breaking up of the heaven, the scattering of the stars, the eruption of the seas and the opening of the graves. The Qur'ān states that when all this occurs, every individual will see and know the truth of whatever he had done on earth. It then asks man what deluded him away from his generous Lord – the one who brought him into existence and favored him with the best and most balanced form of all His creatures.

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, warns humanity not to assume they can escape accountability for their deeds, for each one of them is being recorded precisely and completely. The forceful conclusion states that the appointed time of resurrection and account will surely come; and then both the righteous and the wicked will be justly compensated for all they sought to do during their worldly lives. On that awesome Day, every creation will be utterly helpless, and power will belong to no one but Allah.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-5.

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انْفَطَرَتْ • وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انتَثَرَتْ • وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ •
وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ • عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ.

When the sky breaks apart, and when the stars fall, dispersing, and when the seas are erupted, and when the graves are scattered, a soul will [then] know what it has put forth and kept back.

These first five verses comprise a single sentence. It states that the order of the universe will undergo great changes and upheavals. The heavens will disintegrate and the stars will break away from their orbits. The seas will explode or burst forth, as described by Ibn 'Abbās, overflowing and mixing. The earth will open, exposing and expelling the contents of its graves, whose inhabitants are summoned and convened for the account and judgment, unable to refuse. Each soul will then be fully aware of whatever obligations it had fulfilled or neglected, of the effects and consequences it left behind in the world²²¹ and of what it sent forth to the Hereafter to be witnessed in the record of deeds.

²²⁰ Refer to the ḥadith quoted in the introduction to Sūrah at-Takweer.

²²¹ As stated in the ḥadith: "Whoever begins a good practice in Islam will have the reward of it and the reward of all those who act on it. And whoever begins a bad practice in Islam will have the evil of it and the evil of all those that act on it." (Muslim)

Āyahs 6-8. يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ . الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ . فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ

O mankind, what has deceived you concerning your Lord, the Generous, who created you, proportioned you and balanced you? In whatever form He willed He assembled you.

Here, the Qur'ān reproaches man by asking him what could be of such importance that it distracts him from worship of his Creator who provided him with countless blessings. The question is posed: "What has seduced you, O man, into such a state that you neglect to acknowledge Him who created and sustains you? What induces you to disobey Him and then feel secure from His punishment, neither admitting His right upon you nor showing gratitude for the innumerable favors bestowed upon you? What prevents you, while you depend upon Him for your very existence, from repenting and living as He directed? His great bounty and generosity does not mean that you can be unmindful of His justice.

Allah created man with a well-proportioned upright form. Balance is evident in man's physical, mental and spiritual components. The human being possesses these distinguishing qualities due to the will and unlimited ability of his Creator; yet generally, man remains negligent, ungrateful and defiant. He should not be deluded, however; for his very existence and unique form is adequate proof of the divine will and creative power. Allah confirmed:

وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ فَقَدَرَهُ تَقْدِيرًا

*"And He created each thing and determined it with [precise] determination."*²²²

Ibn Katheer remarked, "This is a warning from Allah to mankind. The question was not asked to get a response as some people suppose – as if the generous Lord is asking them so they will answer, 'It was his pride that deceived him.' The meaning is: "O son of Adam, what deludes you concerning your generous and noble Lord, so that you dare to disobey Him and respond to Him with that which is unbecoming?"

Some of the ṣaḥābah and tābi'een did offer replies, however. Ibn 'Umar said, "By Allah, it is man's ignorance that deceives him." Qatādah said, "It is none but that enemy, the Shayṭān." Others allowed that they might be deceived by their Lord's invisibility or His extreme generosity, adding that Allah has mentioned His name, *al-Kareem*, to remind that His generosity should not be met with denial and evil deeds, but rather with gratitude and obedience.

The individual human features by which one is identified and recognized are apportioned by Allah's will. *Rakkaba* indicates the putting together of component parts to form a whole. From an infinite range of possibilities, Allah selects that which is appropriate for each of His creations and assembles them accordingly.²²³

The Prophet (ﷺ) one day spat into the palm of his hand and put his finger into it, saying, "Allah ta'ālā says, 'O son of Adam, how can you consider [anything] impossible for Me when I have created you from the likes of this? Then I proportioned you and balanced your creation

²²² Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:2.

²²³ For example, the parts of a DNA strand are genes, which number some 100,000 in a single human cell. These are assembled to form an individual who is unlike any other.

so that you walk within two garments; and the earth has a burial place for you. So you gathered [wealth] and withheld it, until when death approached, you said, "I will give charity." But where is the time for charity?"²²⁴

Āyah 9. كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالَّذِينَ No! But you deny the Recompense.

What deludes man from his Lord is alluded to in the statement that mankind (in general) denies the truth of the account and judgment in the Hereafter; therefore feeling no need for Allah's acceptance. Man's disbelief in the Hereafter is precisely the cause of his boldness and disregard for obligations. His heart and conscience are dead. But he will not be punished immediately. The generous Lord grants time for reflection and repentance.

Āyahs 10-12. وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ . كَرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ . يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ And indeed, [appointed] over you are keepers, noble and recording. They know whatever you do.

Allah, the Exalted, confirms that there will be an account in the Hereafter by informing man that his record is being prepared during his life on earth by impartial and honest recording angels who register every deed, good or evil, and not a particle of good or evil will be ignored. The angels are commanded to write down every word and action, although Allah is aware of that even before it occurs. It is a manifestation of His precise and perfect justice.

An angel on the right side records the good deeds, while one on the left records the sins. The wrongdoers are warned:

أَمْ يَحْسِبُونَ أَنَّا لَا نَسْمَعُ سِرَّهُمْ وَنَجْوَاهُمْ بَلَىٰ وَرُسُلْنَا لَدَيْهِمْ يَكْتُبُونَ

*Or do they think that We hear not their secrets and their private conversations? Yes [We do], and Our messengers are with them, recording.*²²⁵

Āyahs 13-16. إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ . وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ . يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ . وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ

Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure; and indeed, the wicked will be in Hellfire. They will [enter to] burn therein on the Day of Recompense, and never therefrom will they be absent.

Those shown to be righteous on the Day of Judgement will be rewarded with an eternal life of pleasure in Paradise. They had worked hard, seeking the acceptance of their Lord.

But the wicked souls who rejected Him will be convicted of their crimes and then driven into Hell to burn in its blazing fire. They will find no respite therein, nor can they escape from its torture. As another āyah states:

²²⁴ Aḥmad and Ibn Mājah.

²²⁵ Sūrah az-Zukhruf, 43:80.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَهُمْ نَارُ جَهَنَّمَ لَا يُقْضَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ فَيَمُوتُوا وَلَا يُخَفَّفُ عَنْهُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِهَا كَذَلِكَ نَجْزِي كُلَّ كَافِرٍ.

*And for those who reject belief will be the fire of Hell. It is not decreed for them that they may die, nor will its torment be lightened for them. Thus do We recompense every ungrateful one.*²²⁶

Āyahs 17-19.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ . ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ . يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِّنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ.

And what can make you know what is the Day of Recompense? Then, what can make you know what is the Day of Recompense? It is the Day when a soul will not possess for another soul [power to do] a thing; and the command, that Day, is [entirely] with Allah.

Here, Allah *ta'ālā* highlights the importance of the Day of Resurrection and Recompense by posing the same question about it twice. Repetition implies the meaning: "You cannot possibly imagine its terrible reality." It will be the Day when all created beings will be deprived of their freedom and abilities and every person will be totally helpless, without power to benefit another or even himself. Allah alone will prevail and will issue His decree about the fate of every soul with perfect justice. Similarly, He has said:

مَالِكِ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

*[He is] Sovereign of the Day of Recompense.*²²⁷

الْمَلِكُ يَوْمَئِذٍ الْحَقُّ لِلرَّحْمَنِ

*True sovereignty, that Day, is for the Most Merciful.*²²⁸

²²⁶ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:36.

²²⁷ Sūrah al-Fāṭiḥah, 1:4.

²²⁸ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:26.

سُورَةُ الْمُطَفِّفِينَ (83) SŪRAH AL-MUṬAFFIFEEN

In this sūrah, Allah (ﷻ) declares war against those who cheat others and take their rights. Its title is derived from the word in the first verse: *al-muṭaffifeen*. There were differences among the *ṣaḥābah* and their students as to whether the sūrah first came down in Makkah or Madinah. One view by Ibn 'Abbās was that with the exception of the last eight verses, it was revealed after the arrival of the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in Madinah to remedy the practice of giving short weight and measure that was widespread among its merchants at the time. Others held that the entire sūrah is Makkan.

The sūrah's main topic is and showing the consequence of people's actions during their time on earth. In the initial verses, traders are severely warned about the evil of deception in their commercial dealings. This is mentioned as one example of the many ills prevalent in society. Unless people realize that they will have to account for every deed they did in the world, they will not be completely ethical in their daily affairs. While some might practice honesty as a beneficial business policy, their principles can easily be abandoned under pressure or whenever benefit is no longer perceived. Only certain belief in the Day of Account can keep one continuously on the straight path.

After relating moral integrity to the outcome in the Hereafter, the verses mention that the deeds of the wicked and the righteous are presently being recorded in a register within their ultimate destinations of Hell and Paradise. And finally, the believers have been reassured and the nonbelievers warned that those who are harming and humiliating Allah's believing servants in this life will meet with a most terrible end as a result of their conduct; and the believers will be pleased and satisfied when they witness that.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ • الَّذِينَ إِذَا اكْتَالُوا عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ • وَإِذَا كَالُواهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوا لَهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ •

Woe to those who give less [than due] – who, when they take a measure from people, take in full. But when they give by measure or by weight to them, they cause loss.

Ibn 'Abbas reported, "When the Prophet (ﷺ) came to Madinah, the people there were the worst regarding measurement."²²⁹ So Allah revealed: *Woe to al-muṭaffifeen*. After that, they began to give proper measure."²³⁰

Al-muṭaffifeen are those who are stingy when dealing in weight or measurement with the intent to gain some small profit unlawfully, as explained in Āyahs 2 and 3. But instead of advantage, their Lord has promised them devastation and destruction, which is what is meant

²²⁹ Meaning that they used to cheat.

²³⁰ An-Nasā'i and Ibn Mājah.

by "wayl."²³¹ Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, warns all those who would deprive others of their right, even when it is so little as not to be noticed.

The command to give full measure and weight with justice is found in other verses of the Qur'ān.²³² And Allah revealed that He had destroyed the people of Shu'ayb because of their dishonesty in weight and measurement.²³³

Āyahs 4-6. لَا يَظُنُّ أُولَئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ • لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ • يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Do they not think that they will be resurrected for a tremendous Day – the Day when mankind will stand before the Lord of the worlds?

Do such people not fear the resurrection and standing for account before their Creator, who knows every concealed matter and every innermost secret? It will be a Day full of terror, anxiety and dread; and whoever is convicted on that Day will be driven into the blazing Hellfire. All people are being reminded here that they will indeed be re-created for the Day of Judgement, when each of them will stand individually, helpless and exposed before Allah.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"This will be the Day that mankind stands before the Lord of the worlds for so long that one of them will be submerged up to the middle of his ears in perspiration."*²³⁴ And 'Ā'ishah reported that he (ﷺ) would seek Allah's refuge from the hardship of standing on *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*. It was reported that once 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar began reciting the sūrah, and when he came to these words he wept so much he was unable to continue.

Āyahs 7-9. كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ • وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ • كِتَابٌ مَرْفُومٌ

No! Indeed, the record of the wicked is in sijjeen. And what can make you know what is sijjeen? [It is their destination recorded in] a register inscribed.

No, it is not as they think; they will surely be called to account. It is written in their records that the destination of sinners and criminals will be *sijjeen*, the deepest depths of Hell. It may be understood as well that their record is located there. Some early scholars defined *sijjeen* as the seventh earth.²³⁵ The word is derived from *sijn*, which means a confined, compressed place or a prison. Here it means the unceasing hostile conditions within an eternal prison of humiliation and torment.²³⁶ The question which follows (Āyah 8) further emphasizes a situation of horror and misery that cannot be imagined.

²³¹ A Bedouin reproached the caliph, 'Abdul Malik bin Marwān, saying, "You know how Allah threatened those who deceive concerning weight and measure." He meant: So how about you, who takes people's wealth without any measure?

²³² Specifically, Sūrahs al-An'ām 6:152, al-Isrā' 17:35 and ar-Raḥmān 55:9.

²³³ See Sūrah Hūd, 11:84-95.

²³⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. A similar more detailed ḥadīth was narrated by Muslim and at-Tirmidhi.

²³⁵ Based on the statement: *"It is Allah who created seven heavens, and of the earth, the like of them."* (Sūrah aṭ-Ṭalāq, 65:12)

²³⁶ A similar description can be found in Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:13.

The phrase of Āyah 9, *Kitābun marqūm* (A register inscribed), has been interpreted by some commentators to be the book in which the evil deeds of the wicked are recorded. But Ibn Katheer maintained that this is not the answer to that question. He clarified, "It is only an explanation that the destination of *sijjeen* is decreed for them in that register. It is already inscribed – written and completed; no one can add anything to it or remove anything from it." The record will remain unopened until the Day of Account.

Āyahs 10-13.

وَيَلَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ • الَّذِينَ يُكَذِّبُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ • وَمَا يُكْذَبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ • إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِ آيَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ.

Woe, that Day, to the deniers who deny the Day of Recompense. And none deny it except every sinful transgressor. When Our verses are recited to him, he says, "Legends of the former peoples."

In addition to *al-muṭaffifeen*, Allah promises destruction and devastation on the Day of Recompense to those who had denied its occurrence while on earth. It is an eternal Day when the Lord of all existence will compensate every soul in full for all that it earned and deserved, for He is *Māliki Yawm id-Deen*.²³⁷

The verses confirm that the deniers are neither uninformed nor unaware; rather, they refuse their Lord's revelation due to their sinful nature. They dislike and reject the concept of resurrection and accountability because it is not compatible with their worldly ambitions. So they refuse to believe, asserting that the Qur'ān is merely a repetition of ancient legends rather than divine revelation, and thus ignore its guidance. This has been mentioned in several preceding sūrahs, such as the words of Allah:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ مَاذَا أُنْزِلَ رَبُّكُمْ قَالَُوا أَسَاطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ.

*And when it is said to them, "What has your Lord sent down?" they say, "Legends of the former peoples."*²³⁸

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ.

No! Rather, the stain has covered their hearts of that which they were earning.

The exclamation *kallā* (meaning: no, not so, certainly not) denotes an emphatic denial of the preceding allegation. It means here: The matter is not at all as they claim when they say that the Qur'ān is only a collection of ancient legends. Rather, it is the Word of Allah the Exalted, His revelation to mankind through His Messenger (ﷺ).

They deny the revelation because their hearts had been coated by the stains of sin until they became hard and unresponsive. The verb, *rāna* indicates that the heart became corroded or

²³⁷ Owner of the Day of Recompense. Refer to Verse 4 of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah.

²³⁸ Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:24. See also 6:25, 8:31, 23:83, 25:5, 27:68, 46:17 and 68:15.

covered with rust, stain or dirt. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) explained, saying, "When the servant commits a sin, a black mark is etched onto his heart, but if he ceases and seeks Allah's forgiveness, then his heart is wiped clean. But if he repeats it, then it (the black stain) increases until it eventually envelops the heart. This is the stain which Allah has mentioned in His Book."²³⁹ Commentators have described the stain as sin upon sin, which finally blackens the heart until no light of truth can penetrate into it. The heart becomes blinded and dies so that the soul then rejects truth and guidance altogether.

Āyahs 15-17.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ • ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ • ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ.

No! Indeed, from their Lord, that Day, they will be partitioned. Then indeed, they will [enter and] burn in the Hellfire. Then it will be said [to them], "This is what you used to deny."

As a result of their denial and rejection of their Lord, the wretched unbelievers will be deprived of the greatest blessing of seeing Him on the Day of Resurrection. To be excluded and alienated from Allah in the Hereafter is the worst deprivation and gravest punishment; and within the depths of *sijjeen* He is completely concealed from them. Imām ash-Shāfiʿī mentioned that in this āyah is confirmation that the believers will see Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, on that Day. This has been confirmed in several authentic hadiths. And Allah Himself has said:

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاطِرَةٌ

*[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord.*²⁴⁰

In addition to isolation from their Lord and His mercy, the wicked deniers will be forced to enter the Hellfire, wherein they are rebuked and taunted with the reminder that this is what they used to deny.

Āyahs 18-21.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْأَبْرَارِ لَفِي عَلَيِّنَ • وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عَلَيُّونَ • كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ • يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

No! Indeed, the record of the righteous is in ‘illiyyūn.²⁴¹ And what can make you know what is ‘illiyyūn? [It is their destination recorded in] a register inscribed, which is witnessed by those brought near [to Allah].

Kallā again refutes the claim that people will not stand before Allah for account in the Hereafter. For it is written in the records of the righteous (*al-abrār*) that their destination will be ‘illiyyūn, the highest elevations of Paradise. The Qur’ān provides two contrasting images so

²³⁹ Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā’i.

²⁴⁰ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:22-23.

²⁴¹ ‘Illīyyeen in the Arabic text reflects a grammatical change due to its position in the sentence.

that a comparison may be drawn. 'Illiyūn is derived from the word 'ulūww, which means elevation and grandeur. The higher something rises and ascends, the greater it becomes.

Allah then gives it additional emphasis by saying, "And what can make you know what is 'illiyūn?" The words, *Kitābun marqūm* again refer to the register of deeds, within which is inscribed 'illiyūn, the destination of the righteous. Early scholars considered it to be the seventh heaven or Paradise itself.

The record of good deeds is witnessed by *al-muqarrabūn* (those brought near to Allah), meaning the angels. Ibn 'Abbās said, "Those nearest to Allah in each heaven will witness it." This is an aspect of honor for the righteous.

Āyahs 22-24. إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ • عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ • تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ

Indeed, the righteous will be in pleasure, on adorned couches, observing. You will recognize in their faces the radiance of pleasure.

On *Yawm al-Qiyamah* the righteous believers will enter Paradise to dwell eternally. They will experience every kind of pleasure therein and will be looking out from elevated positions of honor, beauty and comfort at their kingdom and the endless bounties it contains.

Another interpretation is that they will be looking at Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, unlike the wicked, who will be completely partitioned from Him. A glow of satisfaction and happiness will be evident in their faces and will be noticed by others.

Āyahs 25-28.

يُسْقَوْنَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ • خَتَامُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَافِسُونَ • وَمِزَاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ • عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ.

They will be given to drink [pure] wine [which was] sealed. The last of it is musk; so for this let the competitors compete. And its mixture is of Tasneem, a spring from which those near [to Allah] will drink.

They will sit in luxury and be given pure and delicious drink from the wine of Paradise. *Raḥeeq* is one of the names of the wine in Paradise. Ibn 'Abbās said, "Allah will give the wine a pleasant scent for them, and the last thing He will place in it is musk; so it will be sealed with musk."

Here, the description is interrupted with an instruction: Let anyone who would strive for something strive for this. Similarly, Allah has said:

لِمَثَلٍ هَذَا فَلَْيَعْمَلِ الْعَامِلُونَ.

*For the likes of this let the workers work.*²⁴²

The Hereafter is most worthy of one's efforts because its existence is of limitless duration, while life on earth is limited. The comforts of this world are also limited, while the pleasures

²⁴² Sūrah aṣ-Ṣaffāt, 37:61.

of Paradise are eternal and beyond imagination.

The wine of Paradise will be mixed with a delicious drink from a spring called *Tasneem*. It is described as a fountain from which those who have been brought near to Allah will drink, and it is especially for them. Ibn Mas'ūd and Ibn 'Abbās were of the view that those nearest to Allah would have this drink in pure form, while those of lesser ranks would have it mixed. And Allah knows best.

Āyahs 29-32.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ . وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ . وَإِذَا انْقَلَبُوا إِلَى أَهْلِهِمْ انْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ . وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُّونَ

Indeed, those who committed crimes used to laugh at those who believed. And when they passed by them, they would exchange derisive glances. And when they returned to their people, they would return jesting. And when they saw them, they would say, "Indeed, those are [truly] lost."

The past tense is used here to convey a sense of looking back from the Hereafter to recall what had happened to the righteous believers in this world.

During their earthly life, the believers had suffered much harm and abuse at the hands of the disbelievers, who despised and insulted them. They would laugh at them rudely and mock them openly and behind their backs. Whenever they passed some of the believers, they would wink at one another in contempt of them because many of the Muslims were poor and weak. They would joke about them while living in comfort with their families.

And the arrogant nonbelievers declared that the believers were lost and misguided because they followed the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). Those deniers of truth were setting their own standards of guidance, asserting that they were correct and the believers were the ones astray. Their values totally reversed, they felt no shame about announcing their irrational allegation.

While describing the disbelievers of Makkah, these verses depict an attitude common to people who reject faith in every age. They cannot tolerate reformers among them and vent their anger and resentment against the sincere believing servants of Allah. Yet by doing so, they are only increasing His reward to them.

Āyah 33. وَمَا أُرْسِلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ حَافِظِينَ But they had not been sent as guardians over them.

The Qur'ān concludes the previous illustration with a statement of fact which is so obvious that it shows a touch of sarcasm. The deniers and rejecters had not been appointed to watch over the believers, nor were they held responsible for their manners and deeds. So why were they making them the focus of their attention and involving themselves in matters that did not concern them? No one had asked their opinion, so what pretext did they have to concern themselves with evaluations of the believers and to express their uninvited assessments?

Āyahs 34-36.

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ . عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ . هَلْ تُؤْتَوْنَ الْكَفَّارُ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

So today those who believed are laughing at the unbelievers – on adorned couches, observing. Have the unbelievers [not] been rewarded [this Day] for what they used to do?

Allah compensates everyone in the Hereafter according to the nature of his deeds. There, when the Judgement has taken place and the accounts have been settled, it will be the believers who laugh at the deniers for their foolishness in rejecting the message. Now the tables are turned, and it is a just and fitting end for both parties.²⁴³

The hearts of the believers will be satisfied when they observe and witness the humiliation of the arrogant ones who used to ridicule them. Ibn 'Abbās commented that the wall between Paradise and Hell has doors that will be opened so that the believers, reclining on their couches, can observe the condition of the unbelievers in the Hellfire whenever they please.

A second interpretation, as given in Āyah 23, is that they will see and be looking at their Lord from their places of honor.

فِي مَقْعَدٍ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِكٍ مُّقْتَدِرٍ.

*In a seat of honor near a Sovereign, Perfect in Ability.*²⁴⁴

The sūrah ends with a question posed as confirmation that the disbelievers will certainly be recompensed for all that they did and will be paid in full for their wicked acts. Their punishment is sarcastically described as reward.

These final verses encourage believers to persevere and not be dissuaded by ridicule and persecution, for the outcome of the Hereafter is far superior to worldly gains and victories, and far more enduring.

²⁴³ A further description of this condition can be found in Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:108-111.

²⁴⁴ Sūrah al-Qamar, 54:55.

SŪRAH AL-INSHIQĀQ (84) سُورَةُ الْاِنْشِقَاقِ

The sūrah's title is derived from the word *inshaqqat* in the first verse, and refers to the splitting of the heavens. It is one of the early sūrahs revealed in Makkah whose theme is the Resurrection and the Hereafter.²⁴⁵

The first verses describe the submission and obedience of the heavens and earth to the command of Allah on *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*. The sūrah's powerful opening is followed by a reminder of man's return to his Creator. Whether he is aware of it or not, every individual is moving progressively toward an inevitable meeting with his Lord. He will go through significant stages throughout his life, and in his transfer from the life of this world to that of the Hereafter, where he will find his final abode.

At the time of Judgement people will be separated into two groups. Those whose records are taken in their right hands will be forgiven and have an easy reckoning. But those whose records are given to them behind their backs will long for death but will not be relieved with it; instead, they will be cast into the blazing fire of Hell.

Finally, there is a suggestion that something is surely wrong with those who reject faith and ignore the Qur'ān. And the righteous believers are given good tidings of unlimited reward.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-5.

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ انشَقَّتْ • وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ • وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ • وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ • وَأَذْنَتْ لِرَبِّهَا وَحُقَّتْ

When the sky has been split [open] and listened to its Lord and was obligated [to do so], and when the earth has been extended and cast out that within it and relinquished it, and has listened to its Lord and was obligated [to do so]...

Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, describes certain events of the Day of Resurrection (*al-Qiyāmah*), when the heavens and earth will listen to the command of their Lord. What is meant by "listening" in these verses is response. They will have heard Allah's command and will have inclined immediately to willing obedience. The compliance of the heavens and earth is a manifestation of conscious and dutiful submission, humility and tranquility. They hear and obey, and cannot do otherwise.

The heaven listens to its Lord and obeys His command to split open and tear apart, as it is compelled to do. And the earth extends, spreads and opens, revealing everything that had been buried therein. Ibn Katheer explained that the earth will expel the dead that were buried inside it and it empty itself of them. Other commentators added that it will cast out everything within it: treasures of the earth, remains of the dead and even the secrets once held in their hearts. It will give them up in obedience to Allah, and become empty.

²⁴⁵ Refer to the ḥadith quoted in the introduction to Sūrah at-Takweer.

Āyah 6. يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدًّا فَمَلَأَٰقِيهِ O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.

Allah addresses all of humanity, reminding them that man labors hard during his worldly life, accepting responsibilities and exerting himself to attain his goals. Laboring and striving is part of this life on earth, although the forms exertion will always differ in nature and method. As Allah has said:

إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّىٰ.

*Indeed, your efforts are diverse.*²⁴⁶

Every person is pursuing desires and aspirations throughout his life. At the same time, he is progressing steadily toward death, day by day, hour by hour, minute by minute. This will be followed by the meeting with his Lord, who will take precise account of all he worked for and recompense him in full.

One group of scholars refer the object pronoun back to "your Lord." Thus, they consider the āyah to mean: "...and you will meet Him." This implies that He will reward or punish you for your work and you will be repaid in full for your deeds by Him.

Others refer it back to the exertion, so that the meaning would be: "...and you will meet it," i.e., whatever you accomplished and intended of good or evil. You will find it all waiting for you in the Hereafter, and you will perceive the result and true value of all you had worked for. Evidence for this is found in the ḥadīth qudsi where the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) related, "Jibreel said, 'O Muḥammad, live as long as you will, for indeed you will die. And love whom you will, for indeed you will be leaving him. And do what you will, for indeed you will be meeting it.'"²⁴⁷

Therefore, both of these two interpretations are correct and in harmony.

Āyahs 7-9. فَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوْتِيَ كِتَابَهُ بِيَمِينِهِ . فَسَوْفَ يُحَاسَبُ حِسَابًا يَسِيرًا . وَيَنْقَلِبُ إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا

Then as for he who is given his record in his right hand, he will be judged with an easy account and return to his people in happiness.

The righteous will then be judged leniently; each one will have been given a good record in his right hand. This means that he will not be cross-examined about the specifics of his deeds. For whoever is questioned like that will be destroyed. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) once stated, "Whoever is interrogated about the account will be punished." 'Ā'ishah asked, "But did Allah not say: "He will be judged with an easy account?" He (ﷺ) replied, "That is not the account; it is only his being shown the record. Whoever is interrogated about the account on Yawm al-Qiyāmah will be punished."²⁴⁸ This refers to a person who tries to deny something of his account or dispute it. The truth will then be manifest and Allah will judge accordingly.

²⁴⁶ Sūrah al-Layl, 92:4.

²⁴⁷ Musnad at-Ṭayālisi.

²⁴⁸ Aḥmad, al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The easy account has also been described according to a ḥadīth narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim in which, after enumerating the errors of His believing servant, Allah (ﷻ) will tell him, "I concealed it for you in the world, and I forgive you for it today."

After the receiving their records in their right hands and the announcement of their success, the righteous believers will pass on quickly to the reward awaiting them in Paradise, and will joyfully return to those of their companions who had preceded them.²⁴⁹

Āyahs 10-12. وَأَمَّا مَنْ أُوتِيَ كِتَابَهُ وَرَاءَ ظَهْرِهِ • فَسَوْفَ يَدْعُو ثُبُورًا • وَيَصْلَى سَعِيرًا

But as for he who is given his record behind his back, he will cry out for destruction and [enter to] burn in a Blaze.

The wicked will receive their records in their left hands, behind their backs in shame and disgrace.²⁵⁰ The heedless one who lived his life on earth working hard but disobeying Allah and ignoring His prohibitions will then realize his fate. He will be filled with terror and despair, for he now comprehends that what lies in front of him is but a greater suffering which is never-ending.

Seeing his own annihilation as the only means of escape, he calls out, pleading for death and destruction. But he is not granted this mercy, and instead is driven to burn in the Hellfire.

Āyahs 13-15. إِنَّهُ كَانَ فِي أَهْلِهِ مَسْرُورًا • إِنَّهُ ظَنَّ أَنْ لَنْ يَحُورَ • بَلَى إِنَّ رَبَّهُ كَانَ بِهِ بَصِيرًا

Indeed, he had [once] been among his people in happiness. Indeed, he had thought he would never return [to Allah]. But yes! Indeed, his Lord was ever, of him, Seeing.

After describing the condition of those who enter the Fire, the Qur'ān mentions the cause for it – their attitude during the previous life on earth. This is conveyed as if one is looking back from the Hereafter toward the previous existence.

Allah had given those people contentment and pleasure in the world, but because they did not believe they would return to Him they lived careless and sinful lives. They fulfilled their desires at any cost, cheated, oppressed and taught their children the same. They supposed they would never have to appear before Allah to render an account of their deeds because to them, resurrection was inconceivable. But in fact, their Lord had been testing and observing them, and now they knew that they would have to pay for their transgressions.

Their condition reflects the meaning of a ḥadīth qudsi wherein Allah, the Exalted said, "By My might and My majesty, I will not combine for My servant two securities nor two fears. If he feels secure from Me in this world, I will make him fearful on the Day I gather My servants; and if he fears Me in this world, I will make him secure on the Day I gather My servants,"²⁵¹

²⁴⁹ Further details are given in Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah, 69:19-24.

²⁵⁰ Their misery is described in Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah, 69:25-32.

²⁵¹ Al-Bazzār – hasan.

Āyahs 16-19. فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالشَّفَقِ . وَاللَّيْلِ وَمَا وَسَقَ . وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا اتَّسَقَ . لَتَرْكَبُنَّ طَبَقًا عَن طَبَقٍ

So I swear by the twilight glow, and the night and what it envelops, and the moon when it becomes full [that] you will surely embark upon [i.e., experience] state after state.

Allah swears by some of the phenomena noticeable to man on the earth. He swears by the twilight, the coming of night and the growing of the crescent into a full moon. The word "*lā*" before the verb gives emphasis to the oath. It can also indicate refutation of a previous statement or allegation, declaring, "it is not so." Here it would refer to and refute the erroneous belief that no one could be re-created and brought to account.

The object of the oath has been interpreted in two ways. First, that each one of you will continue to experience progressive stages of creation, development, hardship and ease during the course of life, death and resurrection. The entire universe is subject to constant change, and mankind is no exception. The changes that affect a person for better or for worse during his lifetime are from the trials by which Allah tests His servants.

And second, that the words are directed to the Prophet (ﷺ), telling him, "You will experience difficult phases throughout your mission," or "You will be raised in position higher and higher." The verb, *tarkabunna* (from *rakiba*) literally means to mount or ride upon. It suggests that each new difficulty is to be utilized to reach an objective and that it will deliver its rider to the next evolving stage.

Āyahs 20-21 فَمَا لَهُمْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ . وَإِذَا قُرِئَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْقُرْآنُ لَا يَسْجُدُونَ

So what is [the matter] with them [that] they do not believe, and when the Qur'ān is recited to them, they do not prostrate [to Allah]?

This question is an expression of astonishment at those who continue in denial of faith while before them is so much evidence indicating that it is the truth. What prevents them from believing in Allah, His Messenger and the Last Day? And why, when they have heard the words of Allah, do they not prostrate in reverence and worship? For the Qur'ān has described the universe with a precision and accuracy reflecting knowledge that could only belong to its Creator.

Upon recitation of this āyah the Prophet (ﷺ) performed a *sajdah* (prostration) and those behind him did so.²⁵² Abū Rāfi' related that once he prayed the '*ishaa*' prayer with Abū Hurayrah, who recited [this sūrah], "*Idhas-samā'unshaqqat*" and prostrated. He asked about it, so Abū Hurayrah said, "I prostrated behind Abul-Qāsim (ﷺ), and I will continue prostrating in it until I meet him."²⁵³

²⁵² Al-Bukhāri and Muslim. Thus, it is a sunnah act to prostrate at the end of this verse during prayer and when reciting or hearing it at other times as well.

²⁵³ Al-Bukhāri.

Āyahs 22-24. **بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا يُكَذِّبُونَ • وَاللَّهُ أَعْلَمُ بِمَا يُوعُونَ • فَبَشِّرْهُمْ بِعَذَابٍ أَلِيمٍ**

But those who have disbelieved deny, and Allah is most knowing of what they keep within themselves. So give them tidings of a painful punishment,

Allah states that the reason behind their refusal to believe and prostrate to Him is their rejection of His message and the truth it conveys. And He knows well that their opposition to truth comes from evil within themselves and is by their own choice. He is completely aware of what their hearts contain of obstinacy, arrogance and greed – characteristics of the unbelievers and their recognized manner.

Therefore, the Prophet (ﷺ) is told to inform them of a painful punishment to come. *Bash-shirhum* more literally means "give them the good news," a threat wrapped in sarcasm and mockery.

Āyah 25. **إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ.**

Except those who believe and do righteous deeds. For them is a reward uninterrupted.

However, the righteous believers are exceptions to the general state of mankind. "*Those who believe*" refers to the ones who believe in their hearts. The words, "*and do righteous deeds*" refers to those who do good works with their bodies. So both are required in order to qualify for this exception and attain the reward.

Their reward will be uninterrupted and continuous. Some early scholars added, "a reward without end," "without measure" and "without lessening." This unceasing reparation is one which will be given in the Hereafter, where life is eternal.

SŪRAH AL-BURŪJ (85) سُورَةُ الْبُرُوجِ

This sūrah, named after the word *al-burūj* in the first verse, was revealed in Makkah during the period when the persecution of Muslims was at its peak. It warned the nonbelievers of Quraysh and those of every age of the severe consequence of tyranny and consoled the believers, as if to say, "When you remain firm and steadfast against oppression and intimidation, you will be rewarded abundantly for it, and Allah will surely punish your tormentors."

The story of the people of the trench (*aṣ-ḥāb al-ukhdūd*) is related here. They had cast the believers into pits of fire, joyfully watching them burn to death. But their Lord was observing them, well aware of their terrible crime. Those who take pleasure in tormenting His believing servants are warned that Allah's grip is firm and forceful. When He seizes them for their evil deeds they will never be able to escape.

Allah, the Almighty allows severe trials for believers, thereby enabling them to earn the highest eternal rewards. The sūrah demonstrates how faith overcomes evil.

It was reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would sometimes recite in the *ṭhuhr* and *ʿaṣr* prayers [the sūrahs] "By the sky containing great stars" and "By the sky and the knocker" and similar ones.²⁵⁴

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3.

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الْبُرُوجِ • وَالْيَوْمِ الْمَوْعُودِ • وَشَاهِدٍ وَمَشْهُودٍ

By the sky containing great stars, and [by] the promised Day, and [by] the witness and what is witnessed,

The sūrah begins with an oath. Allah swears first by the sky and what it contains of great stars. Ibn Katheer commented, "*Burūj* are the giant stars, as Allah has said:

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَجَعَلَ فِيهَا سِرَاجًا وَقَمَرًا مُنِيرًا

*Blessed is He who has placed in the sky great stars and placed therein a [burning] lamp and luminous moon.*²⁵⁵

Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Qatādah and others said the same.

Originally, the term *barj* (pl. *burūj*) referred to anything appearing tall or conspicuous, visible from every angle. This meaning is supported with a statement from Ibn 'Abbās that they are towers, palaces or fortresses, based on Allah's words:

أَيْنَمَا تَكُونُوا يُدْرِكُكُمُ الْمَوْتُ وَلَوْ كُنْتُمْ فِي بُرُوجٍ مُّشِيدَةٍ

*Wherever you may be, death will overtake you, even if you should be within towers of lofty construction.*²⁵⁶

²⁵⁴ Meaning Sūrahs al-Burūj and aṭ-Ṭāriq. At-Tirmidhi - ḥasan ṣaḥeeḥ.

²⁵⁵ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:61.

²⁵⁶ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:78.

Thus, a few commentators have held that *burūj* are constellations. Ibn Jareer at-Ṭabari was of the view that it means the positions of the sun and the moon, which are twelve *burūj*. And Allah knows best.

Second, He swears by the Promised Day. It is *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, a day that Allah has promised will come, awaited by all creation. It is then that all the affairs and incidents of this life will be judged, and the disagreements of this world will be settled precisely and completely.

Third, He swears by the witness and that which is witnessed. There has been much speculation by commentators about the meaning of this verse. The witness was explained by several of the ṣaḥābah as being Friday, and the witnessed as the day of 'Arafah. Others were of the view that the witnessed was *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*. Al-Ḥasan bin 'Alī said, "The witness is Muḥammad (ﷺ),²⁵⁷ and the witnessed is *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*."²⁵⁸ Sa'eed bin Jubayr considered that the witness is Allah²⁵⁹ and what is witnessed is us. All creatures and deeds will be exposed and witnessed on the Promised Day.

The sūrah then goes on to portray the dreadful occurrence in a few brief verses that reveal its horror without dwelling on details.

Āyahs 4-7.

قُتِلَ أَصْحَابُ الْأُخْدُودِ • النَّارِ ذَاتِ الْوَقُودِ • إِذْ هُمْ عَلَيْهَا قُعُودٌ • وَهُمْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَفْعُلُونَ بِالْمُؤْمِنِينَ شُهُودٌ

Destroyed [i.e., cursed] were the companions of the trench [containing] the fire full of fuel; when they were sitting near it, and they, to what they were doing against the believers, were witnesses.

Allah swears to the fact that He will destroy those tyrants who burned their own people to death in trenches of fire, merely because of their belief in Allah. They had made sure the fires were well fueled – sufficient to accomplish their evil purpose. After forcing the believers into pits of fire, they took pleasure in watching and witnessing their agony in the most sadistic manner. Allah will certainly take revenge on the criminals, and they will surely be destroyed by His curse, to enter the pit of eternal Hellfire.

The believers could have saved themselves by accepting the tyrant's terms and renouncing their religion, at least outwardly. But they chose martyrdom instead. The oppressors could do as they willed to their bodies but they would never gain control of their hearts, minds and souls.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) described the circumstances of this incident in a lengthy ḥadīth. He said:

²⁵⁷ Citing: *So how [will it be] when We bring from every nation a witness and We bring you, [O Muḥammad], against these [people] as a witness?* (4:41)

²⁵⁸ Citing: *That is a Day for which the people will be collected, and that is a Day [which will be] witnessed.* (11:103)

²⁵⁹ And he recited: *"And sufficient is Allah as a witness."* (4:79 and 48:28)

There was among the people before you a king who had a sorcerer. When the sorcerer grew old, he said to the king, "I have become old and my time is nearly over, so send me a boy to whom I can teach magic." So he sent him a boy and the sorcerer was teaching him magic. Whenever the boy was on his way to the sorcerer, he would stop and sit with a monk and listen to his words, and he liked them. But when he came to the sorcerer, he would beat him and say, "What kept you?" And when he went back to his people they would beat him and say, "What kept you?" The boy complained about this to the monk. The monk said to him, "When you fear the sorcerer, tell him: 'My people kept me.' And when you fear your people, tell them: 'The sorcerer kept me.'" So the boy continued like that for some time.

Then one day he came upon a massive, dreadful beast on the road that had prevented people from passing. The boy said, "Today I will know whether the sorcerer is better or the monk is better." So, he took a stone and said, "O Allah, if the way of the monk is more liked by You than that of the sorcerer, then kill this beast so that the people can pass." He threw it, killing the beast, and the people passed. He then informed the monk about it. The monk said, "O my son, today you are better than me, and you will be put to trial, so do not inform anyone about me."

The boy used to heal those with blindness, leprosy and other diseases. There was a courtier of the king who had become blind and he heard about the boy. He brought many gifts and said, "Cure me, and all this is for you." The boy said, "I do not cure anyone; it is only Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, who cures. If you believe in Allah I will supplicate to Him, and He will cure you." So he believed and the boy supplicated to Allah, and He cured him. After that the courtier went to the king and sat at the place where he used to sit before. The king said, "Who gave you back your sight?" He replied, "My Lord." The king said, "Do you have a lord other than me?" The courtier said, "Yes. My Lord and your Lord is Allah." So the king tortured him until he told him about the boy.

The king sent for the boy and said to him, "O my son, has your magic reached the point that you cure blindness, leprosy and other diseases?" He said, "I do not cure anyone; it is only Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, who cures." The king asked, "Do you have a lord other than me?" The boy answered, "My Lord and your Lord is Allah." So he tortured him also until he told about the monk.

Then the monk was brought to him and the king said, "Abandon your religion." The monk refused, so a saw was put to the middle of his head until he fell, cut in half. The man who had been blind was told, "Abandon your religion." He refused, so a saw was put to the middle of his head until he fell, cut in half.

Then the boy was told, "Abandon your religion." He refused, so he was taken with some people to the top of a mountain and the people were told, "When you reach its peak, see if he abandons his religion; otherwise throw him down." So they took him, and when they ascended the mountain, he said, "O Allah, save me from them however You will." The mountain shuddered and they were all thrown down. The boy came walking back to the king. The king said, "What did your companions do?" The boy said, "Allah saved me from them."

Then the king sent him with some people on a boat, saying, "When you get him out to sea, see if he abandons his religion; otherwise drown him." So they took him out to sea and he said, "O Allah, save me from them however You will," and they were all drowned in the sea. Then

the boy returned to the king and the king said, "What did your companions do?" The boy replied, "Allah saved me from them."

Then he said to the king, "You will not be able to kill me until you do as I order you. And if you do as I order you, you will be able to kill me: otherwise you will not." The king said, "And what is it?" The boy said, "Gather the people on one plain and tie me to a tree trunk. Then take an arrow from my quiver and say, 'In the name of Allah, Lord of the boy.' If you do that, you will kill me." So he did. Placing an arrow in the bow, he shot it, saying, "In the name of Allah, Lord of the boy." The arrow hit the boy in the temple and he placed his hand over the wound and died. The people proclaimed, "We believe in the Lord of the boy!" Then the king was told, "Do you see what happened? That which you feared has taken place. By Allah, all the people have believed!"

So he ordered ditches to be dug at the beginning of the roads and fires were ignited in them. Then the king said, "Whoever abandons his religion, let him go, and whoever does not, throw him into it." The people were thrashing about in the fire and trying to protect themselves. A woman came with her baby that she was breastfeeding, as if she was hesitant about falling into the fire. The child spoke, saying, "Be patient mother, for indeed you are standing upon the truth."²⁶⁰

Āyahs 8-9.

وَمَا نَقَمُوا مِنْهُمْ إِلَّا أَنْ يُؤْمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ الْعَزِيزِ الْحَمِيدِ . الَّذِي لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَاللَّهُ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ شَهِيدٌ

And they only resented them because they believed in Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Praiseworthy, to whom belongs the dominion of the heavens and the earth. And Allah, over all things, is Witness.

They persecuted and tortured the believers for no other reason than their faith in Allah. The people had not committed any sin, but to the tyrannical king it was treason; they had betrayed him by worshipping Allah and refusing to renounce their religion. It is the manner of tyrants and oppressors in every age when their authority is challenged by truth.

But Almighty Allah, to whom is due all praise, owns and controls everything in the heavens and earth. Among His perfect attributes is that He is the Lord of all the heavens, the earth, whatever is in them, and whatever is between them. And He is a witness to all things, which means that no one will escape His justice. This is both a warning to the sinful and a reassurance for the believers.

Āyah 10. إِنَّ الَّذِينَ فَتَنُوا الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ ثُمَّ لَمْ يَتُوبُوا فَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ جَهَنَّمَ وَلَهُمْ عَذَابُ الْحَرِيقِ

Indeed, those who have tortured the believing men and believing women and then have not repented will have the punishment of Hell, and they will have the punishment of the Burning Fire.

²⁶⁰ Ahmad and Muslim.

The literal meaning of *fatanū* (they burned something or someone)²⁶¹ is most appropriate in this āyah. But applicable as well are the related connotations: to put to trial, to test someone's patience and endurance, to afflict, terrorize, torment, disrupt, misguide, impose *kufr* (disbelief) on another, or to dissuade someone from his convictions by means of enticement or through persecution and torture.

Those who were tormenting believers by burning them in fire were in fact causing their own destruction in the next life, as stated in Āyah 4 of the sūrah. Allah, the Exalted, affirms that those who burned or tortured believers, whether male or female, without having repented for their terrible sin will themselves be burned eternally in the fire of Hell. Not only will those disbelievers be punished for their rejection of faith, but they will suffer torment by fire as a fitting recompense for their sadistic cruelty.

Just as the people of the trench became worthy of Allah's curse and punishment, the chiefs of Makkah were also becoming worthy of it by their persecution and torture of the Prophet's followers. And all those who would torment Muslim believers in the ages to come are similarly warned.

Āyah 11. **إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ذَلِكَ الْفَوْزُ الْكَبِيرُ**

Indeed, those who have believed and done righteous deeds will have gardens beneath which rivers flow. That is the great attainment.

But those who believed and then proved it through their actions will escape the Hellfire and attain the reward of Paradise. And just as the believers of that time had accepted to give up their lives in pits of fire rather than give up their faith, so also should all believers be certain that any sacrifice made in the cause of Allah will bring them nearer to Him and His reward.

While the scholars have confirmed that it is not obligatory to sacrifice one's life when under threat,²⁶² it is certain that those whose belief is confirmed by martyrdom or even by lesser good deeds will enter Paradise, and this is indeed the supreme success.

Ibn Katheer stated that when Allah described Paradise as having rivers running beneath it, it means they flow under its trees and dwellings.

Āyahs 12-13. **إِنَّ بَطْشَ رَبِّكَ لَشَدِيدٌ • إِنَّهُ هُوَ يُبْدِي وَيُعِيدُ**

Indeed, the assault [i.e., vengeance] of your Lord is severe. Indeed, it is He who originates [creation] and repeats.

Allah, the Exalted, warns that His vengeance against His enemies is far greater than any human punishment.

²⁶¹ The original meaning of the root word, *fatana*, is to test the quality of gold or silver or to purify them by smelting over fire. So it may indicate a trial in which something disliked is eliminated.

²⁶² Based on the exception mentioned in the Qur'ān (16:106) for cases where expression of disbelief has been forced upon a believer under threat or duress.

*And Allah is Exalted in Might, the Owner of Retribution.*²⁶³

The vengeance of tyrants, while perceived to be extremely harsh and fearsome, is insignificant in comparison to that of the Almighty, to whom belongs the heavens and the earth. While the petty tyrants are allowed to impose their dominance for a brief time within a limited world, Allah's power is complete and absolute, and this is evidenced by His ability to create and recreate.

When He says, "Be," nothing can prevent, oppose or delay its occurrence. And whenever He wills to repeat His creation the balance of justice will be restored. The attributes mentioned here portray the Lord's absolute will, dominance, power and ability, and are relevant to the matter addressed in this sūrah.

Āyahs 14-16. وَهُوَ الْغَفُورُ الْوَدُودُ . ذُو الْعَرْشِ الْمَجِيدُ . فَعَالٌ لِّمَا يُرِيدُ

And He is the Forgiving, the Affectionate, Honorable Owner of the Throne, Effector of what He intends.

The divine attributes, *al-ghafūr* and *al-wadūd* balance the previous description. While He has the power to exact revenge and punish those deserving of it, Allah is also merciful and He loves those of His servants who return to Him in repentance and obedience. He forgives all those who repent sincerely, regardless of how evil or wicked their deeds had been. And He loves those who choose and adhere to His religion and His path. An aspect of His love is manifest in His forgiveness.

Moreover, He owns the great Throne, and is above it. The Arabic word *'arsh* generally means the throne of a king or ruler. But none except Allah can know the essence, nature, substance or greatness of His Throne. From the Qur'ān and Sunnah it is understood to be the greatest of His creations, covering the rest of creation, and that it is carried by angels.

The adjective, *al-majeed* has been interpreted in two ways: either as an attribute of the Lord, (Honorable Owner) or as a description of the Throne.²⁶⁴ Both are considered correct.

Fa'āl is an intensive form of *fā'il* (doer), and means the one who is most able to act, do or bring about something, the most effective. It is an expression of absolute ability and purpose.²⁶⁵ Everything in existence occurs because Allah wills it to be. And what He does not intend cannot be done and will not happen.

In contrast, no being other than Allah is completely able to do everything it intends. Humans are limited in wisdom and ability; they are in need of support and favorable conditions to accomplish their goals. They might want to do something while unable, or might be

²⁶³ Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:4.

²⁶⁴ So the verse's meaning would be: *Owner of the Honorable Throne*.

²⁶⁵ When Abū Bakr as-Ṣiddeeq was asked during his final illness before death, "Has a doctor seen you?" he said, "Yes." They asked, "What did he tell you?" Abū Bakr replied, "He said, 'I am the Effector of what I intend.'"

compelled to do something unwillingly. However great their efforts, success or failure will ultimately depend upon the will of their Lord.

But Allah accomplishes anything He intends without delay or exception. His will is absolute. He may give victory or defeat to believers for a specific purpose that He wants to accomplish. He may afflict tyrants in this life or delay their punishment until the Day of Recompense. He might allow the persecution and suffering of believers in order to give them an even greater eternal reward, and demonstrate to others that faith is more valued than life itself.

Āyahs 17-18. هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْجُنُودِ • فِرْعَوْنُ وَثَمُودُ

Has there reached you the story of the soldiers [of] Fir'awn and Thamūd?

The agents of Fir'awn and Thamūd are mentioned as examples of pride and arrogance that were destroyed by Allah's vengeance. Both peoples had enjoyed power and authority within high standards of material civilization. But when they rejected truth and justice, opposing their Lord's messengers, they were helpless against His will. As the Prophet (ﷺ) disclosed, *"Allah, the Exalted, extends the time of the oppressor, but when He seizes him, He will never let him escape."* Then he recited:

وَكَذَلِكَ أَخْذُ رَبِّكَ إِذَا أَخَذَ الْقُرَىٰ وَهِيَ ظَالِمَةٌ إِنَّ أَخْذَهُ أَلِيمٌ شَدِيدٌ.

*"And thus is the seizure of your Lord when He seizes the cities while they are transgressing. Indeed, His seizure is painful and severe."*²⁶⁶

Āyahs 19-20. بَلِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا فِي تَكْذِيبٍ • وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ

But they who disbelieve are in [persistent] denial, while Allah encompasses them from behind.

The disbelievers of Quraysh are reminded that the forces of Fir'awn and Thamūd were far more numerous and powerful than their own. So they should beware of meeting the same fate; yet they remained heedless. Similarly, the disbelievers of every age are in this state of denial and rebellion. However, Allah encompasses them in His all-pervading knowledge and power. He may hasten justice for them in this world or He may delay it for the Hereafter, where it will be most complete. In due course the balance must be restored, so the wrongdoers cannot escape punishment.

Āyahs 21-22. بَلْ هُوَ قُرْآنٌ مَجِيدٌ • فِي لَوْحٍ مَحْفُوظٍ

But this is an honored Qur'ān [inscribed] in a Preserved Slate.

The sūrah concludes with a statement of the truth about the Qur'ān. It is a noble scripture whose words are inscribed in an eternal and indestructible register, *al-Lawḥ al-Mahfūth* (the

²⁶⁶ Muslim. The Qur'ānic reference is Sūrah Hūd, 11:102.

Preserved Slate). Its nature man cannot know, for it is part of that knowledge the Creator has reserved for Himself.

Despite the denials of the unbelievers, this Qur'ān is preserved and well-guarded within the eternal register that is with Allah. In it all things are recorded, including that which He revealed to His prophets and messengers. It cannot be changed and its statements are final. Allah reaffirms that the Qur'ān is indeed protected by Him from any addition, subtraction, alteration or interference from any creature. It is the final reference for mankind on matters of religion.

سُورَةُ الطَّارِقِ (86) SŪRAH AṬ-ṬĀRIQ

This sūrah was revealed at a time when the disbelievers of Makkah were using all possible strategies and tactics to obstruct and defeat the message of the Qur'ān and Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ).

It deals with man's existence and development under the protection of his Creator and the return to Him for judgment. It concludes with a warning to the unbelievers that they will not be able to discredit the Qur'ān with their schemes and that they will ultimately be defeated.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3. وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ . وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ . النَّجْمُ الثَّاقِبُ

By the sky and the knocker. And what can make you know what is the knocker? [It is] the piercing star.

Allah swears by the heaven and by *aṭ-ṭāriq*, a star which knocks, beats or pulsates.²⁶⁷ A question is then posed to bring additional attention to its nature, which is confirmed by the answer: *It is the piercing star*, one whose powerful rays pierce and penetrate through the darkness of night.

Āyah 4. إِنَّ كُلَّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ

There is no soul but that it has over it a protector.

Allah swears by the sky and its pulsing, piercing star that every soul has over it a *ḥāfith*, an observer appointed by Him to watch and protect it. This implies that every individual continues to exist due to the guardian protecting his soul, and in addition, that there is a

²⁶⁷ *Aṭ-Ṭāriq* has sometimes been translated as "the night visitor" (who would knock at one's door), alluding to the star which reappears nightly.

record being kept. The soul is never unattended and cannot escape being observed. There are guardian angels and recording angels accompanying each person throughout life.

لَهُ مُعَقَّبَاتٌ مِنْ بَيْنِ يَدَيْهِ وَمِنْ خَلْفِهِ يَحْفَظُونَهُ مِنْ أَمْرِ اللَّهِ

*For him are angels in succession, before and behind him, who protect him by the command of Allah.*²⁶⁸

Āyahs 5-8.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ . خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ . يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ . إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ

So let man observe from what he was created. He was created from a fluid, ejected. It emerges from between the backbone and the ribs. Indeed, He is Able to return him [to life].

Man is reminded of his humble origin – that he is created from a liquid ejected from the body of the male or from that of both the male and female. *Ṣulb* and *tarā'ib* express the two walls of the body, back and front, between which the reproductive organs are located.

Man is told to consider how he was brought into existence from a mere sperm drop and then shaped into a living, intelligent human being. Systematic development indicates a purpose, which is bound to continue. He is then told that the Creator who brought him and every other individual into existence most certainly has the power to create him once again in any way He pleases.

Āyahs 9-10. يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ . فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ

The Day when secrets will be put on trial, then he [i.e., man] will have no power or any helper.

This next creation will be for the purpose of judgment and compensation; subjecting everything which had remained concealed in the hearts of men to precise examination. All people will be brought to account. Not only their deeds, but their deepest secrets, motives and intentions will be uncovered, exposed and analyzed with complete justice.

Ibn 'Umar reported from the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ): "There will be raised behind every traitor a banner saying, 'This is the betrayal of so-and-so, son of so-and-so.'"²⁶⁹ And a person's own body will testify against him.²⁷⁰ The Prophet (ﷺ) related that Allah will say, "Sufficient as an accountant against you today is yourself; and as witnesses, the honorable recording angels." And his mouth will be sealed, and it will be said to the parts of his body, "Speak," and they will speak of what he did.²⁷¹

²⁶⁸ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:11. Another interpretation is: "...protect him from [all except] the command of Allah."

²⁶⁹ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

²⁷⁰ Refer to Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:19-23.

²⁷¹ A portion of a ḥadīth narrated by Muslim and an-Nasā'ī.

Justice eludes us in this world because people of authority and influence are often able to get away with the crimes they commit. On *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, however, they will be powerless and helpless. No one can save them from the testimony of this trial or from the consequences of what they had earned.

Āyahs 11-14. وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ • وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ • إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ • وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ

By the sky which sends back and [by] the earth which splits, indeed, it is a decisive statement. And it is not amusement.

Allah swears once again, this time by the heaven and the earth. The sky is described as *dhāt ar-raj*, more literally "having return." Ibn 'Abbās said that *ar-raj* means rain or rainclouds; the sky contains clouds which give rain, again and again, returning water to the earth. Qatādah added, "The sky returns people's sustenance each year; otherwise they and their cattle would die." The earth, *dhāt aṣ-ṣad* then splits open to allow the sprouting of seeds and growth of plants.

The oath confirms and emphasizes that this Qur'ān is a decisive, conclusive and final word from Allah. It is not to be taken lightly. The truths expressed in it are not for the purpose of entertainment or diversion, but are firm and consistent facts which put an end to differences, doubts and uncertainties. It states with certainty that people will return to life to face a trial with judgment and recompense.

The unbelievers are cautioned that they should give serious thought to the Qur'ān's statements of logic and reason, and must heed its warnings. Otherwise, they will have to face the grievous consequences of their dishonest conduct and sinful deeds.

Āyahs 15-17. إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا • وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا • فَمَهْلِ الْكَافِرِينَ أَمْهَلُهُمْ رُوَيْدًا

Indeed, they are planning a plan. But I am planning a plan. So allow time for the disbelievers; leave them awhile.

Allah has reassured His Messenger (ﷺ) that although his enemies were plotting and planning against him, Allah had a plan of His own which would overcome them in due time. The disbelievers had been deceived by the assumption that their strategies and campaigns would defeat the message of the Qur'ān, but they did not realize that Allah Himself had a far superior plan which would make all their schemes futile.²⁷²

The Prophet (ﷺ) is assured that their conspiracy will not succeed. The outcome is in his Lord's hand and by His command. The sūrah's conclusion thus re-emphasizes the fact stated in Sūrah al-Burūj:

وَاللَّهُ مِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ مُحِيطٌ.

*And Allah encompasses them from behind.*²⁷³

²⁷² The scholars have agreed that *kayd* (plotting) should not be attributed to Allah except in the case of measures He takes to defeat the conspiracies of evil men.

²⁷³ Sūrah al-Burūj, 85:20.

Hence, the Prophet (ﷺ) is urged to persevere, be patient and wait for Allah's plan to become manifest. His Lord instructs him to give his opponents some respite, which in fact only allows them to add to their burden of sins. In the words of the Qur'ān:

وَلَا يَحْسَبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ نُمْلِي لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمْلِي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ.

*And let not those who reject belief ever think that [because] We extend their time it is better for them. We only extend it for them so that they may increase in sin, and for them is a humiliating punishment.*²⁷⁴

So they should never imagine that they can defeat their Creator or escape His justice. For He will seize the evildoers suddenly, and soon enough they will meet with torment, distress and destruction. Allah has said:

نُمَتِّعُهُمْ قَلِيلًا ثُمَّ نَضْطَرُّهُمْ إِلَىٰ عَذَابٍ غَلِيظٍ.

*We grant them enjoyment for a little; then We will force them to a massive punishment.*²⁷⁵

The additional period granted them will be of no benefit and will leave them with no excuse. This concluding verse is indeed a warning to the unbelievers that their period of respite will soon be over.

سُورَةُ الْأَعْلَىٰ (87) SŪRAH AL-A'LĀ

This is one of the earliest sūrahs revealed in Makkah. It contains praise of Allah and of His creative ability, reassurance and instruction to the Prophet (ﷺ) and information about the Hereafter, with its compensation of reward and punishment.

'Alī mentioned that the Prophet (ﷺ) was fond of this sūrah.²⁷⁶ He often used to recite it, followed by Sūrah al-Ghāshiyah in the Jumu'ah (Friday) and 'Eid prayers.²⁷⁷ And 'Ā'ishah reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would recite Sūrah al-A'lā, Sūrah al-Kāfirūn and Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ in the witr prayer.²⁷⁸

²⁷⁴ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:178.

²⁷⁵ Sūrah Luqmān, 31:24.

²⁷⁶ Aḥmad.

²⁷⁷ Muslim.

²⁷⁸ Muslim. In a narration by Aḥmad she added, "...and al-Mu'awwadhatayn" (the last two sūrahs).

Āyah 1. سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى Exalt the name of your Lord, the Most High,

Allah *ta'ālā* has instructed His Messenger (ﷺ), and through him his *ummah*, to exalt and glorify His name, as He alone is worthy of all glory and praise. *Sabbih* is a command which means: praise and glorify Allah, recognize His supremacy, perfection, infallibility and all of His divine attributes; affirm that He is above and disassociated from everything unbefitting to His majesty.

Ibn 'Abbās mentioned that when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited this āyah he would say, "*Subḥāna rabbi al-a'lā*."²⁷⁹ And when the āyah was first revealed, he told the people, "*Do it in your sujūd (prostration)*,"²⁸⁰ i.e., in obedience to Allah's command.

Āyahs 2-3. الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى • وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى

Who created then proportioned, and who destined then guided,

Not only did Allah create all things, but He gave each creation its special qualities and proportions. The electrons and protons of every atom are balanced in the same way as are the planets and satellites in a solar system. And a single cell functions perfectly in its relation to the most advanced of living creatures. Every creation is proportioned as Allah willed it.

The Lord of creation has decreed its purpose and destiny, and then guided it to the fulfillment of that destiny. The Messenger (ﷺ) disclosed, "*Indeed, Allah predetermined the measure of all creation fifty thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth, and His Throne was over water*."²⁸¹

Inanimate things submit to their Creator's natural laws of physics. Insects and animals are guided by instinct to survive and reproduce. Man has been given additional guidance through prophets and scriptures to distinguish between right and wrong. The verse refers to guidance in its general sense, meaning that every creature is directed to do whatever it requires to achieve the purpose of its creation. Moreover, Allah's creation is perfected collectively so that interaction will fulfill a number of objectives.

Man is being told that his Lord is the one who created everything in existence, proportioned it, set a destiny for it and taught it to perform the function for which it was created. He should be aware of this and put his gift of guidance to good use.

Āyahs 4-5. وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى • فَجَعَلَ هُتَاءً أَحْوَى

And who brings out the pasture and [then] makes it black stubble.

"Pasture" means here all kinds of vegetation and crops. Mankind witnesses one manifestation of Allah's ability in that He creates beautiful vegetation on the earth and then

²⁷⁹ Aḥmad, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.

²⁸⁰ Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd.

²⁸¹ Muslim.

reduces it to decaying debris, dry black stalks and rotting foliage. Ibn 'Abbās described *ghuthā'an aḥwā* as that which is dried and decomposed.

Plant life, readily observed by man, has been given as an example of how earthly existence and worldly benefits quickly fade away. The harvest of one's worldly life will be reaped in the Hereafter.

Āyahs 6-7. سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى . إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى

We will make you recite and you will not forget, except what Allah should will. Indeed, He knows what is declared and what is hidden.

These verses were directed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). He had been striving to memorize the words of the Qur'ān as soon as they were revealed, so Allah relieved him of this additional exertion and promised that the Qur'ān would be preserved in his memory by his Lord's grace and favor.

As He also said:

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا الذِّكْرَ وَإِنَّا لَهُ لَحَافِظُونَ

*Indeed, it is We who sent down the message and indeed, We will be its guardian.*²⁸²

When the Qur'ān states a promise or a ruling, it sometimes follows it with an exception, showing the Creator's precision in regard to each matter and that His will is not subject to limitation and restriction. The Prophet (ﷺ) is reassured that he would not forget any part of the revelation with the exception of whatever Allah willed to abrogate after it had served a temporary purpose.

He who revealed the Qur'ān is aware of everything that is declared openly and what is concealed in the hearts of men. As He says in Sūrah Ṭāhā:

فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَى

*Indeed, He knows the secret and [what is] more hidden.*²⁸³

His decrees and rulings are based on complete and perfect knowledge of His creatures and of what is best for them.

Āyah 8. وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى **And We will ease you toward ease.**

Allah again reassures His Messenger (ﷺ) that He will make recitation of the Qur'ān easy for him, as well as all righteous deeds in general. "Ease" has been explained as the ease of Paradise or the way of Allah's religion. His Lord would guide him (and through him the Muslim *ummah*) by means of legislation that is straightforward, reasonable and uncomplicated, for ease is the nature of Islam and its relationship to human life. Allah informed the believers:

هُوَ اجْتَبَاكُمْ وَمَا جَعَلَ عَلَيْكُمْ فِي الدِّينِ مِنْ حَرَجٍ

*He has chosen you, and has not placed upon you in the religion any difficulty.*²⁸⁴

²⁸² Sūrah al-Ḥijr, 15:9.

²⁸³ Sūrah Ṭā Hā, 20:7.

'Ā'ishah reported that whenever Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) had a choice, he would always choose the easier of two matters as long as it did not involve sin.²⁸⁵ And he said, *"Indeed, the religion is easy, and no one will make religion difficult but that it will overpower him. So fulfill obligations, do the best you can and receive glad tidings [of reward]. And seek help [through worship] in the mornings and afternoons and a part of the night."*²⁸⁶

Āyahs 9-10. فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى • سَيَذَكِّرُ مَنْ يَخْشَى

So remind, if the reminder should benefit; he who fears [Allah] will be reminded.

The Prophet (ﷺ) is ordered by Allah to remind and convey knowledge wherever it will benefit. In every time and place there are some who will heed reminders and benefit from them, even within corrupt societies. From this āyah is derived motivation to spread knowledge in ways that people understand and accept. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would address people according to their intellectual capacities and unique situations.

With the conveyance of his Lord's message, the Prophet's obligation was fulfilled and he is not responsible beyond that. But the responsibility of those who have heard it is to consider the reminder and comply with it. Allah has allowed them a choice in the matter, however. So only those who fear Allah, the meeting with Him and the evil consequence of falsehood and deviation will choose to benefit from the reminder. This is what makes them worthy of their Lord's acceptance and reward.

Āyahs 11-13. وَيَتَجَنَّبُهَا الْأَشَقَى • الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى • ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَا

But the wretched one will avoid it – he who will [enter and] burn in the greatest Fire, neither dying therein nor living.

The unbeliever who avoids hearing and accepting the message will meet his evil end in the life to come. One who rejects and avoids his Creator's message is indeed most wretched and miserable, for he will waste his life on earth and then enter the Hellfire to suffer endless torments without relief. This is *"the greatest Fire,"* which was described by the Prophet (ﷺ) as being seventy times more intense than the fire of this world.²⁸⁷ Its inhabitants will neither die and be relieved nor live a life beneficial to them. Rather, their living will be most harmful to them because it will be filled with the pain and torment of various punishments.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"As for the true inhabitants of the Hellfire, they will not die therein nor will they live. But others of you afflicted by the Fire due to sins will be caused by Allah to die therein a temporary death until, after they have become charcoal, permission will be given for intercession. They will then be gathered, brought forth and scattered upon the rivers of Paradise. Then it will be said, 'O people of Paradise, pour upon them,' and they will grow like*

²⁸⁴ Sūrah al-Hajj, 22:78.

²⁸⁵ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

²⁸⁶ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

²⁸⁷ Al-Bukhārī.

seeds that have been carried by a flood." A man from among the people present remarked, "It is as if the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to live in the desert."²⁸⁸

Āyahs 14-15. **قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى • وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى**

He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself and remembers the name of his Lord and prays.

Tazakkā may mean "purify oneself" in a broad sense, or it can refer more specifically to giving *zakāh*. Both meanings are included here. The caliph 'Umar bin 'Abdul 'Azeez would order the people to give *zakāt al-fiṭr* and recite this verse. But more generally, the successful servants of Allah are those who purify their souls from unacceptable beliefs and characteristics, implement *tawḥeed*, appreciate that He alone is worthy of worship and act accordingly.

The verb *dhakara* can mean "mention" as well as "remember." Mentioning the Lord's name was explained by Ibn 'Umar and Abū Sa'eed al-Khudri as prayer itself. Ibn 'Abbās understood that the successful servant is one who remembers his Lord and the judgment after death, and this motivates him to worship and pray. Ibn Katheer added, "It means he establishes prayer at its appointed times, seeking the approval of Allah in obedience to His command and implementing His legislation." Constantly remembering Allah leads one to do deeds pleasing to Allah, the most important of which is prayer.

Āyahs 16-17. **بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا • وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى**

But you prefer the worldly life, while the Hereafter is better and more enduring.

But instead of remembering Allah and the life to come, most people give priority to their worldly existence because of its immediate concerns and observable benefits. They favor its temporary advantages over those of the Hereafter, although the Hereafter is undeniably better in nature and duration. Similarly, Allah said:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ • وَتَذَرُونَ الْآخِرَةَ.

"No, but you love the immediate and neglect the Hereafter."²⁸⁹

This short-range preference is the cause of every distress afflicting mankind, and it is the reason that the Qur'ān's warnings are ignored. The present life is, in fact, a provisional existence through which everyone must pass. It has been called *dunyā*, which means "lower" and implies both contempt and easy access. Only those deprived of sound judgment can give so much importance to that which will soon be terminated and prefer it to the home of the Hereafter, which is everlasting and far superior to the present world in every respect.

Āyahs 18-19. **إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى • صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى**

Indeed, this is in the former scriptures, the scriptures of Ibrāheem and Mūsā.

²⁸⁸ Aḥmad and Muslim.

²⁸⁹ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:20-21.

This conclusion confirms the continuity of Allah's message and reflects its common source, which is the Creator of mankind. Each of His prophets conveyed the same fundamental principles: no deity other than Allah, worship of Him alone, and the restoration of justice in a greater life to come. However, since each prophet addressed a specific people during a specific period, the details of legislation differed somewhat in concurrence with particular circumstances.

The truths imparted in this sūrah, and specifically the previous verses (14-17), are not limited to the Qur'ān, but were mentioned as well in earlier scriptures, such as those of Prophets Ibrāheem and Mūsā.²⁹⁰ They are found in every divine message and in the basic teachings of all the prophets, because they are a source of benefit in every time and place, in this world and the next.

SŪRAH AL-GHĀSHIYAH (88) سُورَةُ الْغَاشِيَةِ

This is another of the early sūrahs revealed in Makkah. Its people needed to be awakened and made aware of the danger incurred by rejecting the Prophet's message. So after making clear the truth in a concise and rational argument, the Qur'ān warns of Allah's final account and the punishment that will befall those who do not believe and amend their ways.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) often used to recite this sūrah in the second *rak'ah* of the *Jumu'ah* prayer and 'Eed prayer.²⁹¹

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ الْغَاشِيَةِ

Has there reached you the report of the Overwhelming [event]?

Al-Ghāshiyah is among the names given to *al-Qiyāmah* (the Resurrection). Its verb, *ghashiya*, means to cover something completely. It is an event which will effect, include and overwhelm all of creation. Allah, the Exalted, is introducing the subject with a question addressed to the Prophet (ﷺ) in order to emphasize its importance and urgency.

At that time people will be divided into two categories according to their deeds, as described in the coming verses.

²⁹⁰ A similar statement is found in Sūrah an-Najm, 53:36-42. *Ṣuḥuf* (plural of *ṣaḥeefah*) literally means sheets or pages on which something is written.

²⁹¹ Muslim. Sūrah al-A'lā would be recited in the first *rak'ah*, and sometimes Sūrah al-Jumu'ah.

أُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ . عَامِلَةٌ نَاصِبَةٌ . تَصَلَّى نَارًا حَامِيَةً . تُسْقَى مِنْ عَيْنٍ آنِيَةٍ .
لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ إِلَّا مِنْ ضَرِيعٍ . لَا يُسْمِنُ وَلَا يُغْنِي مِنْ جُوعٍ

[Some] faces, that Day, will be humbled, working [hard] and exhausted. They will [enter to] burn in an intensely hot Fire. They will be given drink from a boiling spring. For them there will be no food except from a poisonous, thorny plant which neither nourishes nor avails against hunger.

The faces of some people will be lowered in fear and humility, showing the strain of labor and exhaustion from work done in the worldly life which brought them no benefit. They had worked and labored only for themselves and to further their own ambitions, never for the cause of Allah. Moreover, they had wearied themselves doing deeds of disobedience to Allah, heedless of the life to come.

So in the Hereafter they find the result of their labor, and their faces will reflect the fear, humiliation, exhaustion, misery and hopelessness that they feel. They will then enter the Hellfire, where they will burn, drink from a spring of water whose temperature has reached the boiling point, and eat from *dharee'*, a thorny, poisonous plant which can never relieve their hunger and only increase their torment.

أُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَاعِمَةٌ . لِسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ . فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ . لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَاغِيَةً .
فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ . فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَرْفُوعَةٌ . وَأَكْوَابٌ مَوْضُوعَةٌ . وَنَمَارِقُ مَصْفُوفَةٌ . وَزَرَابِيُّ مَبْثُوثَةٌ .

[Other] faces, that Day, will show pleasure. With their effort [they are] satisfied. [They are] in an elevated garden, wherein they will hear no inappropriate speech. Within it is a flowing spring. Within it are couches raised high and cups put in place and cushions lined up and carpets spread around.

In contrast, faces of the righteous will show happiness, being pleased and satisfied with their efforts and deeds which have been accepted and appreciated by their Lord. He will reward them with eternal residence in the high gardens of Paradise, where they will hear no empty or annoying speech,²⁹² no insult, falsehood, immorality, idle or vain remarks. Moreover, they will enjoy pleasant and comfortable surroundings. These descriptions serve to convey to man an atmosphere of peace and pleasure, the reality of which can only be experienced in the Hereafter.

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ خُلِقَتْ . وَإِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ . وَإِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ .
وَإِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ

Then do they not look at the camels – how they are created? And at the sky – how it is raised? And at the mountains – how they are erected? And at the earth – how it is spread out?

²⁹² This is also mentioned in Sūrah Maryam 19:62, at-Ṭūr 52:23 and al-Wāqī'ah 56:25-26.

The sūrah's verses now bring the listener or reader back to the present environment on earth. Allah invites man to observe and contemplate some of the familiar creations around him – the camels, the sky, the mountains, the earth – as a means of obtaining and increasing faith. Shurayḥ al-Qādhī would tell people, "Come out and let us look at the camels – how they are created, and the sky – how it is raised, and the mountains – how they are erected, and the earth – how it is spread out." These verbs are in passive form, so it is understood that all of this was done by an all-powerful Creator who is not visible.

The camel was mentioned first because it had distinctive features and special value for Arabs. Ibn Katheer commented, "Indeed they are an amazing creation, a strange formation. For they are extremely powerful and strong, yet gentle enough to be led by a weak person. They can be eaten, there is benefit in their hair, and their milk is drunk." One riding it would first notice the animal itself. Then his gaze would be captured by the vastness of the sky above and around him; it would then descend to mountain peaks on the horizon, and finally to the earth, which has been made to appear flat before him. All this is evidence before his eyes of the power and ability of the Creator who designed and maintains it.

The obvious conclusion is that He alone is worthy to be worshipped. If people can acknowledge that a Creator has created all this without an assistant, why should they refuse to accept Him alone as their Lord and Sustainer? And on what logic can they deny that Allah also has the power to cause resurrection, to recreate man, and to place him in Paradise or in Hell?

Āyahs 21-22. فَذَكِّرْ إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ . لَسْتَ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ

So remind, [O Muḥammad]; you are only a reminder. You are not over them a controller.

Allah instructs His Messenger (ﷺ) to remind people to worship Him, their true Lord, and none other but Him. He is to warn them that they will indeed return to Allah, and warn them about the account, judgment and compensation in the life to come.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was responsible only for conveying the words of his Lord, but was told that he had not been empowered to compel them. He could not create faith in their hearts nor could he force them to accept it. His task was to communicate the message and make it known; yet the people's guidance was not within his capacity, nor was he accountable for it. It is Allah who will determine the outcome of his efforts and guide whom He wills. Another verse confirms:

وَأِنْ مَا نُرِيَنَّكَ بَعْضَ الَّذِي نَعِدُهُمْ أَوْ نَتَوَفَّيَنَّكَ فَإِنَّمَا عَلَيْكَ الْبَلَاغُ وَعَلَيْنَا الْحِسَابُ.

And whether We show you part of what We promise them or take you in death, upon you is only the [duty of] notification, and upon Us is the account.²⁹³

²⁹³ Sūrah ar-Ra'd, 13:40.

Āyahs 23-24. **إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ . فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ**

However, he who turns away and disbelieves – then Allah will punish him with the greatest punishment.

But Allah will not leave the disbelievers to commit their crimes without recompense. The greatest punishment is due for the greatest sin, which is the rejection of Him to whom one owes his existence and sustenance. Those who choose to ignore or refuse His reminder will be punished severely for their denial and ingratitude.

Āyahs 25-26. **إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ . ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ**

Indeed, to Us²⁹⁴ is their [final] return. Then indeed, upon Us is their account.

The term decreed for every individual on the earth will come to an end, and every soul will be returned, willingly or unwillingly, to its Creator for the Account and Judgement.

The Prophet (ﷺ) was instructed to inform the people:

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ مَلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ.

Say, "The angel of death who has been entrusted with you will take you. Then to your Lord you will be returned."²⁹⁵

The Day of Resurrection must come, and each person will be confronted with the truth of all he accomplished and attempted in the life of this world. Allah will judge each individual with His perfect and absolute knowledge, wisdom and justice. He will decree the fate of each soul according to its record of deeds and His awareness of that servant's intent and circumstances. When one did good, he will obtain good and far more, and if he did evil, he will only receive an equal measure of evil.²⁹⁶

²⁹⁴ When Allah refers to Himself with a plural pronoun, as in these two verses, it is understood in the Arabic text to denote grandeur and authority. This is known as the "royal plural." It indicates the Lord's majesty, power and honor in contrast to the more intimate singular form "I" used in specific instances.

²⁹⁵ Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:11.

²⁹⁶ As mentioned in Sūrah Ghāfir, 40:40.

SŪRAH AL-FAJR (89) سُورَةُ الْفَجْرِ

This sūrah was revealed during the period when the persecution of new Muslims had begun in Makkah. Accordingly, its three main subjects are: previous defiant peoples and the punishment they earned, the nature of mankind, and the return to Allah for recompense in the Hereafter.

Without faith people are ruled by worldly interests, pursuing them excessively and often unjustly. Three examples are given of such nations who enjoyed the great favors granted them by Allah, yet they refused His legislation and opposed His prophets. The outcome they suffered in this world was merely the beginning of a greater retribution they will meet in the Hereafter.

Then there follows an outline of some human concepts which are inconsistent with faith. A refutation of these erroneous attitudes is provided through a description of conditions which lead to them. Wealth, poverty, ease and difficulty are all tests from Allah by which He examines His servants as to who is grateful or patient, so that He may reward them abundantly, and as to who is harsh and miserly so that He may give them their deserved penalty.

The sūrah's final verses describe the ultimate outcome for individual souls. During the period of worldly existence, the condition of any people or nation is determined by the conduct of its majority. When corruption spreads among a people, its consequences will affect everyone. In the Hereafter, however, the result of good and evil conduct is manifested for every person independently. As the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*When Allah sends down punishment on a people, it afflicts whoever is among them; but then they will be resurrected [individually] according to their deeds.*"²⁹⁷

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-5. وَالْفَجْرِ • وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ • وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ • وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ • هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِّذِي حِجْرِ

By the dawn, and [by] ten nights, and the even [number] and the odd, and the night when it passes – is there [not] in that an oath [sufficient] for one of perception?

Allah swears first by *al-fajr* (the dawn or daybreak), which is a time of awakening and renewed activity and a reminder of the Resurrection.

Next, He swears by ten blessed nights. These nights are not specified. Some scholars are of the opinion that they are the first ten nights of Dhul-Hijjah (the month of Hajj), while others hold the more likely view that they are the last ten nights of Ramadhān, within which is Laylat al-Qadr.

²⁹⁷ Narrated by Aḥmad and al-Bukhāri.

Then He swears by what is paired (*ash-shaf'*) and what is single (*al-watr*). All creation is based on duality, while the Creator is one alone, so many scholars interpreted the meaning to be that Allah is swearing by His creation and by Himself. Several other possibilities are mentioned in books of *tafseer*, such as that of Ibn Katheer. The early scholars presented a variety of views about the meanings of *al-fajr*, the ten nights, what is paired and single, and the night when it passes, but Allah knows best what He intended.

In any case, it is a compound oath which should be more than sufficient to awaken and convince any intelligent being. In effect, the nonbelievers are being asked: "Acknowledging all this, is it not enough to confirm the truth of that which you are refusing to accept? Do you need further evidence that it is within the power of Allah to establish the Hereafter, to recreate man and to call him to account for his deeds?"

Āyahs 6-8. أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ • إِرَمَ ذَاتِ الْعِمَادِ • الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ

Have you not considered how your Lord dealt with 'Aad? [With] Iram, who had lofty pillars, the likes of whom had never been created in the land.

Moreover, they should consider the examples of earlier populations which were destroyed for their denial and wickedness. Allah will never allow evil oppressors to go unpunished.

The first example is that of the tribe of 'Aad, a people of great physical strength who supported their tents with tall pillars. *Iram* is another name by which the people of 'Aad were known. They were filled with pride in themselves, their accomplishments and their tradition of idol worship; and they obstinately opposed their prophet, Hūd. So Allah sent against them a violent wind for seven nights and eight days in succession. Today there is no trace of their civilization.

Āyahs 9-10. وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ • وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ

And [with] Thamūd, who carved out the rocks in the valley? And [with] Fir'awn, owner of the stakes?

The second example is of the tribe of Thamūd, an arrogant people who carved their dwellings out of the rock. They had reached a high level of prosperity and power but forgot their Lord, turned to sin and idol worship and defied their prophet, Ṣāliḥ. Allah destroyed them with an earthquake, shaking them out of their pride, and a blast from the sky to terrify their hardened hearts. The city's ruins are known today as Madā'in Ṣāliḥ.²⁹⁸

The third example was that of Fir'awn (Pharaoh), who had critics among his people tortured and tied to stakes.²⁹⁹ After his oppression of the people, persecution of the Children of Israel and plots against Prophet Mūsā, Allah caused Fir'awn and his agents to be drowned in the sea while in pursuit of them. And He caused his body to be preserved as a sign and a lesson for future generations.

²⁹⁸ Refer also to Sūrah ash-Shams, 91:11-15.

²⁹⁹ Some narrations state that his believing wife (mentioned in Sūrah at-Taḥreem, 66:11) was tortured in this way until she died as a martyr.

Āyahs 11-13. الَّذِينَ طَغَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ . فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفُسَادَ . فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ

[All of] those who oppressed within the lands and increased therein the corruption. So your Lord poured upon them a scourge of punishment.

Those three were tyrannical oppressors who spread evil and corruption throughout the land. Entire civilizations flourish or fail according to the natural laws established by Allah for this universe, but at times He may intervene directly to impose His will. Thus, He sent down upon each of them dreadful punishments to destroy them.

The terrible end met by the 'Aad and Thamūd peoples, and then Fir'aun and his army, is cited as an example, showing that when they transgressed all limits and increased the corruption on earth, Allah afflicted them with His torment in this life even before the next. It confirms that the universe is not being run in a meaningless way, but systematically, and by a Sovereign whose power, wisdom and justice are observable in world history. It serves as a clear warning to all oppressors.

Āyah 14. إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبَالْمُرْصَادِ **Indeed, your Lord is in observation.**

Allah is fully aware and observing of everyone, including those who do not fear or believe in Him. In the Arabic language, *mirṣād* is a place of ambush, where a hunter or attacker quietly waits for the right moment to make a move. Allah is ever watchful while He grants respite to the wrongdoers. He sees, knows, records and takes account. And He will deal severely with His enemies, but it will be only when He wills. Believers are reassured that in time, their Lord will eliminate corruption and tyranny with just recompense for all.

The Qur'ān then moves on from the mention of nations to the mention of individual conduct and its outcome.

Āyah 15. فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ

So as for man, when his Lord tries him and [thus] is generous to him and favors him, he says, "My Lord has honored me."

Allah, Most High, makes an appraisal of the general moral condition of human society and comments on a primary weakness of mankind. Man is essentially ignorant and self-centered, having little perception of the consequences of his deeds. He is proud rather than grateful, attributing the favor to his own merit. The pagan Arabs were a conspicuous example of this. They assumed that the status they enjoyed would endure, and thought the favors and blessings granted to them by Allah in this world indicated that they were noble in His sight and approved by Him.³⁰⁰ Allah alludes to their limited logic in another verse:

أَيَحْسَبُونَ أَنَّمَا نُمِدُّهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ مَالٍ وَبَنِينَ نُسَارِعُ لَهُمْ فِي الْخَيْرَاتِ بَلْ لَا يَشْعُرُونَ.

*Do they think that what We extend to them of wealth and children is [because] We hasten for them good things? Rather, they do not perceive.*³⁰¹

³⁰⁰ This attitude is also described in Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:34-36.

³⁰¹ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:55-56.

Two aspects of this human tendency are considered in this and the next āyah.

First is the materialistic attitude of people who regard worldly wealth, rank and position as the only criterion of honor and merit. In their superficial outlook on life, disbelievers assume that they are favored or merely fortunate, while in fact, those gifts are given to test them. Allah examines man through various circumstances in order to make evident what attitude he will adopt when blessed with wealth and when afflicted with poverty.

Āyah 16. وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ

But when He tries him and restricts his provision, he says, "My Lord has humiliated me."

The other misconception, related to the first, is that lack of wealth and property indicates dishonor. So whenever Allah tries the materialistic person by holding back some of his provision so that he secures his needs for survival and nothing more, he complains that Allah has disgraced and humiliated him. When his wealth is taken away, this person feels he will lose the respect of his associates. And some are so afflicted with greed and self-indulgence that they will never be satisfied, no matter how much they accumulate.

Āyahs 17-18. كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تُكْرِمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ • وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمِسْكِينِ

No! But you do not honor the orphan. And you do not encourage one another to feed the poor.

The verses now address the deluded ones directly and bluntly, refuting their erroneous claims with an emphatic "No!" (*Kallā*). The meaning is that it is not at all as they imply. Disparities in provision among people do not make anyone superior or inferior; rather, affluence and poverty are regulated by the Mighty and Majestic, who might withhold from those He loves and give abundantly to those He does not love out of His complete knowledge and wisdom. People can be tried through prosperity or hardship, but Allah must be obeyed in every situation – in ease and in difficulty, for He does not charge any soul with more than it can bear. And He will reward both gratitude and patience with honor in the eternal life to come.

The Qur'ān points out that the selfish person who is concerned only with satisfying his own wants is undeserving of his Lord's favor and honor because he does not treat others appropriately in obedience to Him. For this reason, it goes on to censure such people for their indifference toward disadvantaged members of society.

"You do not honor the orphan." An orphan (*yateem*) is a child who has lost his or her father before the age of puberty.³⁰² As such, he is in need of others to show him kindness and alleviate his distress. The Qur'ān and Sunnah have given much attention to orphans and made benevolence to them a means of obtaining Paradise and drawing nearer to Allah. But instead of honoring the orphan you ignore and even demean him; and this demonstrates that your hearts are devoid of mercy and your consciences are dead.

³⁰² Among animals, it is one that has lost its mother.

"And you do not encourage one another to feed the poor." As the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "The believer is not one who eats his fill while his neighbor is hungry."³⁰³ Both the Qur'ān and Sunnah envision a society in which Muslims cooperate to care for the hungry, the distressed and the needy.

But while there are people facing starvation and death throughout the world, many affluent members of society go on seeking endless acquisitions and the short-lived pleasures they consider essential to their own well-being. About them Allah has said:

يَعْلَمُونَ ظَاهِرًا مِّنَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ عَنِ الْآخِرَةِ هُمْ غَافِلُونَ.

*They know what is apparent of the worldly life, but they, of the Hereafter, are unaware.*³⁰⁴

But when asked in the Hereafter what led them into the Hellfire, its miserable inhabitants will cite among the causes:

وَلَمْ نَكُ نَطْعِمِ الْمَسْكِينِ

*"And we used not to feed the poor."*³⁰⁵

The Qur'ān relates this attitude to unbelief, saying:

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْطَعِمُ مَنْ لَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ أَطْعَمَهُ ...

*And when it is said to them, "Spend from that with which Allah has provided you," the unbelievers say to the believers, "Should we feed him whom if Allah had willed He would have fed?"*³⁰⁶

And the Prophet (ﷺ) confirmed, "None of you [truly] believes until he likes for his brother what he likes for himself."³⁰⁷

Āyahs 19-20. **وَتَأْكُلُونَ التَّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَّمًّا • وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا**

And you consume inheritance, devouring [it] altogether, and you love wealth with immense love.

The stingy one neither respects the orphan nor wishes to feed the hungry. Individuals, peoples and nations have a tendency to exploit the weak among them. When greedy for wealth, they will seize it by any means – lawful or unlawful. Unconcerned about the condition of others, they love the world immensely with a love that has taken hold of their hearts.

The love of wealth and passion to accumulate it was a characteristic of the pre-Islamic Makkan society, as it is of all materialistic societies. The weak position of orphans often tempted their guardians to deprive them of inheritance and cheat them out of their

³⁰³ Al-Hākim and at-Ṭabarānī.

³⁰⁴ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:7.

³⁰⁵ Sūrah al-Muddath-thir, 74:44.

³⁰⁶ Sūrah Yā Seen, 36:47.

³⁰⁷ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

properties. No share was given to females or to boys who were not yet able to participate in wars.

Islam amended this to include women and children, assigning exact shares based on the proximity of kinship between the heir and the deceased. It ruled that no part of an estate, no matter how little, may be withheld from any heir.

But those who love wealth and decline to share it assume that they are within their right and that they hold no responsibility for the plight of others. These few verses do not simply expose this attitude; they condemn it and demand its termination. The Qur'ān's descriptions are meant to illustrate the reason why people with such an attitude in life will be called to account.

Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) once told the Muslims, "*It is not poverty that I fear for you, but I fear that the earth with its comforts will be spread out for you as it was spread for those before you, that you will covet it as they coveted it, and that it will destroy you as it destroyed them.*"³⁰⁸

Āyahs 21-22. كَلَّا إِذَا دُغَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَغًّا دَكًّا • وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا

No! When the earth has been leveled – pounded and crushed – and your Lord has come, and the angels, rank upon rank...

Again, Allah rejects the position of the unbelievers with the emphatic *kallā* – no indeed! He reminds the heedless that a time will come when they will witness alarming events and will be stripped of all ownership and wealth. Ahead lies a grave Day and dreadful terror. The earth, its mountains and everything on it will be flattened and levelled, pounded and crushed to dust, making it a barren, level plain. The systematic levelling and total destruction of all that is on the earth is one of the great upheavals that overwhelm the universe on *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*. Ibn Katheer adds that this is when all creatures will emerge from their graves.

And your Lord has come – for the Judgement. He will come in a manner befitting His majesty which is beyond human comprehension.³⁰⁹ *And the angels* will descend, row after row of them, in obedience to their Lord. As Allah has said:

هَلْ يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ رَبُّكَ أَوْ يَأْتِيَ بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ لَا يَنْفَعُ
نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ أَمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ فِي إِيْمَانِهَا خَيْرًا

Do they wait for anything except that the angels should come to them, or your Lord should come or some of the signs of your Lord? The Day that some of the signs of your

³⁰⁸ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

³⁰⁹ Allah has stated in the Qur'ān that He has certain attributes such as coming, encompassing, or being above the Throne. However, He has also disassociated Himself from the limitations of human attributes or human imagination. So a Muslim must believe in the existence of these attributes as Allah has described them without applying to them any allegorical meanings or attempting to explain how a certain quality could be (while this is known to Him alone) and without comparing them to those of creation or denying that He would have such a quality.

*Lord will come no soul will benefit from its faith as long as it had not believed before or earned through its faith some good.*³¹⁰

Āyahs 23-24. وَيَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى • يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي

And brought [within view] that Day, is Hell. That Day man will remember; but how, for him, will be the remembrance? He will say, "Oh, I wish I had sent ahead [some good] for my life."

On *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, Hell will be brought forth to terrify those who had neglected their obligations. They will observe their destined abode directly before them. Allah states:

وَعَرَضْنَا جَهَنَّمَ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِّلْكَافِرِينَ عَرَضًا

*"And We present the Hellfire that Day on display before the disbelievers."*³¹¹

Ibn Katheer pointed out that Allah will show them the Hellfire to let them see what it contains of retribution and punishment before their entry into it. Observing it intensifies their sorrow and distress, and the horror of anticipation brings additional anguish. Ibn Mas'ūd reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"The Hellfire will be brought, being led from seventy thousand halters – at each one, seventy thousand angels pulling it."*³¹² When one of them sees it before him he will remember and admit his sins, but it will be of no benefit to him at that time.

How, for him, will be the remembrance? What good will the remembrance be to him then? It is too late; the time for amending the situation has long faded. Those servants will be filled with regret, bitterness, self-reproach and pain when they view the punishment they deserve and which they could have avoided. They will realize that this is their just compensation for deliberately rejecting the truth and preferring to follow their own sinful desires.

"Oh, I wish I had sent [something] ahead for my life." Good deeds are capital, deposited in this world for redemption in the next, where every servant will be most in need of them on the Day of Account. The opponent of faith will then wish fervently that he had obeyed Allah and done some righteous deeds in his worldly life to save him from misery in the eternal life he now faces. But his regrets will not save him from the punishment.

The life referred to is the eternal life, as Allah has confirmed:

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهْوٌ وَلَعِبٌ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِیَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ.

*And this worldly life is not but diversion and amusement. And indeed, the home of the Hereafter – that is the [true] life, if only they knew.*³¹³

³¹⁰ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:158. See also Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:210.

³¹¹ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:100.

³¹² Muslim.

³¹³ Sūrah al-'Ankabūt, 29:64. Some narrations mention that even the believer will regret whatever good deeds he failed to do in the present life, and the obedient person will wish he had performed more acts of obedience.

Āyahs 25-26. **فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَذِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ . وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُ أَحَدٌ**

So on that Day, none will punish [as severely] as His punishment, and none will bind [as severely] as His binding [of the evildoers].

On that Day the evil soul will know for certain that there is no punishment as severe as that of Allah, and no one will be more severely punished than those who arrogantly disobeyed Him. Those tyrants and oppressors who confined and tortured people in this life will now be on the receiving end, but it will not be comparable to anything one might suffer on earth. The angels of punishment will endlessly torment the unrepentant criminals in the depths of Hell, and they will be bound in in such a way that there can never be any escape.

Āyahs 27-30.

يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ . ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَّرْضِيَّةً . فَأَدْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي . وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي

"O reassured soul, return to your Lord, well-pleased and pleasing [to Him]. And enter among My [righteous] servants, and enter My Paradise."

And on that same Day, the Mighty and Majestic will honor each righteous soul by addressing it directly. This is in clear contrast to the preceding scene of wrath and revenge against the evildoers. The believer who strove throughout his worldly life to obey and please his Creator will return to Him in peace and contentment. The command to return is evidence that the soul was originally with Allah but is placed in this temporary life on earth to be tested and to earn His approval.

The good soul that had accepted the truth, obeyed Allah and worked to amend itself out of love and fear of Him is reassured that it will return to Him pleased and satisfied, and that Allah will be pleased with that soul as well. The righteous one will be pleased and content within himself and pleased with Allah, knowing that Allah is pleased with his efforts. He will be at peace with his Lord, certain of His justice and confident of His mercy.

The believer is reassured that he will return to the company of his Creator and obtain His reward. He will be told, *"Enter among My servants, and enter My Paradise."* Ibn Katheer was of the opinion that these words will be said to every believing soul at the time of its death. And Ibn 'Abbās reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) told Abū Bakr, *"It will be said to you."*³¹⁴

³¹⁴ Ibn Abī Ḥātim.

SŪRAH AL-BALAD (90) سُورَةُ الْبَلَدِ

The sūrah is named after the word *al-balad* in the first verse. It was sent down in the Makkan period after the disbelievers had determined to oppose the Prophet (ﷺ) and persecute him.

The sūrah explains the true position of man in the world and states that Allah has shown him the paths of good and evil, and has provided him with the means to assess them and choose. It then depends upon man's own judgment and effort – whether he takes the path of righteousness and attains happiness or the path of sin and earns misery. The subject has been condensed into a few brief sentences, and among the miracles of the Qur'ān is that a complete concept of life has been effectively summarized in the concise words of this short sūrah.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. لَا أَقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ **No, I swear by this city,**

The word "*lā*" preceding the verb has been used to emphasize the oath. Or it may indicate negativity – the refutation of a previous statement or allegation, declaring "it is not so," and here would refer to the false claims made by the unbelievers of Quraysh. Allah swears an oath by the sacred city of Makkah in which the Prophet was living at the time. The purpose of an oath in the Qur'ān is to confirm something and emphasize it. This particular oath testifies to the great honor given to the city of Makkah.

Āyah 2. وَأَنْتَ حَرٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ **And you are free of restriction in this city.**

Although an early Makkan sūrah, Ibn Katheer and other commentators have preferred the above interpretation which alludes to the future conquest of the sacred city. Bloodshed had never been allowed in Makkah before the Prophet's triumphant entry into it. This restriction was lifted very briefly at that time. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Allah declared this city to be sacred the day He created the heavens and earth. It will remain so by the decree of Allah until the Day of Resurrection – its tree may not be uprooted nor its grass cut. It was made lawful for me alone therein for a brief period of a day, but today its sanctity has been returned as it was before. Let those present convey it to those absent. If anyone should allow it because fighting was allowed to the Messenger of Allah, then say, 'Allah permitted it to His Messenger but He did not permit it to you.*"³¹⁵

Another meaning given by the scholars is: *And you are a resident in this city.* This is also of great significance because the unbelievers of Makkah, who claimed to be the descendants of Prophets Ibrāheem and Ismā'eel as well as custodians of the Ka'bah, had been clearly violating its sanctity. While forbidding harm to an animal, a bird or even a plant therein, they maliciously persecuted the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and his followers who resided there.

³¹⁵ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

Āyah 3. وَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدَ And [by] the father and that which was born [of him],

And Allah swears by the father and his descendants. Three interpretations are generally given for these words: 1) Ādam and his descendants, i.e., all of mankind, 2) Ibrāheem and his descendants, and 3) every parent and child, that which begets and that which is begotten, alluding to the process of reproduction and preservation of the species.

Āyah 4. لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ We have certainly created man into hardship.

The Creator swears that He has indeed created mankind in a state of difficulty, work and exhaustion. The city of Makkah with the hardships faced therein by the Prophet (ﷺ) and the difficulties endured by human beings in general are cited as evidence that this world is not a place of comfort and ease for man. Rather, he has been created into a state of toil, struggle and effort. He strives to survive, he strives to obtain what he needs and wants, he strives to achieve his goals. His life is a process of continued exertion that never ends until he meets his Lord. Sūrah al-Inshiqāq describes it thus:

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّكَ كَادِحٌ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ كَدْحًا فَمُلَاقِيهِ.

*O mankind, indeed you are laboring toward your Lord with [great] exertion and will meet Him.*³¹⁶

Hardship takes various forms as a test for every individual. The loser is one who fails his test and earns added affliction in the Hereafter, while the winner is one who earns release from the afflictions of worldly life – and then peace, contentment and pleasure in the Hereafter.

Āyah 5. أَيَحْسَبُ أَن لَّن يَقْدِرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ Does he think that never will anyone overcome him?

But in spite of life's difficulties, most of humanity does not acknowledge its weak nature or indebtedness to its Creator and Provider. Instead, people tend to think they are self-sufficient, depending upon their own abilities, wealth and influence. They become egotistical over what their Lord has given them of strength and prosperity and act as if they were unaccountable for their deeds. They seek to acquire more and more by indulging in oppression, tyranny and exploitation, corrupting themselves and others in total disregard of moral values.

Āyah 6. يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا He says, "I have spent wealth in abundance."

When such a person is called upon to spend for a good cause, he excuses himself, saying he has already spent more than enough. But he has not done so for the cause of Allah and only boasts of spending in front of others. He makes a great show of generosity and people admire him for that. He squanders wealth for ostentation and display and prides himself on his extravagances while forgetting that Allah is fully aware of his true motivations. The Prophet (ﷺ) related that at the time of Judgment a man who had given much charity will be

³¹⁶Sūrah al-Inshiqāq, 84:6.

told, "You spent only to be called generous, and it was said." Then it will be commanded that he be dragged on his face and thrown into the Hellfire.³¹⁷

Āyah 7. اَيَحْسَبُ اَنْ لَّمْ يَرَهُ اَحَدٌ Does he think that no one has seen him?

He assumes that he has escaped exposure, while his Lord has full knowledge of by what methods he obtained his wealth and in what ways, and even for what motives he spent it. Mujāhid and other early scholars confirmed, "Does he think that Allah, the Mighty and Majestic, does not see him?"

On the contrary, Allah has called Himself "*al-Baṣeer*" (He who sees everything) forty-two times in the Qur'ān. To cite an example:

وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ اَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ.

And He is with you³¹⁸ wherever you are; and Allah is Seeing of what you do.³¹⁹

And the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Iḥsān is to worship your Lord as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He sees you.*"³²⁰ His sight encompasses not only the visible, but every state of existence and every circumstance. He is completely aware of what each of His servants does, how he does it and why.

Āyahs 8-9. اَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ . وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ Have We not made for him two eyes? And a tongue and two lips?

The ignorant person does not acknowledge any indebtedness or responsibility toward his Creator. But Allah reminds man of two of His most basic favors, without which he would be severely disabled: the instruments of vision and of speech. It was reported that al-Fudhayl bin 'Ayyādh recited this āyah one night and wept. A man asked him why, so he answered, "Have you ever spent a night thanking Allah for giving you two eyes with which you see? Have you ever spent a night thanking Allah for giving you a tongue with which you can speak?" Then he continued enumerating other blessings in this manner.

These are favors bestowed on man to help him follow right guidance – his eyes with which he recognizes the evidence of Allah's power and His signs throughout the universe, which should bring him to faith, and his tongue and lips which are his means of speech and expression. One word can often be more effective than a sword; it can awaken a conscience and inspire righteousness. Or, on the other hand, it may plunge a man into the fire of Hell.

Āyah 10. وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ And We have shown him the two ways.

In addition to the blessings of sight, speech and other physical faculties, Allah has favored man with guidance, clarifying for him *an-najdayn* (the ways of good and of evil) and giving

³¹⁷ Portion of a *ḥadīth* narrated by Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā'ī.

³¹⁸ In His knowledge – observing and witnessing.

³¹⁹ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:4.

³²⁰ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

him the ability to distinguish between them. *Najd* denotes a high ground or a mountain pass; and the dual form here indicates two prominent paths which are clearly distinct and recognizable.

Allah has given man instinctive knowledge supplemented by abilities of thought and understanding. He has set before him the directions of right and wrong, virtue and vice. One path leads to moral heights. It resembles a steep uphill road requiring a person to exercise self-restraint, discipline and determination. The other leads downward to moral corruption. This is the easier path, and the human soul tends to prefer the effortlessness of descent to the struggle of climbing higher.

But the Creator of man has shown him these two paths so that he can make an enlightened choice between them, and has revealed to him what lies at the end of each one. Allah has willed that man be given the ability to choose either way and grants him the freedom to act upon his choice. This is stated in Sūrah ash-Shams:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

"And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it³²¹ and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness – he has succeeded who purifies it and he has failed who corrupts it."³²²

Because man has been entrusted with a free will, accountability and judgment are inevitable. The human being must give an account of his conduct and face the consequences of how he had managed his life. Then, the Creator of life, who is all-knowing, all-powerful and completely just, will judge every aspect of His servant's conduct – from the innermost intentions to the effects of his deeds which extend to others, perhaps beyond his own lifetime for generations to come – and duly compensate him.

Āyahs 11-12. فَلَا افْتَحَمَ الْعَقَبَةَ . وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعَقَبَةُ But he has not broken through the difficult pass. And what can make you know what is [breaking through] the difficult pass?

In order to attain Paradise, one must take the difficult path of ascent. If he does not, it remains an obstruction to that attainment, for the ascent has been clearly indicated in this verse as the obstacle in the way of reaching the destination.

Most of mankind will not be willing to undertake such exertion, preferring a life of ease and comfort or else expending his efforts for worldly gains. Except for believers, man generally refrains from attempting the ascent which separates him from Paradise; but if he can pass this obstacle he will succeed. Expressing it in this way serves as a powerful incentive to take up the challenge no matter how much effort is required; for mankind must strive in any case. Only a true believer aspiring for his Lord's approval and eternal reward will be eager to break through the obstacles which have been set on the difficult pass to test every individual. The following verses clarify how he may do so.

³²¹ i.e., balanced and refined it, creating in it sound tendencies and consciousness.

³²² Sūrah ash-Shams, 91: 7-10.

Āyahs 13-16. فَكَ رَقَبَةٍ . أَوْ إِطْعَامٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ . يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ

[It is] the freeing of a slave; or feeding on a day of severe hunger an orphan of near relationship or a needy person in misery.

Allah explains to believers how to ascend the difficult pass and how to confront and overcome the obstacles found upon it, enabling them to reach the heights of Paradise. It is that they should give up spending for ostentation, display and pride, and instead spend their wealth to help orphans and the needy. They must be compassionate toward people and participate in the development of a society based on virtue and righteousness.

The first thing mentioned is the freeing of a slave or captive.³²³ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever frees a believing slave, Allah will free for every limb of the slave one of his limbs from the Hellfire."³²⁴ And he said, "Whoever builds a masjid so that Allah may be mentioned in it – Allah will build a house for him in Paradise; and whoever frees a Muslim person – it will be his ransom from the Hellfire; and whoever grows grey in Islam, then it will be a light for him on the Day of Resurrection."³²⁵ Scholars have pointed out that this includes sharing in the effort to free a slave or captive, not necessarily bearing all of the expense involved.

While in Makkah, before the *hijrah*, Abū Bakr freed a total of seven people: two men and five women. His father said to him, "I see you freeing some weak slaves. Why don't you free strong men who can defend and protect you?" Abū Bakr replied, "I am doing it only for Allah." In this manner Abū Bakr scaled the ascent by freeing those helpless souls in order to earn the approval of Allah.

The next verses mention feeding the hungry. A time of famine and hunger (*masghabah*) when food is scarce becomes a time when faith is tested, for one would not find much difficulty sharing food in times of abundance. The one most deserving of aid and kindness at such a time is an orphan who is also a relative. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "A *ṣadaqah* given to the poor person is counted as a charity, while if it is given to a relative it is counted as a charity and also connecting the ties of kinship."³²⁶

Feeding any destitute person on a day of hunger is revealed here to be another method for scaling the ascent. This also is a test which reveals such qualities in a believer as sympathy, compassion, cooperation and generosity. Ibn 'Abbās said, "*Dhā matrabah* is one who is covered with dust, or one miserable in the street as he has no house or anything to protect him from the dust."

Āyahs 17-18. ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْمَرْحَمَةِ . أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ

And then being among those who believed and advised one another to patience and advised one another to compassion. Those are the companions of the right.

³²³ The scholars include any Muslim who is imprisoned unjustly or under a form of subjugation or exploitation.

³²⁴ Aḥmad.

³²⁵ Aḥmad.

³²⁶ At-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā'i.

The path to Paradise and avoidance of Hellfire is described in these verses as performing certain deeds; in particular, freeing a captive, feeding the hungry among orphans and the destitute, and then true belief and counseling others to have patience and compassion. The conjunction in the Arabic text, *thumma*, does not indicate a time sequence but is used only as an introduction to the most important aspect of scaling the ascent, which is the belief that gives such deeds their value and weight in the judgment of Allah.

The appropriate righteous deeds must be coupled with correct belief,³²⁷ and neither one alone will suffice. As stated in the Qur'ān:

وَمَنْ أَرَادَ الْآخِرَةَ وَسَعَىٰ لَهَا سَعْيَهَا وَهُوَ مُؤْمِنٌ فَأُولَٰئِكَ كَانَ سَعْيُهُمْ مَشْكُورًا.

*And whoever desires the Hereafter and exerts the effort due to it while he is believer – it is those whose effort is ever appreciated.*³²⁸

And with their belief is the resulting conduct: supporting and advising one another throughout the difficulties of life. Believers should counsel each other to be patient and persevere in adversity as a practical demonstration of their solidarity when cooperating to carry out their religious obligations and achieve their common objectives. Thus, they become elements of strength and a source of hope and comfort to the whole society.

The spirit of compassion and mercy spreads among believers because they consider mutual advice an individual and communal responsibility. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) disclosed, "Those who are merciful will be given mercy by the Most Merciful. Show mercy to those on the earth; you will be shown mercy by Him in the heaven."³²⁹ And, "He who does not show mercy to people will not be shown mercy by Allah."³³⁰ The concept of community is emphasized in the Sunnah as it is in this āyah and elsewhere in the Qur'ān. It is central to the concept of Islam.

Believers strive and cooperate on the path of religion through their efforts and good deeds, and Āyah 18 states that they will be the possessors of good fortune who receive their records in their right hands on the Day of Account and proceed on to Paradise.

Āyahs 19-20. وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ . عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّوصَدَّةٌ

But they who disbelieved in Our signs – those are the companions of the left. Over them will be fire closed in.

Those who rejected Allah's signs and guidance can expect no good. Their denial renders worthless any deeds they might do, no matter how impressive they appear to people on the surface. They will receive their records in their left hands. These are the possessors of ill fortune who will enter the Hellfire, where they will be imprisoned and locked in. They are surrounded by fire and trapped within it; this is their eternal dwelling with no chance of escape. The cover over Hell will be sealed and locked forever, containing its fire and its inhabitants.

³²⁷ This is mentioned over 50 times in the Qur'ān.

³²⁸ Sūrah al-Isrā', 17:19.

³²⁹ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi.

³³⁰ At-Tirmidhi

سُورَةُ الشَّمْسِ (91) SŪRAH ASH-SHAMS

The sūrah's subject matter indicates that it was sent down in the early Makkan period at a time when opposition to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was intense. It deals mainly with the nature of man, his inherent ability to differentiate between right and wrong, his choice of action and his responsibility in determining his own destiny. Its verses have been seen by several scholars to be an explanation of those in Sūrah al-Layl.

The Creator's oath gives significance to certain of His creations, and mankind is urged to consider and appreciate their purpose and value. Just as the sun and the moon, the day and the night, the sky and the earth are contrasting opposites, good and evil are opposite in their methods and consequences. Allah has instilled in the human subconscious the ability to distinguish between them, and one's eternal life to come will depend upon how he uses that ability to do good and avoid evil. When he develops and implements his good inclinations he will attain permanent success; and those who insist on falsehood and pretense are warned of its evil end with disappointment, loss and punishment.

The sūrah concludes with a lesson from history – a brief account of the Thamūd's rebellion against their prophet, Ṣāliḥ (عليه السلام). It provides an example of what awaits those who allow their souls to be corrupted and oppose their Creator's guidance and instruction. The conditions in Makkah at the time of this revelation were similar to those that had been established by the wicked people of Thamūd against their prophet. Mention of this historical precedent indicated to the people of Makkah that it could apply to them.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1-2. وَالشَّمْسُ وَضُحَاهَا . وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَّهَا By the sun and its morning brightness and [by] the moon when it follows it,

Allah swears by some of His contrasting creations - first, by the sun and its bright morning light. *Dhuḥā* specifically expresses the clear light of mid-morning produced by the sun. Then He swears by the moon, which is visible with the disappearance of the sun, or which follows in its own orbit. Some of the *salaf* (early scholars) mentioned that the moon's following the sun means that it is subservient to it because it derives its light from the sun. Qatādah offered that "*follows it*" refers to the new crescent moon – when the sun goes down, it becomes visible.

Āyah 3-4. وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا . وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا And [by] the day when it displays it and [by] the night when it covers it,

The feminine pronoun *hā* (it) in these two āyahs has been said by some scholars to refer to the sun, while others refer it to the earth. So Allah swears by the day, making the earth visible, and the night, covering and concealing it in darkness. Or He swears by the day in which the sun becomes visible and the night in which it is concealed from view.

Āyah 5-6. وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا . وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا And [by] the sky and He who constructed it and [by] the earth and He who spread it,

The Creator then swears by the sky and by that which structured it, meaning Himself. Grammatically, the Arabic phrase can either mean: "By the sky and its constructor" or "By the sky and its construction." As He has also stated:

وَالسَّمَاءَ بَنَيْنَاهَا بِأَيْدٍ وَإِنَّا لَمُوسِعُونَ . وَالْأَرْضَ فَرَشْنَاهَا فَنِعْمَ الْمَاهِدُونَ.

And the heaven We constructed with hands [i.e., strength], and indeed, We are [its] expander. And the earth We have spread out, and excellent is the preparer.³³¹

And He swears by the earth and by that which made its spherical shape seem to man as a flat surface, enabling him to live upon it with ease.³³² Again, that which spread the earth is none but its Creator. The use of *mā* (what) rather than *man* (who) in these verses conveys a sense of the supreme, incomparable power and ability that would be required to construct the vast heavens, spread out the earth and (in the following āyah) create the human soul. The contrasting pairs mentioned in these verses are not in opposition to one another; rather, they are a source of balance and benefit for the earth's inhabitants.

Āyah 7-8. وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا . فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا And [by] the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it [with discernment of] its wickedness and its righteousness

Allah *ta'ālā* then swears by the human soul and by Himself, i.e., the one who created that soul with a sound nature, who balanced and refined it, who instilled in it consciousness and implanted in it a sense of right and wrong. *Fujūr* denotes rebellion, breach and violation, while *taqwā* is consciousness of Allah, caution and righteousness. This was similarly stated in Sūrah al-Balad:

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ

And We have shown him the two ways.³³³

The Prophet (ﷺ) explained the distinction by saying, "Righteousness is good morals, and wrongdoing is that which wavers within yourself and you would not like people to discover."³³⁴

Allah directed His Messenger (ﷺ), and through him His servants, to maintain and preserve the sound condition of their souls:

فِطْرَةَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ

[Adhere to] the fiṭrah of Allah upon which He has created [all] people. No change should there be in the creation of Allah.³³⁵

³³¹ Sūrah adh-Dhāriyāt, 51:47-48.

³³² Refer also to Sūrah an-Nāziyāt, 79:30.

³³³ Sūrah al-Balad, 90:10.

³³⁴ Muslim.

³³⁵ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:30.

Fiṭrah is the natural inborn inclination of every human being to believe in and worship his Creator before the corruption of his nature by external influences.³³⁶ The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) explained, *"Every child is born in a state of fiṭrah, but his parents make him a Jew or a Christian or a Zoroastrian."*³³⁷

Divine messages revealed through the prophets should increase man's ability to distinguish between good and evil, help him to take appropriate decisions in life and make him aware of his accountability. The Creator grants a measure of free will so that every soul can earn the appropriate remuneration for whatever belief and conduct it has chosen to follow. Even so, everything one chooses to do is already known by Allah and recorded in His register.

A man once came to the Prophet (ﷺ) and asked him, "O Messenger of Allah, do you consider that what people do and strive for is something predestined for them from a past decree, or is it something they attain from what [legislation] their prophet brought and evidence of it will be confirmed against them?" He replied, *"Rather, it is something predestined for them."* So the man said, "Then why do we work?" The Prophet (ﷺ) replied, *"Whomever Allah has created for one of the two places [i.e., Paradise or Hell], He prepares him for it, and that is confirmed in the Book of Allah: 'By the soul and He who proportioned it and inspired it [with] its wickedness and its righteousness.'"*³³⁸ Allah prepares each person for his decreed destination by enabling him to work for it and earn it.

Āyah 9-10. قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا • وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا He has succeeded who purifies it, and he has failed who corrupts it.

The object of that oath sworn by Allah is the sūrah's message – man may purify his soul or corrupt it, and he will obtain the result of that. While one's destiny is predetermined by Allah, it is also the direct consequence of his choices and deeds in this life on earth. Allah informs mankind that when one chooses to purify his soul through faith and good deeds he will be successful in attaining Paradise, but if he corrupts it through unbelief and sin he will fail and be disappointed.

Human decisions and actions do not operate outside the will of Allah because He has decreed that everyone must make choices in life about particular matters and then has provided clear guidance for all who choose to accept it. So no one should submit passively to what he supposes to be his fate, because he has no knowledge of that. And since he has no knowledge of the destination for which he was created, Allah's knowledge of it will not affect his choice.

The believer continually seeks his Lord's assistance in keeping his soul pure and adhering to the path leading to success, *aṣ-ṣirāṭ al-mustaqīm*. It was related that upon reciting *qad*

³³⁶ Islam is described as the religion of *fiṭrah* – that which is consistent with the inherent nature of mankind.

³³⁷ Al-Bukhari and Muslim. Another authentic hadith narrated by at-Tirmidhi adds: *"...or a polytheist."*

³³⁸ Aḥmad and Muslim. Allah prepares one for the decreed destination by enabling him to work for it. See also the ḥadīth under Āyahs 8-10 of Sūrah al-Layl.

aflaḥa man zakāhā, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would supplicate, "O Allah, grant my soul its *taqwā* and purify it; You are the best who can purify it."³³⁹

Āyah 11-13. كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا . إِذِ انْبَعَثَ أَشْقَاهَا . فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا

Thamūd denied by [reason of] their transgression, when the most wretched of them was sent forth. And the messenger of Allah [i.e., Ṣāliḥ] said to them, "[Do not harm] the she-camel of Allah or [prevent her from] her drink."

One example of those who corrupted their souls is the tribe of Thamūd, who denied Allah's prophet, Ṣāliḥ due to their arrogance and tyranny. They had reached a high level of prosperity and power, and Allah had given them authority in the land while prohibiting corruption therein. But they forgot their Lord and turned to sin and idol worship, so a messenger was raised among them to remind and warn them.

The affluent majority saw Ṣāliḥ and his few followers as a threat to their established way of life. When they demanded a miracle, Allah sent them a she-camel of great size and beauty. But after witnessing the miracle they rebelled, and their leader, who was the most arrogant and wicked man among them,³⁴⁰ went out to kill the camel sent by Allah. 'Abdullāh bin Zam'ah reported that once the Prophet (ﷺ) addressed the people, mentioning the she-camel and the one who hamstrung her. He recited, "*When the most wretched of them was sent forth,*" and said, "*A man was sent after her who was honored for his might, ruthless and supported among his people, similar to Abū Zam'ah.*"³⁴¹

The prophet Ṣāliḥ warned the people of Thamūd not to harm the she-camel or deprive her of her right to drink from the water which she shared with them by the command of Allah. But they refused, urging their evil companion to do away with her.

Āyah 14. فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَحَسَّوْهَا But they denied him and hamstrung her. So their Lord brought down upon them destruction for their sin and made it equal [upon all of them].

The Thamūd defied their prophet and plotted to eliminate the she-camel. Their wicked leader began by slashing her hind legs with his sword, and as she fell the others moved in to kill her. Then, when no punishment was yet apparent, they challenged their prophet, saying, "Bring it on if you should be truthful!" So due to their defiance and collaboration in the sin, Allah sent down on the entire tribe a terrible punishment and destroyed them all, except for Ṣāliḥ and his few followers.

When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) and some of his companions passed through the ruins of al-Ḥijr, (now known as Madā'in Ṣāliḥ) they stopped at the dwellings of Thamūd. People began to draw water from the wells, make dough with it and cook. When the Prophet

³³⁹ Muslim and an-Nasā'i.

³⁴⁰ Some reports mention that his name was Qudār bin Sālif or Uhaymir.

³⁴¹ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim. Abū Zam'ah was the narrator's grandfather.

learned of that he ordered them to empty their pots and feed the dough to the camels. He then moved them out until they reached the well that the she-camel used to drink from and said, "*Do not enter upon those tortured ones except that you be weeping; and if you are not weeping, do not enter upon them in order not to be struck by that which struck them.*"³⁴²

Āyah 15. وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا And He does not fear the consequence thereof.

Allah, the Exalted, punishes out of complete justice. None can reverse His judgment or decree. He does whatever He wills with no fear of consequences. He is not asked about what He does; yet His servants will be asked. The Qur'ān confirms:

لَا يُسْأَلُ عَمَّا يَفْعَلُ وَهُمْ يُسْأَلُونَ.

*He is not questioned about what He does, but they will be questioned.*³⁴³

سُورَةُ اللَّيْلِ (92) SŪRAH AL-LAYL

The subject matter of this sūrah closely resembles that of Sūrah ash-Shams: perceiving the distinction between the two clearly opposing ways of life and stating the outcome of each. Some scholars have said that its verses are explained by those in ash-Shams, which are more specific. The two sūrahs were revealed at about the same period.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3. وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى . وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى . وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى By the night when it covers and [by] the day when it appears and [by] He who created the male and female,

Allah swears by the diversity of His creation, among the most obvious aspects of which are the night and day, the male and female. The night covers and conceals the land and all that is on it, and the day brightens up and makes every object apparent and visible. He swears also by Himself, i.e., "*that which created the male and female.*" The male and female division is applicable to all animate species, including plants, while singularity and oneness belong only to the Creator who has no counterpart.

³⁴²Al-Bukhārī.

³⁴³Sūrah al-Anbiyaa', 21:23.

Āyah 4. إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَّى **Indeed, your efforts are diverse.**

This is the object of Allah's oath; He confirms that the efforts and activities of people are various, diverse and often in opposition to one another. Human beings generally strive for different things in the world – wealth, property, enjoyment, reputation and security. For non-believers, worldly achievement and comfort is the main aspiration. Excessive attachment to the life of this world and rivalry for its pleasures becomes the root of every sin.

In contrast, believers strive mainly for success in the Hereafter and it is their true priority, although they might seek something of this world as a means to attain this long-term objective. But whatever they possess is in their hands to be utilized and not their hearts to be cherished. They continually work to please Allah, become close to Him and earn His reward by striving to improve their deeds, their character, their morals and manners.

Mention of the diversity of man's activities and ambitions suggests that their outcomes will also be different – the bliss and contentment of Paradise or the misery and torment of Hell. Faith gives the believer a goal greater than earthly life and draws him toward concepts superior to those of the material world. The following verses elaborate further.

Āyahs 5-7. فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَى . وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَى . فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْيُسْرَى **So as for he who gives and fears Allah and believes in the best [reward], We will ease him toward ease.**

Those who were generous out of consciousness of their Lord and believing in His good reward will be eased toward a good life in both this world and the next. *Al-ḥusnā* means the best or most beautiful thing. It refers to the reward of Paradise.

As Allah also said:

لِّلَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا الْحُسْنَىٰ وَزِيَادَةٌ

For those who have done good is al-ḥusnā (the best) and more...³⁴⁴

In an authentic ḥadīth narrated by Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) explained "more" (*ziyādah*) as being what is greater than the reward of Paradise: that its inhabitants will be able to see their Lord.

Some commentators expressed the opinion that *al-ḥusnā* refers to the truth or to the best words: *Lā ilāha ill-Allāh; Muḥammadur-rasūlullāh*, which is also correct. Accordingly, those who believe in this truth will be eased and aided by Allah to obey Him and do the appropriate deeds easily.

So for one who gives,³⁴⁵ fears Allah, believes in the truth He has revealed and in the reward of the Hereafter, Allah will facilitate for him the correct way of life, so much so that doing good will become easy for him and doing evil will be difficult. Ibn Katheer explained that when one intends righteousness, Allah rewards him by helping him to attain it. And when he intends evil, Allah leaves him to his own devices.

³⁴⁴ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:26.

³⁴⁵ i.e., gives of himself – from his wealth, his knowledge, skills, experience, or whatever blessings Allah has granted him.

Āyahs 8-10. وَأَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنَى . وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحَسَنَى . فَسَنُيَسِّرُهُ لِلْعُسْرَى . But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need and denies the best [reward], We will ease him toward difficulty.

But those who adopt the opposite manner of life, greedily withholding from others, refusing to share the blessings bestowed upon them by their Lord and rejecting the concept of the Hereafter with its accountability and good reward will be eased toward a life of hardship and misery. Allah will facilitate that way of life for them, so much so that doing evil will become easy and doing good will be difficult. And thus, they will easily and effortlessly be taking a path toward the Hellfire.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once said, *"There is no soul given life but that Allah has decreed its place in Paradise or Hell and decreed that it will [ultimately] be unhappy or happy."* A man asked, "O Messenger of Allah, should we not then leave it to our decree and cease working?" He (ﷺ) replied, *"Work, for everyone is disposed toward that for which he was created. As for the people of happiness, they are disposed toward the deeds of the people of happiness, but as for the people of unhappiness, they are disposed toward the deeds of the people of unhappiness."* Then he recited: *"As for he who gives and fears Allah And believes in the best [reward], We will ease him toward ease. But as for he who withholds and considers himself free of need and denies the best [reward], We will ease him toward difficulty."*³⁴⁶

Āyah 11. وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّى . And what will his wealth avail him when he falls?

While the sinful disbeliever may be successful and prosperous in this worldly life, he will not secure the least benefit from the wealth he hoarded once his term comes to an end. What good will it do him after his death? The description of that stingy one who denies the Hereafter concludes with this unsettling āyah, which says: "What will his wealth avail him when he collapses in death? When he goes down into his grave? When he falls headlong into the Fire?"

No amount of wealth will benefit him at that time. Those properties and assets for which he was prepared to risk his honor and even his life cannot accompany him to the grave. Neither will they save him from his Lord's judgment nor will they prevent him from being cast into the depths of Hell for his senseless greed and wickedness.

Āyahs 12-13. إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَى . وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَى . Indeed, [incumbent] upon Us is guidance. And indeed, to Us belongs the Hereafter and the first [life].

Allah states that He has made it an obligation upon Himself to send guidance and provide clear directives for mankind. Qatādah said that it means Allah will explain what is lawful and unlawful. And because Allah has taken it upon Himself to guide man to the right path and will never fail in His promise, no one can justify deviation or injustice. Aṭ-Ṭabari compared this meaning to Allah's words:

³⁴⁶ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

*And upon Allah is the direction of the [right] way.*³⁴⁷

Then, He reminds that He owns and is in complete control of both this world and the Hereafter, where His judgment cannot be avoided and His justice will prevail. It is a statement of the power He holds over man and all creation, from which there is no escape.

Āyahs 14-16. فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّى . لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى . الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى . **So I have warned you of a Fire which is blazing. None will [enter to] burn therein except the most wretched one who had denied and turned away.**

Allah clearly warned mankind about the Hellfire which has been prepared for those who deny the truth, reject His Messenger and ignore His message. An-Nu'mān bin Basheer said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) giving a sermon in which he said, '*I have warned you of the Fire.*' He said it in such a voice that if a man was in the marketplace he would have heard it from where I am standing now. And he said it [so forcefully] that the garment on his shoulder fell down to his feet."³⁴⁸

It is only the most wretched of human beings who will be thrown into that Fire. A description is given of such a person; it is one *who had denied and turned away* from his Lord's revelation during his lifetime on earth. He had not responded to Allah's invitation or His command, refusing His guidance and His mercy. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) told his companions, "*All of my ummah will enter Paradise on the Day of Resurrection except those who refused.*" One of them asked, "Who would refuse, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied, "*Whoever obeys me will enter Paradise, and whoever disobeys me has refused.*"³⁴⁹

Āyahs 17-20.

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى . الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى . وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى . إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى

But the righteous one will avoid it – [he] who gives [from] his wealth to purify himself. And not [giving] for anyone who has [done him] a favor to be rewarded, but only seeking the face of his Lord, Most High.

In contrast, Allah promises that the punishment of Hellfire will not touch the righteous person who was conscious of Him and sought to please Him. That believer is described as one who spends generously for the cause of Allah in order to purify his soul from sin. Moreover, he does not give of his wealth for a worldly purpose or benefit, nor to repay a favor done to him. Through his expenditures and charities he seeks only the countenance or *face* of his Lord, which has been interpreted by early and later scholars to mean His acceptance and approval. Allah states in the Qur'ān that He has certain attributes such as hearing, sight, hands, face, etc. However, He has disassociated Himself from the limitations

³⁴⁷ Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:9.

³⁴⁸ Aḥmad.

³⁴⁹ Aḥmad and al-Bukhārī.

of human attributes. His attributes are unlike those of His creation and are befitting to Him alone; and He affirmed:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

*There is nothing like unto Him.*³⁵⁰

Ibn Katheer offered another meaning: The righteous one seeks the face of his Lord, hoping to attain the blessing of seeing Him in the final abode, in the gardens of Paradise. As Allah said:

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاصِرَةٌ . إِلَىٰ رَبِّهَا نَاظِرَةٌ

*[Some] faces, that Day, will be radiant, looking at their Lord.*³⁵¹

Āyah 21. وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ And he is going to be satisfied.

Allah promises that He will not only save His righteous servant from the Hellfire, but that He will completely satisfy and please him in the next life with the great blessing of His Paradise. In addition, the righteous one will be content in this life and satisfied with his religion, his Lord, his destiny and whatever befalls him.

Many scholars of tafseer mentioned that these final verses were revealed regarding Abū Bakr. Undoubtedly, he is included, and is the most deserving of the *ummah* to be described with these attributes. However, the wording is general and applies to any believer who fits the description. And Allah knows best.

³⁵⁰ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:11. Islamic 'aqeedah (belief) requires faith in the existence of these attributes as Allah has described them without applying to them any allegorical meanings or attempting to explain how a certain quality might be (while this is known only to Allah) and without comparing them to creation or denying that He would have such a quality.

³⁵¹ Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:22-23.

SŪRAH ADH-DHUḤĀ (93) سُورَةُ الضُّحَى

This sūrah was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) at the earliest period in Makkah during the first stage of prophethood. Allah had suspended the revelation temporarily and the polytheists taunted him about it. He was saddened and distressed, thinking that perhaps his Lord was dissatisfied with him for some reason. Then the revelation returned to him with this sūrah.

The opening verses respond to the claims being made by the unbelievers that Allah was displeased with him and had forsaken him. For indeed, Allah had already given much to His Prophet (ﷺ) – in particular, the Qur'ān containing guidance for all humanity. And Allah had blessed him with the most noble nature and temperament, as He stated in the Qur'ān:

وَإِنَّكَ لَعَلَىٰ خُلُقٍ عَظِيمٍ

*And indeed you have an exalted standard of character.*³⁵²

The sūrah's words reassure him that the pause in revelation was not due to any failure on his part, and that the initial hardships he was experiencing would be overcome. Allah reminds him that He has cared for him all along and prepared him for his mission. Hence, he is told to show gratitude by making his Lord's favors and blessings known.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-2. وَالضُّحَىٰ . وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا سَجَىٰ By the morning brightness; and [by] the night when it covers with darkness,

Allah swears an oath by the morning brightness and then by night as its darkness settles – a time of activity and a time of rest. A few commentators have suggested a parallel between these two contrasting phenomena and that of the revelation followed by its interruption.

The oath emphasizes the importance of what follows – support for the Prophet (ﷺ) and relief from the anxiety he was experiencing, for he could not understand why the revelations were no longer coming to him. In addition, the Makkan polytheists had begun to notice this and comment sarcastically.

Āyah 3. مَا وَدَّعَكَ رَبُّكَ وَمَا قَلَىٰ Your Lord has not taken leave of you nor has He detested [you].

The object of this oath is not only reassurance for the Prophet (ﷺ), but refutation of the claim by the unbelievers that Allah hated and had abandoned him. When he became ill for a few days and did not stand for prayer, a woman said, "O Muḥammad, I think your devil has finally left you." In another narration, the idolaters said, "Muḥammad's Lord has abandoned him and detests him." So Allah revealed these verses.³⁵³

³⁵² Sūrah al-Qalam, 68:4.

³⁵³ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī and an-Nasā'ī.

Allah speaks directly to him while responding to the taunts of his enemies. He had felt anxious that perhaps he had committed some error due to which his Lord had become angry, so he is told that Allah had not forsaken him, nor was He displeased with him. The revelation had not been delayed because of displeasure; it was merely his Lord's plan.

Āyah 4-5. وَلِلْآخِرَةِ خَيْرٌ لَّكَ مِنَ الْأُولَىٰ . وَلَسَوْفَ يُعْطِيكَ رَبُّكَ فَتَرْضَىٰ **And the Hereafter is better for you than the first [life]; and your Lord is going to give you, and you will be satisfied.**

Additionally, Allah gives the Prophet (ﷺ) good tidings that the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*) will be better for him than the present life, and that there He will grant him whatever he had aspired for – so much so that he will be pleased and contented. And this is why the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was the most indifferent of people concerning worldly things, as is evident in his *seerah* (biography). He said, "*What do I have to do with this world? The example of me and this world is like a rider who rests in the shade of a tree and then moves on and leaves it.*"³⁵⁴

Allah had already given His Prophet (ﷺ) the most noble character and then the highest honor by making him the greatest and the final prophet to humanity. He gave him the Qur'ān containing His words and guidance for mankind. He then gave him steadfast and righteous followers to support him, and He would give him a community of believers enduring generation after generation, asking Allah to send blessings upon him until the end of time.

He would be granted the highest honor in the Hereafter as well, and be the first to enter Paradise. Ibn Katheer explained that in the home of the Hereafter, Allah would give him intercession until He was satisfied and pleased concerning his *ummah*, in addition to what He has prepared for him of honor. And among those blessings would be the river, *al-Kawthar*, whose banks are domes of pearl and whose mud is the most fragrant musk.

Some commentators added the interpretation that Allah was promising His Messenger (ﷺ) that *al-ākhirah*, meaning the later part of his life, would be better than the first part; and this was realized with the spread of Islam throughout the Arabian peninsula.

Then, Allah reminds him of His constant, continuous care and protection.

Āyah 6. أَلَمْ يَجِدْكَ يَتِيمًا فَآوَىٰ **Did He not find you an orphan and gave [you] refuge?**

Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was born an orphan. His father had died before his birth and his mother died while he was a small child. Yet, Allah ensured that he was always taken care of; for then he was under the guardianship of his grandfather, 'Abdul-Muṭṭalib, until he too passed away when Muḥammad was eight years old. After that his uncle, Abū Ṭālib took responsibility for him and continued to love and protect him, even while refusing to accept Islam. So Allah reminds that in spite of his being an orphan, He had provided for his needs and prepared him for prophethood.

³⁵⁴ Aḥmad, at-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah.

Āyah 7. وَوَجَدَكَ ضَالًّا فَهَدَىٰ And He found you lost and guided [you].

Additionally, Allah blessed Muhammad (ﷺ) with His guidance. Although the environment he lived in was steeped in misguidance, ignorance and heedlessness, Allah did not leave him unaware and searching. He protected him from the deviance, corruption and immorality of the pre-Islamic Arabian society and then showed him the truth.

The Arabic word *dhāll* can mean unaware, unguided or alone. The Prophet (ﷺ) knew nothing of previous divine scriptures before the Qur'ān was revealed to him, but Allah guided and taught him, and through him, his entire nation. As He stated in the Qur'ān:

وَكَذَلِكَ أَوْحَيْنَا إِلَيْكَ رُوحًا مِّنْ أَمْرِنَا مَا كُنْتَ تَدْرِي مَا الْكِتَابُ وَلَا الْإِيمَانُ وَلَكِن جَعَلْنَاهُ نُورًا نَّهْدِي بِهِ مَن نَّشَاءُ مِنْ عِبَادِنَا وَإِنَّكَ لَتَهْدِي إِلَى صِرَاطٍ مُسْتَقِيمٍ.

*And thus We have revealed to you an inspiration of Our command. You did not know what is the Book or [what is] faith, but We have made it a light by which We guide whom We will of Our servants. And indeed, [O Muḥammad], you are guiding to a straight path.*³⁵⁵

Those who followed his guidance were to become the most noble nation on earth and leaders in human development and civilization.

Āyah 8. وَوَجَدَكَ عَائِلًا فَأَغْنَىٰ And He found you poor and made [you] self-sufficient.

And his Lord enriched him after he had been in poverty. First, through marriage to Khadījah, He provided the Prophet (ﷺ) with independence and a sense of self-sufficiency. Thus, he (ﷺ) said, "*Wealth is not an abundance of possessions, but wealth is self-sufficiency of the soul.*"³⁵⁶ And second, although he lived very simply with few possessions, considerable wealth came to him. But whatever he obtained of camels, livestock, gold or silver, he gave away to those in need among his people.

‘Uqbah bin al-Ḥārith reported: "I prayed the ‘aṣr prayer behind the Prophet (ﷺ) in Madinah. He pronounced the salām and then he stood up and quickly passed through the rows of people to one of his wives' chambers. The people were alarmed at his haste. So upon returning he told them, '*I remembered a donation we had at home and disliked that it remained in my possession, so I ordered its distribution.*'"³⁵⁷ In fact, substantial wealth passed through his hands and all of the world's luxuries and comforts could have been at his disposal. But he never desired possessions or kept them for himself.³⁵⁸

Āyah 9-10. فَأَمَّا الْيَتِيمَ فَلَا تَقْهَرْ . وَأَمَّا السَّائِلَ فَلَا تَنْهَرْ So as for the orphan, do not oppress [him]. And as for the petitioner, do not repel [him].

³⁵⁵ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:52.

³⁵⁶ Muslim. This means contentment with whatever Allah has given and the attitude that it is enough.

³⁵⁷ Al-Bukhārī.

³⁵⁸ However, he did not reject them either, but always used them for a good purpose.

³⁵⁸ Al-Bukhārī.

Mention of Allah's care for the Prophet (ﷺ) is preparation for instruction. In these final verses, Allah reminds His Messenger (ﷺ) of the duties these blessings require. He directs him and the *ummah* in general to adopt a similar code of behavior; and specifically, kindness to the orphan, respecting his rights and his person. Just as Allah sheltered and nurtured him in his early years, he should show gratitude by protecting and caring for orphans. This he did, and encouraged others, saying, "*I and the sponsor of an orphan will be in Paradise like this*," and he held up his index and middle fingers.³⁵⁹

Then, Allah reminds him never to shun or turn away any who approach him with their needs. It is prohibited to disregard one who seeks or asks for something. A believer must not be oppressive, arrogant, wicked, or mean to the weak among Allah's servants who seek aid of some kind. Qatādah said, "This means to respond to the poor and needy with mercy and gentleness." If there is something to give, give it graciously; but if not, then at least show kindness and goodwill.

The instruction not to repel a petitioner also applies to those who are seeking guidance and information. One should never scorn or ignore such a person, especially when it concerns religious knowledge. Whenever someone asks for clarification regarding anything about Allah's religion, it is an obligation to teach that person, just as Allah taught His Prophet (ﷺ).

Āyah 11. وَأَمَّا بِنِعْمَةِ رَبِّكَ فَحَدِّثْ But as for the favor of your Lord, report [it].

And finally, Allah instructs his Messenger (ﷺ) to show gratitude by making known the blessings that had been bestowed upon him. This is not a command to be boastful, since the favor is from Allah and not from himself. It is a declaration of the Lord's grace and generosity.

Similarly, gratitude is forthcoming when one receives assistance or a kindness from another human being. Abū Hurayrah reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Whoever does not thank people does not thank Allah*."³⁶⁰

Speaking of Allah's bounties, especially those of guidance and faith, expresses gratitude to Him who has given those blessings. It is the recipient's practical manifestation of thanks. Gratitude to Allah is further shown by sharing one's blessings with others – his wealth, knowledge, skills, guidance, or anything that may be of benefit.

³⁵⁹ Al-Bukhāri.

³⁶⁰ Abū Dāwūd and at-Tirmidhi.

SŪRAH ASH-SHARḤ (94) سُورَةُ الشَّرْحِ

The subject matter of this sūrah closely resembles that of Sūrah adh-Dhuhā. Both sūrahs were revealed in about the same period and under similar conditions. It is called *ash-Sharḥ* and *al-Inshirāḥ* in reference to the verb *nashraḥ* in the first āyah.

Before his prophethood, Muḥammad (ﷺ) never had to encounter the conditions in which he found himself after it. This was an enormous transformation in his life, for as soon as he began to declare the message of Islam, the same society which had previously honored him with unique respect turned hostile towards him. People in Makkah would no longer listen to him; he began to be ridiculed and abused; at every step he had to face new difficulties. Although with time he became accustomed to hardships, the initial stage was especially difficult for him. Thus, *adh-Dhuhā* and then *ash-Sharḥ* were sent down to comfort him and encourage him to continue working for the approval and reward of Allah.

He is reminded that Allah had favored him with great blessings; therefore he should not be depressed. In this sūrah, he is reassured that his period of hardship would not continue much longer, and that relief was imminent. Finally, he is instructed to reduce the stress of hardships in that initial period through additional worship and concentration on the meeting with his Lord.³⁶¹

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ Did We not expand for you your breast?

In the first part of this sūrah, Allah *ta'ālā* reminds His Messenger (ﷺ) of some of His favors to him – among them that initially, He opened his heart to accept and contain Islam and enlightened it with guidance. The reminder is meant to assure him that just as his Lord had previously aided and supported him, He would continue to do so.

"Expansion of the breast" (*sharḥ aṣ-ṣadr*) is an expression of reassurance, relief from doubt, satisfaction, confidence and motivation. Before prophethood was bestowed upon him, Muḥammad (ﷺ) was in a mentally confused and troubled state. Neither could he accept the religion of his forefathers nor had he perceived a feasible alternative. His spiritual unrest and dissatisfaction led him to seek seclusion in the cave of Ḥiraa' to contemplate and pray for guidance. With the favor of prophethood, Allah opened for him the path of right guidance, which brought him relief, peace of mind and the courage and determination needed to carry the heavy responsibilities of his mission.

The context in which *sharḥ aṣ-ṣadr* (expansion of the breast) is mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'ān shows that it has two meanings:

- (1) Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:125, says: "So whoever Allah wants to guide, *yashraḥ ṣadrahū lil-islām* (He expands his breast to contain Islam)"; and in Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:22, "So is one

³⁶¹ A similar directive was given to him at the beginning of Sūrah al-Muzammil, 73:1-9.

whose breast Allah has expanded to [accept] Islam (*sharaḥ-Allāhu ṣadrahū lil-Islām*) and he is upon a light from his Lord..." In both these verses, *sharḥ aṣ-ṣadr* means freedom from every kind of distraction and indecision, and satisfaction with Islam as the only correct and appropriate way of life.

(2) And in Sūrah Tā Hā, 20:25-26, it states that when Allah appointed Prophet Mūsā to confront Pharaoh and his people, he prayed to Allah, saying: "*Rabbishraḥ-li ṣadri wa yassirli amrī* (My Lord, expand for me my breast and ease for me my task)." Here, expanding the breast implies that his morale and courage be increased for the task ahead.

In this sūrah, "expanding the Prophet's breast" contains both meanings. And it emphasizes for him an additional point: "When Allah has blessed you with *sharḥ aṣ-ṣadr*, there is no longer any reason that you should feel distressed or depressed."

Āyahs 2-3. وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ . الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ And We removed from you your burden which had weighed upon your back.

In addition, Allah had removed a burden that had weighed heavily upon the Prophet (ﷺ). This has been interpreted by commentators in three ways:

1. It refers to the two occasions on which angels opened his chest and cleansed his heart: the first during his childhood³⁶² and the second prior to *al-Israa'* (the Night Journey).³⁶³ A number of scholars have rejected this view since the wording in those ḥadiths is *shaqq aṣ-ṣadr*, (splitting or opening) rather than *sharḥ*.
2. It means forgiveness for some errors that he may have committed previously. Although *wizr* (burden) is often used to mean guilt or sin, it is known that all prophets were safeguarded from committing sins. Thus, his burden refers to minor oversights about which he was acutely sensitive.
3. It refers to the anxiety experienced at the outset of his prophethood – this is considered to be most likely and the most correct view. It suggests that the difficulties facing his mission weighed heavily on his heart but that Allah supported him and made it easier for him.

Āyah 4. وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ And We raised high for you your repute.

This was revealed at a time when no one could imagine that a man who had so few followers confined to one city (Makkah) would someday be praised throughout the entire world. But indeed, Allah gave him a reputation of high honor. For his name, Muḥammad, means one who is constantly praised and worthy of praise. And the fact that he was chosen by Allah for conveyance of His final message is in itself sufficient to make him praiseworthy.

³⁶² As narrated by Aḥmad and Muslim.

³⁶³ As narrated by al-Bukhārī.

His name was first spread by enemies who made a point of warning everyone they contacted, near and far, not to listen to this man who was saying strange things. Curiosity was aroused, and consequently people came to know of the Prophet's character, conduct and religion. Within ten years the *shahādah* and the *adhān* were being pronounced throughout the Arabian peninsula. After that, it spread eastward through Asia and westward into Africa. Moreover, Allah gave him the distinction of joining the name of Muḥammad with His own name within the *shahādah*, which is recited in every prayer, and in the *adhān*, which is now being called out somewhere on the earth at every moment of the day and night. And whenever his name is mentioned, Muslims as well as the angels are invoking Allah's blessings upon him with the words: *ṣall-Allāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*.

Allah gave him the highest honor by making him the greatest of all prophets and the final prophet to humanity. He would also carry the highest honor in the Hereafter and be the first to enter Paradise. He had status to which no one else could ever aspire both in this world and the next.

Āyahs 5-6. فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا . إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا . For indeed, with the hardship [will be] ease. Indeed, with the hardship [will be] ease.

Allah also reassures the Prophet (ﷺ) that ease will overtake hardship and that with every hardship He has prepared relief. Although it might appear a contradiction that hardship would come with ease, the words convey that the hardship is not complete because some kind of ease accompanies it. Use of the definite article (ال) indicates that *al-'usr* is one particular hardship, while the indefinite *yusr* implies numerous forms and aspects of ease. Therefore the scholars have understood that the hardship will be overcome. This is reaffirmed by its repetition. The difficult times he was going through would soon give way to better times. The mention of ease along with the hardship rather than after it³⁶⁴ suggests additionally that the time of ease is so close as if it was connected to it.

Āyahs 7-8. فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ . وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ . So when you have finished [your duties], then stand up, and to your Lord direct [your] longing.

And finally, Allah instructs His Messenger (ﷺ), after completing his religious and worldly activities for the day, to continue his efforts in worship and turn his attention to his Lord. Some have interpreted the directive to be, "*then stand [in additional night prayers] and supplicate to your Lord.*" This is an acceptable but limited view, and it is included in the wider meaning given above. For the Prophet's fulfillment of his obligations was in obedience, service and worship of his Lord; accordingly, he is now instructed to continue that effort through other kinds of worship or more private ones once he is free, turning his attention fully to Allah and longing to meet Him. This is expressed by the imperative form of the verb, *raghiba* (i.e., *farghab*), which means desire, want or long for something. Longing for one's Lord suggests a continued exertion in preparation to meet Him, with supplication and seeking

³⁶⁴ As in Sūrah at-Ṭalāq, 65:7, where "hardship" is unspecified and general in nature.

His acceptance.³⁶⁵ So the Prophet (ﷺ) is told not to be distracted from the purpose and objective before him, but to continue in worship whenever he is free and to concentrate on the eternal life to come. Indirectly, believers too are advised never to stop striving; rather, they should persist in seeking the approval and pleasure of their Lord through additional worship and good works.

سُورَةُ التِّينِ (95) SŪRAH AT-TEEN

The verses of this sūrah bring together various aspects of Allah's wisdom – His wisdom in creating, in guiding and in judging deeds. Thus, they inspire in the believer's heart a desire for righteousness and a sense of hope.

It has been stated here that there are two kinds of men: those who in spite of having been created in the best of forms, become inclined to evil and whose moral breakdown causes them to be reduced to the lowest of the low; and in contrast, those who by adopting the way of faith and righteousness, remain secure from deviation and remain consistent with the noble position of having been created in the best of forms. The existence among mankind of both types is a fact which is being observed and experienced in society everywhere at all times. Since these are such distinctly opposite ways of behavior, one can conclude that the only means to justice must be judgment and compensation for the deeds of each. Allah, who is the most just of all judges, will surely restore justice.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3. وَالتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ • وَطُورِ سِينِينَ • وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ By the fig and the olive, and [by] Mount Sinai, and [by] this secure city...

Allah first swears by the fig and the olive.³⁶⁶ This might refer to the fig and olive trees or to the fruits themselves. Some commentators interpret it as the places known for their production, i.e., Damascus and Jerusalem, where they are found in abundance. They base their view on the fact that two other places are mentioned in the oath: the mount of Sinai³⁶⁷ upon which Allah spoke to Prophet Mūsā (عليه السلام), and the secure city, which is known to be Makkah. The view that the fig and the olive refer to the lands of Syria and Palestine, where

³⁶⁵ The Prophet (ﷺ) informed his ummah, "Whoever would like to meet Allah – Allah will like to meet him. And whoever would not like to meet Allah – Allah will not like to meet him." (Al-Bukhāri and Muslim)

³⁶⁶ The purpose of an oath in the Qur'ān is to confirm and emphasize the statement that follows it.

³⁶⁷ Ibn 'Abbās stated that Ṭūr was a lush, green mountain.

many of the prophets had lived and taught, affirms that this region has particular importance and that it was chosen and blessed by Allah. It also affirms that theirs was a unified message and a single faith.

Although commentators did not fully agree over the meaning of the fig and the olive, they were unanimous in stating that the words *hādhal-baladil-ameen* (this secure city) refer to Makkah. They also agreed that Allah referred in Sūrah al-Balad to Makkah when He said:

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ . وَأَنْتَ حِلٌّ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ

*No, I swear by this city. And you are free of restriction in this city.*³⁶⁸

The sanctity of these lands is due to the honor and distinction given to the prophets whom Allah sent with His message to mankind. The entire region was blessed by Allah.

Āyah 4. لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ We have certainly created man in the best of stature.

Allah swears by all of the aforementioned to emphasize that He has created mankind in the best of forms, pleasing in appearance, upright in nature and blessed with countless abilities. This has been expressed in other ways throughout the Qur'ān. For example, Allah appointed man to be His agent upon the earth and commanded the angels to bow down to him in respect.³⁶⁹ And He said:

وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَاهُمْ فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا.
*And We have certainly honored the children of Adam and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of the good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference.*³⁷⁰

While Allah has made all of His creation according to His will, mankind has been given an excess of His care. The superiority of man's creation is most clearly apparent in his mental and spiritual characteristics. Whether one considers the human's physical construction, his mind and soul or his abilities and potential, he gets an insight into Allah's wisdom. He understands that with such favor comes responsibility and accountability.

Āyah 5. ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ Then We return him to the lowest of the low,

Then,³⁷¹ most human beings are returned to one of the following:

- 1 Helpless old age after youth – One interpretation is that a person, after growing up to attain maturity and full strength, then ages and returns to a state of weakness.
- 2 Immorality and decadence – People corrupt their pure *fiṭrah* (the natural state in which Allah created them) by their own choices in life.

³⁶⁸ Sūrah al-Balad, 90:1-2. The "city" referred to as Makkah is also mentioned in Sūrah al-Naml, 27:91.

³⁶⁹ As mentioned in 2:30-34, 6:165, 7:11, 15:28-29, 27:62 and 71-73.

³⁷⁰ Sūrah al-Israa', 17:70.

³⁷¹ The word *thumma* means then, later, subsequently or thereafter.

- 3 The depths of Hell – The majority will earn this recompense due to their sinful acts, unbelief and denial of Allah.

These three interpretations show various ways in which man may descend. The first of them is noticeable, although the Qur'ān is not so much concerned with man's physical state; rather, it focuses attention on the soul. Its emphasis is on spiritual qualities since this is what drags a person down to the worst condition when he deviates from his upright nature and turns away from his Lord. His moral descent takes him to a level lower than that of the animals, and ultimately into the depths of Hell, where he is utterly debased.

Āyah 6. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ Except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward uninterrupted.

There is an exception to the previous description – some among mankind will escape that fate. Those who have been excluded from it are the ones who believe during their lifetime and then confirm their belief through good deeds. They will remain in their upright form and position of honor. They will not be lowered, reduced or debased. According to an authentic ḥadīth narrated by al-Ḥākim, even the aged among the believers who are disabled by weakness or senility are not reduced to a negative state. They continue to have all the good deeds they used to do recorded by the angels while in that condition.

So Allah has promised that after this earthly life, which must inevitably end, there will be a great reward in the next life for His righteous servants. Thus, faith is shown to be the means by which upright human nature ascends toward its Creator. And while human beings are subject in this world to the laws of creation – many will age and all will die – the righteous believers will enjoy a permanent pleasurable life in the Hereafter, one which will neither cease nor be interrupted.

The verse further shows that belief alone is not sufficient. It must be proven by those deeds which confirm it. Practically speaking, unless it is translated into effective behavior, nothing is gained from mere faith in the heart.

Faith must become a motive to positive action – to *doing* as one is directed. That means putting the word of Allah above all else – above customs and traditions, above the opinions of men, above one's own desires, laziness or reluctance.

All of this was apparent and self-evident to the early Muslims. It was not their idealism alone which changed the course of history – it was action. They knew that the laws of Allah had been sent down to be followed, and that this was the true meaning of worship.

Āyah 7. فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ So what yet causes you to deny the Recompense?

Man is being asked: "You can see that Allah has created the human being in an excellent form, so is this not a sufficient sign of the Lord's purpose and wisdom? Does it not compel you to believe and worship Him? After having been aware of all this, how can you still deny that there will be an account and judgment?" Or more literally: "What makes you lie concerning it?" In the words of the Qur'ān:

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّ اللَّهَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَلَمْ يَغَيِّ بِخَلْقِهِنَّ بِقَادِرٍ عَلَى أَنْ يُحْيِيَ الْمَوْتَى

*Do they not see that Allah, who created the heavens and earth and did not fail in their creation, is able to give life to the dead?*³⁷²

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَىٰ فَلَوْلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

*And you have already known the first creation, so will you not remember?*³⁷³

There is great danger in continuing on a downward path. Humans will inevitably sin, so believers must be aware of their actions and guard them; and they must continually repent from their errors.

Āyah 8. أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ Is not Allah the most just of judges?

These words convey reassurance to the righteous. Yes, Allah is surely the most just of judges. He has prohibited injustice and can never be unjust. It is a manifestation of the Creator's wisdom that all people must return to Him in the next life and be judged for their deeds and attitudes in the life of this world. And the manifestation of His justice is complete compensation for all those who were wronged in this life, to be taken from the ones who wronged them.

So when the Qur'ān describes Allah as the most just of judges, it is an affirmation of His mercy as well. What He legislates for His servants during their brief period on the earth is never unfair. The teachings of Islam uphold the rights of all people without exception – the ruler and the ruled, the powerful and the weak, the male and the female, the innocent and the criminal, the believer and the unbeliever. No one will bear the sin of another. No offender will be punished for more than the sin he committed; and no good deed will be left without its due reward.

It was reported that occasionally when the Prophet (ﷺ) recited this verse, he would answer the question, saying, "Yes, and I am among the witnesses of that."³⁷⁴

³⁷² Sūrah al-Aḥqāf, 46:33.

³⁷³ Sūrah al-Wāqī'ah, 56:62.

³⁷⁴ At-Tirmidhi.

SŪRAH AL-'ALAQ (96) سُورَةُ الْعَلَقِ

The sūrah was named after the word *'alaq* in the second verse. It is also known as *Iqra'*, which is the command to "recite" or "read" from the first verse.

Ā'ishah, Ibn 'Abbās, Abū Mūsā al-Ash'ari and several other Ṣaḥābah stated that the five opening verses of this sūrah were the first words of the Qur'ān revealed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). This event marked a change in the course of history. Ā'ishah related³⁷⁵ how the revelation began as she had heard it from the Prophet. In summary:

The first signs of prophethood came to him in the form of true dreams as bright as morning. Then he began to like seclusion. He would retire to the cave of Ḥirā' for meditation and prayer for a few days and then return to his family. This continued until the truth came to him while he was in the cave. The angel Jibreel (Gabriel) came to him, commanding him to recite. He replied, "I am not one who can recite." After pressing him hard and repeating the command three times, the angel delivered the first of the revelations: *"Recite in the name of your Lord who created..."*

This took place during the lunar month of Ramadhān in the year 610 CE. Prior to this occurrence, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) had no indication that he was going to be appointed as a prophet. Terrified at what he had experienced, he fled to the comfort of his wife, Khadījah, who reassured him that on account of his kindness, generosity and righteousness, Allah would never harm him. The revelations from Allah continued to come to him periodically throughout the remaining twenty-three years of his life.

The other fourteen verses of the sūrah were sent down some time later, after the Prophet began to pray in the precincts of the Ka'bah and his uncle, Abū Jahl, was attempting to prevent him. He threatened, "By al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā,³⁷⁶ if I find him doing that, I will put my foot on his neck and rub his face in the dust." Then it happened that he saw the Messenger (ﷺ) in prostration and came forward to put his foot on his neck, but suddenly he turned back as if in fright. Upon being asked he said, "There was a pit of fire and a terrible creature between me and Muḥammad, and some wings." When he heard about it, the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Had he come near me, the angels would have struck him and torn him to pieces."*³⁷⁷ In another narration, he said, *"If he done so, the angels would have seized him then and there."*³⁷⁸

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. اِقْرَأْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ Recite in the name of your Lord who created...

Allah, the Exalted, willed to begin His revelation to the Prophet (ﷺ), and through him to mankind and jinn, with an instruction to recite or to read. The word *iqra'* can denote either

³⁷⁵ In authentic narrations by Aḥmad, al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

³⁷⁶ He swore by these two goddesses which were idols worshipped at the time.

³⁷⁷ Aḥmad, Muslim and an-Nasā'i.

³⁷⁸ Al-Bukhāri and at-Tirmidhi.

of these meanings; however, knowing that the Prophet was an unlettered man and that there was no text to be read, the command was obviously for him to recite the words being revealed to him.

Some commentators have mentioned a more general aspect of this āyah: that man is ordered to read, i.e., to seek knowledge from the Book of Allah and from other beneficial sources.³⁷⁹ The Prophet (ﷺ) stated, "Seeking knowledge is an obligation upon every Muslim."³⁸⁰ And he said, "For one who treads a path to knowledge, Allah will make easy the path to Paradise."³⁸¹

The instruction is to begin in the name of Allah, who created all things. A basic purpose of acquiring knowledge is to bring men closer to their Creator, so the Qur'ān advocates the research, study, thought and contemplation that leads humanity to faith by conviction rather than blind acceptance.

Āyah 2. خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ عَلَقٍ Created man from a clinging substance.

In particular, He created mankind, who would make use of knowledge. The creation of man is mentioned at the outset of the revelation, showing that he holds an honored position in the sight of his Lord. Allah elevated and honored man by giving him knowledge, and this is the attribute that distinguished Ādam (عليه السلام) and made him superior to the angels.

Allah states that He created man from 'alaq, a hanging, suspended substance or a leechlike form. The stages of man's creation have been mentioned elsewhere in the Qur'ān. For example:

أَلَمْ يَكُنْ نُطْفَةً مِنْ مَنِيٍّ يُُمْنَىٰ . ثُمَّ كَانَ عَلَقَةً فَخَلَقَ فَسَوَّىٰ

*Had he not been a sperm from semen emitted? Then he was a clinging clot, and [Allah] created [his form] and proportioned [him].*³⁸²

However, the āyah of this sūrah is the only one in which that the term 'alaq is mentioned in its plural form, while 'alaqah, which is the singular form, was used in each of the other verses. That is the precise stage of development when an embryo has the appearance of a leech, attached to the walls of the uterus and nourished by its mother's blood in the same way as the leech feeds on its host.³⁸³

Allah confirms His creative ability and a purpose behind producing a human being from such a substance and then granting him intellect and the means of obtaining knowledge. It is further evidence that man has been honored by his Lord and distinguished from other creatures.

³⁷⁹ The number of verses in which 'ilm (knowledge) or its derivatives and associated words are used in the Qur'an totals over 700.

³⁸⁰ Narrated by Ibn Majah.

³⁸¹ Narrated by Muslim.

³⁸² Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:37-38. See also 22:5, 23,14, and 40:67.

³⁸³ Thus, the translation of 'alaq as a clot of blood is not entirely accurate.

Āyahs 3-5. اِقْرَأْ وَرَبُّكَ الْأَكْرَمُ • الَّذِي عَلَّمَ بِالْقَلَمِ • عَلَّمَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا لَمْ يَعْلَمْ

Recite, and your Lord is the Most Generous – who taught by the pen – taught man that which he did not know.

The command, "*iqra*" is repeated for emphasis, and this time accompanied by a reminder of Allah's generosity and favor to man. Allah refers to Himself in this verse as *al-Akram* (the Most Generous). He has described Himself several times in the Qur'ān as *al-Kareem* (the Generous), but in this instance He uses the superlative form. Allah is more generous than any other, and what He has given man as an example of His generosity in this particular verse demands consideration.

What Allah speaks of here is how He taught humanity by way of the pen. He is the Most Generous because he bestowed upon mankind the ability to learn and acquire knowledge. And He provided the means of preserving it and passing it on – the pen, an instrument used for recording information.³⁸⁴ The ḥadīth narrated by 'Ā'ishah describing the beginning of revelation continues with the Prophet's saying, "*The next thing that came down upon me after Iqra' was: 'Nūn. By the pen and what they inscribe...'*"³⁸⁵

Ibn Katheer said, "Knowledge can at times be in the mind, at times on the tongue, and at times in writing with the fingers – it is understood, spoken and written." Allah enabled man to write down the knowledge he acquires and to read written words so that information is stored, history preserved, sciences developed and life on earth improved. Indeed, *He taught man that which he did not know.*

Some scholars held that the pen mentioned here is the one which Allah told to write the decree of all creation fifty-thousand years before He created the heavens and the earth. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "*The first thing Allah created was the pen, and He said to it, 'Write.' It said, 'O Lord, what shall I write?' He said, 'Write the destiny – what has been and whatever will be forever.'*"³⁸⁶

Āyahs 6-7. كَلَّا إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنَّاظٍ • أَن رَّاهُ اسْتَفْغَىٰ

No! [But] indeed, man transgresses because he sees himself self-sufficient.

The word "*kallā*" is an emphatic expression of denial and reproach. In spite of Allah's favor to man, he is generally ungrateful and unbelieving, becoming proud once he has been given health, wealth and capabilities. At a time when he would be expected to be grateful for his Lord's favors, he imagines that he is self-sufficient and easily transgresses, forgetting his origin and denying his end. He refuses to recognize that the source of his power and authority is the same Lord who created him and gave him knowledge.

³⁸⁴ And undoubtedly the predecessor of various modern developments in communication and documentation.

³⁸⁵ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

³⁸⁶ At-Tirmidhi.

Self-deception and vanity often comes when a person obtains some knowledge, wealth, power, knowledge, or position. Those who do not worship Allah are worshipping some creation of His, and often, in reality worship themselves. The ego is arrogant, considering nothing but itself. It is the main cause of unbelief and ingratitude. Only a believer can feel humble before Allah and acknowledge that whatever he has of possessions, intelligence, abilities and opportunities are provided on lease to him from his Creator, to be used in ways pleasing to Him. The sūrah encourages human beings to elevate themselves from their self-absorbed state and use their minds to reflect.

Some of the early commentators stated that the *insān* (man) referred to in this āyah is the Prophet's uncle, Abū Jahl, who undoubtedly fits the description given. However, the description is a general one and includes all others who fit it as well.

Āyah 8. **إِنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الرُّجْعَىٰ** **Indeed, to your Lord is the return.**

This is a reminder and warning that however much one might have attained in the world which can make him arrogant and rebellious, he will eventually be returned to his Creator for the Account and Judgement. Then he will find out what fate awaits him as a consequence of his attitude and behavior. He will be held accountable for his wealth and position – how he obtained it and how he used it. The deniers have been warned of this throughout the Qur'ān.

أَفَحَسِبْتُمْ أَنَّمَا خَلَقْنَاكُمْ عَبَثًا وَأَنَّكُمْ إِلَيْنَا لَا تُرْجَعُونَ.

*Then did you think that We created you uselessly and that to Us you would not be returned?*³⁸⁷

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ ذَائِقَةُ الْمَوْتِ وَنَبْلُوكُم بِالشَّرِّ وَالْخَيْرِ فِتْنَةً وَإِلَيْنَا تُرْجَعُونَ.

*Every soul will taste death. And We test you with evil and with good as trial; and to Us you will be returned.*³⁸⁸

اللَّهُ يَبْدَأُ الْخَلْقَ ثُمَّ يُعِيدُهُ ثُمَّ إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ.

*Allah begins creation; then He will repeat it; then to Him you will be returned.*³⁸⁹

They will be seized unwillingly by the Angel of Death, helplessly pulled out of this life to face the anger of their Creator, who says:

نُمتّعهم قليلاً ثم نضطرّهم إلى عذابٍ غليظٍ

*"We grant them enjoyment for a little; then We shall force them to a massive punishment."*³⁹⁰

³⁸⁷ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:115.

³⁸⁸ Sūrah al-Anbiyaa', 21:35.

³⁸⁹ Sūrah ar-Rūm, 30:11.

³⁹⁰ Sūrah Luqmān, 31:24.

Āyahs 9-10. **أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يَنْهَى • عَبْدًا إِذَا صَلَّى**

Have you seen the one who forbids a servant when he prays?

The sūrah goes on to mention a person who prevents another from prayer. It is a general description, but the verses are considered by the scholars to refer specifically to Abū Jahl,³⁹¹ who tried to prevent the Prophet (ﷺ) from praying at the Ka'bah and thus dissuade people from worshipping their Creator alone rather than man-made idols.

The phrase "*ara'ayta*" may be translated as "Have you seen?" or "Have you considered?" It was used by the Arabs to mean "Tell me about it." What kind of a person could that be?

Āyahs 11-12. **أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَانَ عَلَى الْهُدَى • أَوْ أَمَرَ بِالتَّقْوَى**

Have you seen if he is upon guidance? Or enjoins righteousness?

One interpretation of these questions is that they were addressed to the Prophet about Abū Jahl. Could one who threatens you and forbids you from praying be rightly guided or advocate righteousness? No, obviously he could not.

Another interpretation of the same words has been given by Ibn Katheer, which is that they were addressed to Abū Jahl, advising him about the Prophet (ﷺ). Thus, the meaning would be: "Do you not consider that this man whom you are preventing from worship could be on the straight path with his deeds, or that he enjoins righteousness in his words? Yet, you abuse and threaten him because of his prayer."

Āyahs 13-14. **أَرَأَيْتَ إِنْ كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى • أَلَمْ يَعْلَمْ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ يَرَى**

Have you seen if he denies and turns away? Does he not know that Allah sees?

Or is it not true that Abū Jahl and those like him ignore and reject the guidance sent to them through the Messenger by their Lord? Do they not know that Allah is observing them? They are unaware simply because they do not believe. They commit crimes and injustices because they do not think they will be exposed, or that there will be any consequence to their deeds. If they feared the authority of a higher power than themselves they would behave quite differently. For a believer will restrain himself from wrongdoing even when alone, because he is aware that his Lord is constantly observant of him. These verses give warning against similar behavior by any transgressor against believers. He is told that Allah sees his deeds and then will bring him to account for every one of them.

Āyahs 15-16. **كَأَلَّا لَنْ لَمْ يَنْتَهُ لِنَسْفَعًا بِالنَّاصِيَةِ • نَاصِيَةٍ كَاذِبَةٍ خَاطِئَةٍ**

No! If he does not desist, We will surely drag [him] by the forelock – a lying, sinning forelock.

The evil one will not escape seizure by Allah, but it will occur whenever He wills. *Kallā* is an

³⁹¹ The Prophet's uncle, 'Amr bin Hishām, was called Abū Jahl (Father of Ignorance) due to his rejection of the truth.

emphatic refutation of the criminal's supposition that he will never be discovered or punished. Allah, the Exalted, corrects this assumption and indicates that this person has been warned repeatedly by His threat to the evildoer that unless he changes his course he will not escape punishment. And, as the Arabic text shows, He confirms His threat absolutely.

The verb, *nasfa`* (from *safi`a*), to which is attached the two letters³⁹² of emphasis and confirmation (*la-nasfa`-an*), carries several meanings: to violently seize, drag, slap or blacken. All of them are applicable to the case of Abū Jahl. He will be seized and dragged by his forelock into the Hellfire, and his forehead will be struck, scorched and blackened.

The Arabs of that time considered the frontal part of the head to be the location and symbol of one's honor and intelligence, so here the forelock is described as the person himself – lying and sinning. Sinning, due to his efforts to humiliate and then to kill the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). And lying, because Abū Jahl knew and had privately admitted to al-Akhnas bin Shurayq and to his nephew, al-Miswar bin Makhramah that the Qur'ān was something unparalleled; yet he opposed the Prophet and his message fearing a loss of influence for his own clan. He said, "We competed for honor. They fed the poor and we fed them; they supplied the pilgrims with water and we supplied them; they gave protection and we gave protection, until we became almost even like two race horses. But then they said, 'A prophet has appeared from among us.' How can we ever attain the like of that?"

Āyahs 17-18. فَلْيَدْعُ نَادِيَهُ . سَنَدْعُ الزَّبَانِيَةَ

Then let him call his associates. We will call the angels of Hell.

Nādī is a place where people meet for a common purpose, or it may refer to the people themselves – a council or assembly. Allah (ﷻ) challenges the one who plots against His Messenger to call upon the members of his tribe, his friends and his supporters for assistance. Ibn 'Abbās explained, "If he had called his people, the angels of torment would have seized him at that very moment."³⁹³ The tone of sarcasm makes it clear which of the two parties will overcome the other. So if the criminal thinks that he will be aided by his supporters in the Hereafter as he was in this world, he will only find himself helpless before *az-zabāniyah* (the angels of Hell), who push the wicked into the Fire.

Āyah 19. كَلَّا لَا تُطِيعُوهُ وَاسْجُدْ وَاقْتَرِبْ ۝

No! Do not obey him; but prostrate and draw near [to Allāh].

The Prophet (ﷺ) is instructed, "Do not obey such a one when he forbids you from worship, and resist his pressure. Continue in whatever is right and pleasing to Allah and worship and obey Him alone, for your Lord will protect and aid you. And draw near to Him through an abundance of *sujūd*."

³⁹² The letter *lām* preceding the verb and the *nūn* (or *tanween*) following it.

³⁹³ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi - ḥasan-ṣaḥeḥ.

While these words were directed to the Messenger (ﷺ), they have been interpreted by most scholars to include every Muslim believer, and in particular those who face opposition when practicing the basic requirements of their religion. Abuse and persecution must be opposed within the limits of Islam, with wisdom, patience and reliance on Allah. Some early scholars used to advise, "Keep fast to the path of truth, and do not succumb to loneliness because of the few who tread it; and beware of the path of falsehood, and do not be deceived by the many headed on it to destruction."

By placing his forehead in the lowest position, that of prostration (*sujūd*), a worshipper becomes nearest to Allah, the Most High. As described in the ḥadīth: "*The closest a servant can be to his Lord is when he is in sujūd, so [at that time] supplicate abundantly.*"³⁹⁴

Upon reciting this verse, the Prophet (ﷺ) would perform one *sajdah* (prostration), and those hearing him would also prostrate. This is the sunnah for those who hear the verse recited or recite it themselves, either during prayer or at other times.³⁹⁵

SŪRAH AL-QADR (97) سُورَةُ الْقَدْرِ

This short sūrah speaks about the beginning of the Qur'ān's revelation, but from a different perspective from that of *al-'Alaq*, which was addressed directly to Allah's Messenger (ﷺ). It describes the night on which the Qur'ān came down from *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūth*³⁹⁶ to the lowest heaven and the Prophet received the first revelation from the angel, Jibreel. It was an event that changed the destiny of the world during a night full of blessings.

From the twelve lunar months of the year, Allah *ta'ālā* chose *Ramadhān* to begin conveying the Qur'ān to humanity. And from its days and nights, He chose *Laylat al-Qadr* as its most blessed night – the moment in which the Qur'ān first entered human history. *Laylat al-Qadr* is one of the major blessings bestowed by Allah on His believing servants, for within it the reward for deeds is multiplied and worshipping Him on that night is better than worshipping for 1000 months.

³⁹⁴ Aḥmad, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd.

³⁹⁵ It is sunnah, and not obligatory, for one who recites or hears an āyah of prostration to say, "Allāhu akbar" and perform a *sajdah*.

³⁹⁶ The Preserved Slate, an eternal register which is with Allah, and in which all things are recorded.

Āyah 1. إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ Indeed, We sent it down in Laylat al-Qadr.

Allah begins by saying: "We sent it down."³⁹⁷ The Qur'ān is not something from the mind of Muḥammad (ﷺ) or any other human being; rather, it was the Lord and Creator of mankind who revealed it to him. And this happened during the month of Ramadhān. Allah has said in Sūrah al-Baqarah:

شَهْرُ رَمَضَانَ الَّذِي أُنْزِلَ فِيهِ الْقُرْآنُ هُدًى لِلنَّاسِ وَبَيِّنَاتٍ مِنَ الْهُدَى وَالْفُرْقَانِ

*The month of Ramadhān [is that] in which was revealed the Qur'ān, a guidance for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion.*³⁹⁸

It is the "blessed night" referred to in Sūrah ad-Dukhān:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنْذِرِينَ . فِيهَا يُفْرَقُ كُلُّ أَمْرٍ حَكِيمٍ . أَمْراً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ

*Indeed, We sent it down during a blessed night. Indeed, We were to warn [mankind]. Therein is made distinct every precise matter – [every] matter [proceeding] from Us. Indeed, We were to send [a messenger].*³⁹⁹

The Arabic verb, *anzala* is used to indicate something being sent down all at once. It refers here to the Book of Allah being sent down by Him from *al-Lawḥ al-Maḥfūth* to the nearest heaven. Allah sent down the entire Qur'ān in Laylat al-Qadr. Then the angel, Jibreel, conveyed it to Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) in stages over a period of 23 years.⁴⁰⁰

Laylat al-Qadr is the most excellent and blessed night of the year. It is the "Night of Decree" or "Night of Destiny" and is the night in which Allah sent down the Qur'ān to the nearest heaven and began its revelation to mankind. *Qadr* includes the meanings of calculation and measure. It is the night wherein the measured portions of Allah's decree are determined for the coming year – life spans, provisions and destinies. All are decreed on this night. And *qadr* can also mean significance and strength. So it is called *Laylat al-Qadr* due to its great importance and benefit.

Āyahs 2-3. وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ . لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

And what can make you know what is Laylat al-Qadr? Laylat al-Qadr is better than a thousand months.

The question posed here additionally emphasizes the great importance of *Laylat al-Qadr*. It is a night of unique honor, dignity, glory and mercy; its nature is beyond human comprehension.

³⁹⁷The reference of Allah to Himself as "We" in many Qur'anic verses is understood in the Arabic language to denote grandeur and power, as contrasted with the more intimate singular form "I" used in specific instances.

³⁹⁸Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:185.

³⁹⁹Sūrah ad-Dukhān, 44:3-5.

⁴⁰⁰Correspondingly, the verb *nazzala* indicates sending down gradually in stages, as the Qur'ān was revealed to the Prophet (ﷺ).

It is better in the sight of Allah than a thousand months. And it is better for those who worship during it than worshipping for a thousand months of ordinary nights. Worship and righteous deeds done on this night are superior in value to those of a thousand months.

A thousand months is equivalent to 83 years and 4 months. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"The lifespan of the people of my ummah is from sixty to seventy years. Only a few live longer than that."*⁴⁰¹ Thus, a Muslim may achieve the benefit of a maximum lifetime of worship in one night.

A thousand months may also indicate an indefinitely long period of time according to common Arabic usage. The night begins at sunset and lasts until dawn; yet, how much is the time-value of these few hours. Allah, the Exalted, has bestowed excessive favor upon this *ummah* by providing it with a night wherein worship and righteous deeds are more valuable than those performed in a thousand months.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"Whoever spends Laylat al-Qadr in worship with faith and seeking reward will have whatever preceded of his sin forgiven."*⁴⁰² He would seek its blessings during the last ten nights of Ramadhān, and said, *"Look for it in the odd nights of the last ten."*

There has been much speculation about which of the last ten nights is *Laylat al-Qadr*. The majority of scholars maintain that the night on which it falls is not known for certain. 'Ubādah bin aṣ-Ṣāmit, reported that when Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) came out to give information about *Laylat al-Qadr*, two men among the Muslims were arguing. The Prophet said, *"I came out to tell you about Laylat al-Qadr, but those two were arguing, so [knowledge of] it was removed; and perhaps that will be better for you. Seek it on the twenty-seventh, the twenty-ninth and the twenty-fifth."*⁴⁰³

There are several narrations recorded by al-Bukhāri and Muslim in which some of the Ṣaḥābah mentioned its occurrence on various nights. Abū Sa'eed al-Khudri described it as being on the eve of the twenty-first. 'Abdullāh bin Unays related a ḥadīth citing the twenty-third. Ibn 'Abbās mentioned the twenty-fifth in addition to the previous two. Ubayy bin Ka'b declared that it was the eve of the 27th. When asked what made him say this, he said, "The sign which was told to us by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) is that the sun will rise on that day without rays."⁴⁰⁴ And Aḥmad recorded from Abū Hurayrah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said to seek it during the eve of the twenty-seventh or the twenty-ninth. Many of the early scholars were of the opinion that it shifts from year to year, and Allah knows best.

It is known that Allah (ﷻ) did not reveal the precise date to His Messenger (ﷺ), and perhaps the wisdom behind its concealment is to allow worshippers to benefit most from each of the ten nights while following the Prophet's sunnah. Ibn Taymiyyah said: "The odd numbers have to do with what is past [i.e., when one starts counting from the beginning of the month], so it should be sought on the twenty-first, the twenty-third, the twenty-seventh or the twenty-

⁴⁰¹ Ibn Hibbān - ṣaḥeeḥ.

⁴⁰² Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁴⁰³ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁰⁴ This sign was stated by the Prophet (ﷺ), but scholars have pointed out that specification of the 27th was Ka'b's own deduction.

ninth. Or it may be with regard to what remains, as the Prophet (ﷺ) said, ‘...when there are nine left, or seven left, or five left, or three left.’⁴⁰⁵ Thus, if the month has thirty days, those will be even-numbered nights; so on the twenty-second there will be nine days left, and on the twenty-fourth there will be seven days left. This is how Abū Sa‘eed al-Khudri explained the authentic ḥadīth; and this is how the Prophet (ﷺ) prayed qiyām during that month. And if the month has twenty-nine days, then the dates of days left will be the same as for days passed. As this is the case, the believer should seek it in all of the last ten days.”⁴⁰⁶

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to seclude himself in the masjid during these nights and increase his worship, seeking *Laylat al-Qadr*. ‘Ā’ishah reported that he would worship throughout these nights until dawn, avoid marital relations and awaken his family for prayer.⁴⁰⁷ And she inquired, "O Messenger of Allah, if I might know which night is *Laylat al-Qadr*, what should I say therein?" He replied, "Say, 'Allāhumma innaka ‘afuwwun tuḥibbul-‘afwa fa’fu ‘annee' (O Allah, You are pardoning; You love pardon, so pardon me)."⁴⁰⁸

Āyah 4. تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ The angels and the Spirit descend therein by permission of their Lord for every matter.

Angels descend in abundance during *Laylat al-Qadr* due to its abundant blessings.⁴⁰⁹ They witness the supplications of worshippers on that night, their seeking forgiveness and weeping; and they say, "Ameen" to them.

Ar-Rūh (the Spirit) refers here to the angel, Jibreel (Gabriel). The wording of the āyah serves to distinguish Jibreel from the other angels, for he is the greatest of them. The angels, along with Jibreel, descend to the earth during this night bringing the decree of Allah for whatever is destined to occur in the coming year of deaths, births, provisions, calamities, and so on. Thus, it is the night of decree or destiny. The angels bring the exact measures for everything apportioned by Allah in the course of the coming year. They also serve as the means by which decrees of Allah are implemented when they obey His commands.

Angels do not possess a free will, nor do they act of their own accord. They are servants of Allah, perpetually engaged in worship and obedience. They act only in accordance with His commands and their descent is with His permission.

Āyah 5. سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ Peace it is until the emergence of dawn.

When the angels descend with every decree by permission of their Lord, there is peace for believers and worshippers throughout that night until daybreak. There is security that night from evil and harm, from sunset until the break of dawn. The angels give greetings of peace during this night to the people who spend it in worship. Some scholars have said that no evil occurs because, whether or not it is recognized by human beings, all of Allah's decrees are

⁴⁰⁵ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁰⁶ *Majmū‘ al-Fatāwā*, vol. 25, pp.284-285.

⁴⁰⁷ Aḥmad.

⁴⁰⁸ At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah - ṣaḥeeḥ.

⁴⁰⁹ They also descend when the Qur’ān is recited and they attend circles of study where Allah is mentioned.

good. And even when the command to destroy a particular nation is sent down, it is for the eventual good of mankind. These aspects of *Laylat al-Qadr* will remain each year until the Day of Resurrection. In a narration by Muslim, the Prophet (ﷺ) described that night as clear, quiet, and moderate – neither hot nor cold; and the sun rises the next morning, appearing white without rays.

SŪRAH AL-BAYYINAH (98) سُورَةُ الْبَيِّنَةِ

The sūrah has been named after the word *al-Bayyinah* occurring at the end of the first verse. While most of Juz' 'Amma was revealed in Makkah, *al-Bayyinah* and *an-Naṣr* are exceptions. Many scholars consider from their content that they came down in Madinah.

It was placed in the Qur'ān after Sūrahs al-'Alaq and al-Qadr. While Sūrah al-'Alaq contains the first revelation and Sūrah al-Qadr describes the occasion on which it was revealed, *Sūrah al-Bayyinah* explains why it was necessary to reveal this final scripture.

The Prophet (ﷺ) once said to Ubayy bin Ka'b, "*Indeed, Allah has ordered me to recite to you [the sūrah] 'Lam yakunil-ladheena kafarū min ahlil-kitāb.'*" He asked, "He mentioned me by name, O Messenger of Allah?" The Prophet said, "Yes." Ubayy wept.⁴¹⁰

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. لَمْ يَكُنِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ مُنْفَكِّينَ حَتَّى تَأْتِيَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

Those who rejected belief among the People of the Scripture and the polytheists were not to be parted [from misbelief] until there came to them clear evidence –

The purpose behind sending a messenger with clear evidence is stated here. It was essentially to free people from the deception of incorrect beliefs. "*Those who rejected belief*" were people who had ignored and concealed the truth. The original Arabic meaning of *kufr* is covering and concealment, as when a planter covers his seeds with soil. It is the attribute of one who covers up or hides truth, and who denies something which Allah has clearly stated or commanded. The unbeliever covers up and suppresses his *fiṭrah*, the natural inborn inclination to worship his Creator.

The Qur'ān uses the term "People of the Scripture" (*Ahl al-Kitāb*) when referring to followers of the monotheistic faiths that preceded the prophethood of Muḥammad (ﷺ); in particular, the Jews and Christians. Both groups had deviated from the original teachings of Allah's religion as revealed to His messengers.

⁴¹⁰ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

The polytheists (*mushrikeen*)⁴¹¹ were the pagans and idol worshippers. *Shirk* can mean the worship of anything other than Allah, associating partners with Him, invoking other than Him, attributing His characteristics to others beside Him, or obeying others instead of Him. A polytheist (*mushrik*) may believe in Allah but does not worship Him alone; while acknowledging Allah as the Creator, he worships idols or other created beings. *Shirk* is a form of *kufr* (unbelief).

The meaning of *bayyinah* is clear evidence, indication or proof. The world was in need of clear evidence – a renewed message from Allah – in view of the fact that false beliefs and superstitions had become prevalent among its peoples. The message brought by earlier prophets had been forgotten, their teachings had been altered and corruption had become widespread. Hence, Muḥammad (ﷺ) was appointed and sent to convey and clarify the Creator's final message, in order to provide mankind with guidance for as long as the earth endures.

Āyahs 2-3. رَسُولٌ مِّنَ اللَّهِ يَتْلُوا صُحُفًا مُّطَهَّرَةً . فِيهَا كُتُبٌ قَيِّمَةٌ . A messenger from Allah, reciting purified scriptures within which are correct writings.

The Messenger (ﷺ) was himself *al-Bayyinah*, the clear evidence, who was sent as a mercy to all mankind, reciting purified scriptures – purified from every kind of polytheism and falsehood that had been introduced by men into religion. The People of the Book had altered their scriptures, so they no longer contained the precise original teachings of their prophets. People, whether adherents to earlier scriptures or polytheists, would not be freed from their state of misbelief and confusion until Allah sent a Messenger who would recite His words to them in an original, pure form – a scripture consisting of sound teachings.

The word, *kutub* (pl. of *kitāb*) which means writings or books, is used to refer to the rulings and laws which Allah revealed in the Qur'ān. Ibn Jareer aṭ-Ṭabari said about the *correct writings*, "It means that what is within the purified scriptures are writings coming from Allah. They are upright, just and undiluted, and they contain no errors because they are from Allah, the Mighty and Majestic."

Āyah 4. وَمَا تَفَرَّقَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ إِلَّا مِن بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَتْهُمُ الْبَيِّنَةُ

Nor did those who were given the Scripture become divided until after there had come to them clear evidence.

As Allah *ta'ālā* said in another āyah:

فَتَقَطَّعُوا أَمْرَهُم بَيْنَهُمْ زُبُرًا كُلُّ حِزْبٍ بِمَا لَدَيْهِمْ فَرِحُونَ.

*Then they divided their religion among them into sects – each faction in what it has [of beliefs and practices] rejoicing.*⁴¹²

⁴¹¹ Literally, those who practice *shirk*.

⁴¹² Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:53.

Religious discord and conflict did not arise among the People of the Book out of ignorance of their religion or obscurity or ambiguity in it. Nor did they divide into various sects due to a lack of clear evidence to guide them. They lacked neither knowledge nor evidence, but were led to deviation by their inclinations and preferences. It was after Allah's guidance came to them that they went astray, preferring to adhere instead to their own ways.

The Qur'ān warns Muslims against similar conduct:

وَلَا تَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ تَفَرَّقُوا وَاخْتَلَفُوا مِنْ بَعْدِ مَا جَاءَهُمُ الْبَيِّنَاتُ

*And do not be like those who became divided and differed after the clear proofs had come to them.*⁴¹³

And the Prophet (ﷺ) is reported to have said, "The Jews were divided into seventy-one sects, the Christians were divided into seventy-two sects, and this [Muslim] nation will be divided into seventy-three sects; all will be in the Hellfire but one." When asked about that one, he replied, "Those who are upon the way that I and my companions practice."⁴¹⁴

Āyah 5. وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ حُنَفَاءَ وَيُقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَيُؤْتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَذَلِكَ دِينُ الْقَيِّمَةِ

And they were not commanded except to worship Allah, [being] sincere to Him in religion, inclining to truth, and to establish prayer and to give zakāh. And that is the correct religion.

This verse is similar to Allah's statement:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ.

*And We sent not before you any messenger except We revealed to him that, "There is no deity except Me, so worship Me."*⁴¹⁵

The prophets who were sent by Allah and the scriptures He revealed to them had never enjoined anything but sincere worship and obedience to the Creator. Allah's religion in its original revealed form was clear and straightforward. Its fundamental practice was merely to worship Allah in sincere submission to Him alone, rejecting and avoiding polytheism, upholding truth, establishing regular prayer and giving the obligatory zakāh.

The followers of earlier scriptures, having strayed from the divinely revealed religion, were themselves responsible for their error and divergence. Like the previous prophets, Muḥammad (ﷺ) was sent to invite people back to the original faith and way of life prescribed by their Lord. So after the clear instruction through Allah's final Messenger (ﷺ), there is no longer any excuse for deviation.

Āyah 6. إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا مِنْ أَهْلِ الْكِتَابِ وَالْمُشْرِكِينَ فِي نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أُولَئِكَ هُمْ شَرُّ الْبَرِيَّةِ
Indeed, they who rejected belief among the People of the Scripture and the

⁴¹³ Sūrah Āli 'Imrān, 3:105.

⁴¹⁴ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi. The cause of division among these groups has to do with fundamental matters of religion and 'aqeedah, and not differences of opinion regarding fiqh issues.

⁴¹⁵ Sūrah al-Anbiyā', 21:25.

polytheists will be in the fire of Hell, abiding eternally therein. Those are the worst of creatures.

Allah *ta'ālā* states that the followers of the earlier scriptures and the polytheists who refuse to acknowledge His final Messenger (ﷺ) and oppose him are the worst of creation. Indeed, the liability of the People of the Scripture is greater than that of the pagans given that they had already been exposed to Allah's religion in their own scriptures. Then, when clear evidence came to them through Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ), many refused it.

Their permanent destination will be the Hellfire. They earn this punishment due to misuse of the intellect and abilities granted to them by their Creator, so that they prefer a way of life at variance with truth, reality and righteousness. The religion ordained by Allah is based on a natural correlation between man's intellect and his faith; thus, rejection of it is *kufr* (ingratitude and unbelief) of the worst kind.

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنْتَقِمُونَ.

*And who is more unjust than one who is reminded of the verses of his Lord, then he turns away from them? Indeed We, from the criminals, will take retribution.*⁴¹⁶

Āyahs 7-8.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمْ خَيْرُ الْبَرِيَّةِ .

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ.

Indeed, they who have believed and done righteous deeds – those are the best of creatures. Their reward with their Lord will be gardens of perpetual residence beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever, Allah being pleased with them and they with Him. That is for whoever has feared his Lord.

Then Allah describes the righteous people who believe in their hearts and perform righteous deeds as being the best of creation. Abū Hurayrah and others cited this āyah as proof that believers have a status among Allah's creations higher than that of the angels. They are superior to angels due to the fact that angels do not have the option to disobey Allah, while believers choose freely to obey Him in spite of their ability to disobey.

Hence, their reward is eternal Paradise wherein they will dwell eternally. Similar is the verse which says:

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ.

*Allah has promised to believing men and believing women gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they abide eternally, and pleasant dwellings in gardens of perpetual residence; but approval from Allah is greater. It is that which is the great attainment.*⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁶ Sūrah as-Sajdah, 32:22.

⁴¹⁷ Sūrah at-Tawbah, 9:72.

Their happiness, peace and contentment is indicated by security against its interruption or termination and rivers flowing beneath its gardens. It is the reward that will be attained by those who revere Allah and fear Him as He should be feared, and who worship Allah as if they could see Him, knowing that although they do not see Him, indeed, He sees them.

In Paradise they will find that Allah is well pleased with them. They have achieved His pleasure through their sincere faith and obedience. And the state of their Lord being pleased with them is greater than all the everlasting delights that they will be given and greater than any other happiness.

Moreover, they are well pleased with Allah. They will feel this pleasure due to the reward of immeasurable favors and blessings He will give them. And the greatest of those favors is that they will be permitted to see Him.⁴¹⁸

That is for whoever feared his Lord. The word "*dhālika*" refers to the reward and indicates that the pleasure of Paradise as well as Allah's pleasure with them will be the reward of those who fear Allah and conscientiously obey Him. It results from faith which motivates toward righteous deeds and protects against polytheism, hypocrisy and deviation.

سُورَةُ الزَّلْزَلَةِ (99) SŪRAH AZ-ZALZALAH

This sūrah describes a scene from Yawm al-Qiyāmah, the condition of the earth and of its people at the time of resurrection. Its theme is the commencement of the next life and the presentation to man of a complete record of his deeds.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3. إِذَا زُلْزِلَتِ الْأَرْضُ زِلْزَالَهَا . وَأَخْرَجَتِ الْأَرْضُ أَثْقَالَهَا . وَقَالَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا لَهَا

When the earth is shaken with its [final] earthquake and the earth discharges its burdens, and man says, "What is [wrong] with it?"

At a decreed time, the entire universe will undergo drastic changes by the command of its Creator. The earth will be shaken violently and expel everything within it, including the generations of people buried beneath its surface. As in another description:

وَإِذَا الْأَرْضُ مُدَّتْ . وَأَلْقَتْ مَا فِيهَا وَتَخَلَّتْ ...

*And when the earth has been extended and cast out that within it and relinquished it...*⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁸As confirmed in a ḥadīth related by Muslim and in Sūrah al-Qiyāmah, 75:22-23.

⁴¹⁹Sūrah al-Inshiqāq, 84:3-4.

All people will be evicted from their graves. They will all be recreated and restored to life in the same condition in which they died – as believers or non-believers, virtuous or wicked. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) confirmed, *"Every servant will be brought back to life in accordance with the state in which he died."*⁴²⁰

Finding the earth in turbulence, they will be in wonder and shock, in terror and amazement, crying out in dismay, *"What is wrong with it?"* But soon enough they will realize that this is the event that was promised by Allah. His Messenger (ﷺ) said, *"The earth will throw out its contents, gold and silver [emerging] as columns. A murderer will come and say, 'For this I killed.' One who severed ties of kinship will say, 'For this I broke the ties of kinship.' A thief will say, 'For this my hand was amputated.' Then they will leave it and no one will take from it anything."*⁴²¹

Āyahs 4-5. يَوْمَئِذٍ تُحَدِّثُ أَخْبَارَهَا . بِأَنَّ رَبَّكَ أَوْحَىٰ لَهَا

That Day, it will report its news because your Lord inspired it.

When Allah commands it, the earth will testify to everything that took place upon it during its first creation. Ibn 'Abbās and Mujāhid explained the words, *inspired it*, as meaning: He commanded it to speak. So then the earth will release its burdens and its information in obedience to Allah. It was reported that once the Prophet (ﷺ) recited, *"That Day it will report its news."* Then he said to his companions, *"Do you know what its news is? It will testify to what every man and woman did on its surface. It will say, 'He did such and such on that particular day,' and that is its news."*⁴²²

Āyah 6. يَوْمَئِذٍ يَصْدُرُ النَّاسُ أَشْتَاتًا لِّيُرَوْا أَعْمَالَهُمْ

That Day, the people will come forth, separated, to be shown their deeds.

One interpretation of *yaṣḍuru ashtātan* is that the people will depart from their graves, separated into categories according to their beliefs and deeds in the former life. They will be divided into factions or sects.

Another interpretation is that on Yawm al-Qiyāmah they will "emerge separately" from their graves. People will emerge from the earth individually and then be put into groups. Fearful and anxious, they will stand before the Creator to answer for everything they did in this world. The groups who denied and disobeyed Allah will be the most terrified, for they will now be certain of His punishment.

A third interpretation is that they will proceed from the place of Judgement to their final abode in groups – those who are miserable and taken to the Hellfire, and those who are joyful and taken to Paradise.

"To be shown their deeds" means that they will be shown the good or evil results of their deeds, or the compensation they will receive for them.

⁴²⁰ Muslim.

⁴²¹ Muslim.

⁴²² Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi. Scholars have pointed out some weakness in this ḥadīth.

Āyahs 7-8. **فَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ خَيْرًا يَرَهُ • وَمَنْ يَعْمَلْ مِثْقَالَ ذَرَّةٍ شَرًّا يَرَهُ**

So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it.

Allah will judge each person with complete and perfect justice. His deeds will be weighed right before his eyes, and he will see for himself exactly what he deserves. Nothing great or small will be overlooked. *Dharrah* has been interpreted to mean the smallest thing imaginable – early commentators have said: a tiny red ant, a speck of dust or a weightless particle. Everyone will witness as little as an atom's weight of his good and evil deeds and intentions being placed upon the balance and included in his account. Therefore, one should never assume any small deed, word or intent – good or bad – to be insignificant.

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Do not underrate any good act, even if it is offering drinking water from your bucket to one who is seeking a drink, or meeting your brother with a cheerful face.*"⁴²³ And, "*Beware of the sins that seem trivial. For indeed they accumulate in a man until they destroy him.*"⁴²⁴

سُورَةُ الْعَادِيَّاتِ (100) SŪRAH AL-'AADIYĀT

This sūrah cites examples and illustrations from the environment with which its first recipients, the Arabs, were most familiar. It was revealed during the earliest stage of prophethood in Makkah.

The sūrah's objective is to make people realize how corrupt man can become when he denies the Hereafter or becomes heedless of it. It goes on to warn that in the Hereafter, not only will the visible and apparent deeds of individuals be on trial, but the secrets hidden deep in their hearts will likewise be subjected to scrutiny.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-5. **وَالْعَادِيَّاتِ ضَبْحًا • فَالْمُورِيَّاتِ قَدْحًا • فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا • فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا • فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا**

By the racers, panting, and the producers of sparks [when] striking, and the chargers at dawn, stirring up thereby [clouds of] dust, arriving thereby in the center collectively...

Allah, the Exalted, swears an oath by the horses ridden by fighters as they race to attack an

⁴²³ Muslim.

⁴²⁴ Aḥmad.

enemy. Their hoofs produce sparks while galloping over rocky terrain. And He swears by the steeds charging into the unsuspecting enemy camp at dawn, penetrating into their ranks during a surprise attack.

Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Qatādah and others said that these are the horses that have been trained for *jihād* in the cause of Allah. Other commentators considered, in view of the fact that this sūrah was revealed in Makkah, that the scene depicted is one of horses in attack during a tribal raid or those ridden by bandits, charging in to steal and plunder. They cite the following verses which describe man's ravenous greed as indication of this. Either way, it is an image of war horses racing to engulf and overwhelm the camp of adversaries in the early morning before they become aware of what has occurred. And Allah knows best.

Āyahs 6-8. إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ • وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ • وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ

Indeed mankind, to his Lord, is ungrateful. And indeed, he is to that a witness. And indeed he is, in love of wealth, intense.

Allah swears by those horses that the natural tendency of mankind is to be heedless and ungrateful to his Lord. *Kanūd* describes one who dwells upon misfortunes that happen to him and forgets Allah's countless favors. Unaware of his accountability in the Hereafter, man has become unmindful of his Lord and Sustainer. He abuses the powers and abilities given him by Allah, utilizing them to perpetrate acts of aggression and plunder, thereby showing ingratitude for His blessings.

Man confirms and testifies to his ingratitude through his speech and his actions. He is overly concerned with obtaining and accumulating material wealth and possessions. Blinded by love of what it brings of worldly advantages, he strives to obtain wealth by every possible means, however dishonest or immoral it might be.

Āyahs 9-11. أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ • وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ • إِنَّ رَبَّهُم بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ

But does he not know that when the contents of the graves are scattered and that within the breasts is obtained – indeed their Lord with them, that Day, is [fully] Aware.

Allah warns against giving in to that inclination. He reminds mankind that there will come a time when everyone will be called to account for what he did and what he neglected. When all the people are expelled from the earth on *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, the secrets their hearts held in this world will become known. "*That within the breasts*" refers to secrets contained in the heart. Ibn 'Abbās and others said, "It means that what was in their souls will be uncovered and made apparent." The intents and motives with which one had done his deeds in the worldly life will be brought out and exposed before everyone to see.

Then, He who knows the most precise details about every individual, will judge each one accordingly. *Al-Khabeer* is the one who is fully acquainted and familiar with everything concerning each of His creations. And He will compensate all of them with the recompense most deserved without the slightest injustice.

سُورَةُ الْقَارِعَةِ (101) SŪRAH AL-QĀRI'AH

In this sūrah, Allah, the Exalted, describes some of the awesome occurrences that will take place at the Final Hour and mentions the Account and its conclusion. *Al-Qāri'ah* refers to the Resurrection or *Qiyāmah*. The sūrah's subject matter includes the stages of the Hereafter in totality, from the Resurrection to the outcome of Allah's Judgement.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyahs 1-3. الْقَارِعَةُ . مَا الْقَارِعَةُ . وَمَا أَذْرَاكَ مَا الْقَارِعَةُ

The Striking Calamity – what is the Striking Calamity? And what can make you know what is the Striking Calamity?

These first three verses are very similar in style and meaning to those at the beginning of Sūrah al-Ḥāqqah, where *al-Qāri'ah* is mentioned as well. Repetition of the word within a question form serves to create additional interest and impatience in the listener to know what will follow.

"Al-Qāri'ah" literally means "the Striker," or something which strikes, causing an earsplitting noise which startles and terrifies the creation. In Arabic, it also carries the meaning of an overwhelming calamity, one never before experienced and greater than any other. It is another name for *al-Qiyāmah*, and refers to the indescribable destruction of the entire universe on the Last Day.

Āyahs 4-5. يَوْمَ يَكُونُ النَّاسُ كَالْفَرَاشِ الْمَبْثُوثِ . وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِيشِ الْمُنْفُوشِ

It is the Day when people will be like moths dispersed, and the mountains will be like wool, fluffed up.

After having been expelled from their graves, people will be running about in panic and confusion like moths around a lamp. As they witness the fearful alterations in creation, they will experience the earth's shifting and shaking. They will see the mountains, once solid, beginning to disintegrate, appearing like pieces of soft wool of various colors and textures, being blown into the air. Then, everyone will be gathered before Allah for the Judgement.

Āyahs 6-7. فَأَمَّا مَنْ ثَقُلَتْ مَوَازِينُهُ . فَهُوَ فِي عِيشَةٍ رَاضِيَةٍ

Then as for one whose scales are heavy – he will be in a pleasant life.

In order that all people be convinced of the justice of their judgment and final destiny, their deeds will be weighed on perfectly balanced scales. *Mawāzeen* (pl. of *meezān*) are the scales of the Creator's balance of complete justice.⁴²⁵ Their being heavy means that the scale of

⁴²⁵ Refer also to Sūrah al-A'rāf, 7:8-9 and Sūrah Al-Anbiyaa', 21:47.

those good deeds which have been accepted by Allah will outweigh that of the bad deeds, which lighten and subtract from it.

Mawāzeen is also the plural of *mawzūn*, which refers to what is weighed – i.e., the deeds. The righteous person's good deeds will have enough weight to earn him a place in Paradise, where his eternal life will be one of ease, contentment and pleasure.

Āyahs 8-11. وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَفَّتْ مَوَازِينُهُ . فَأُمُّهُ هَاوِيَةٌ . وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا هِيَّةٌ . نَارٌ حَامِيَةٌ

But as for one whose scales are light, his refuge will be an abyss. And what can make you know what that is? It is a Fire, intensely hot.

But bad deeds will lighten the scale and show that the wrongdoer is worthy of punishment. The scale of his good deeds will be light due to the abundance of his bad deeds. Thus, he will be condemned to the pit of Hellfire.

The literal meaning of *ummuhū* is "his mother," which is a man's original refuge. The final abode to which the wicked will return is a *hāwiyah*, a deep pit which will envelop them as in an embrace. As the mother is a child's refuge to which he runs in times of distress, the Hellfire will be the destination of the wicked in the Hereafter. The word *hāwiyah* is derived from *hawā*, which means to fall from a height to a depth, and it is the deep pit into which something falls. Here, it refers to the depths of the Hellfire, into which the criminals will be thrown from above.

The final question and its brief answer emphasize the fact that not only will it be a terrifying abyss, but it will be one full of raging fire from which there is no escape.

SŪRAH AT-TAKĀTHUR (102) سُورَةُ التَّكَاثُرِ

In this sūrah people have been warned of the evil consequences of obsession with worldly matters to the degree that it becomes akin to worship. Such individuals spend their lives in the acquisition of more and more wealth, material benefits, pleasures, position and power, publicizing and boasting about their achievements. It has distracted them from desiring the good of the Hereafter and striving for it. After a warning of the terrible end that awaits them, mankind is told that everyone will have to give an account for each of the assets and advantages he had acquired during his life on earth. Anyone who keeps this in mind will surely improve his conduct and amend his affairs.

Āyahs 1-2. أَهْلَاكُمُ التَّكَاثُرُ . حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ

Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you until you visit the graveyards.

Most people become absorbed in the affairs of this world to the point that they forget about the Hereafter. They spend their lives collecting wealth and pursuing pleasures, contending with one another for that while neglecting important duties. This pursuit so occupies them that they are left with no time or desire for worship of their Lord.

Commentators have added that competition in the acquisition of more and more worldly goods will distract one from the truth, from the message of the Qur'ān and from taking account of himself before he is judged in the Hereafter.

In Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, Allah said:

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهُمْ زِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ وَرِضْوَانٌ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ.

*Know that the life of this world is but amusement and diversion and adornment and boasting to one another and competition in increase of wealth and children – like the example of a rain whose [resulting] plant growth pleases the tillers; then it dries and you see it turned yellow; then it becomes [scattered] debris. And in the Hereafter is severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and approval. And what is the worldly life except the enjoyment of delusion.*⁴²⁶

Only at the time of death will those distracted ones realize the extent of their error. "Visiting the graveyards" means that the people will remain in their graves temporarily until the Day of Resurrection.

Āyahs 3-5. كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ . ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ . كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ

No! You are going to know. Then, no! You are going to know. No! If only you could know with knowledge of certainty...

Allah repeatedly threatens the deniers and warns believers against making the same mistake. For the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "A servant says, 'My wealth, my wealth.' Yet he only gets from his wealth three [benefits]: what he eats and finishes, what he wears and is worn out, and what he gives in charity and is spent. Everything other than that departs [from him] and is left behind for the people."⁴²⁷

And he (ﷺ) said, "Three things follow the deceased [to his grave]; then two return and one remains with him. What follows him are his family, his wealth and his deeds. His family and his wealth return while his deeds remain."⁴²⁸

⁴²⁶ Sūrah al-Ḥadeed, 57:20.

⁴²⁷ Muslim.

⁴²⁸ Al-Bukhāri, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā'i.

Each one will be reminded of all that he did, and he will know it. Those who had disregarded the information conveyed by the Prophet (ﷺ) will be astonished and shocked at what they find before them in the life to come, when they obtain certain knowledge of all that was promised in the Qur'ān.

After twice confirming that everyone will surely know the truth of every matter after death, Allah addresses mankind in the present life, saying: "*If you only knew with knowledge of certainty...*" The sentence is left incomplete for additional impact. Its conclusion is estimated to be "...you would not have been distracted from preparing for the Hereafter."

Āyahs 6-8. لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ • ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ • ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ.

You will surely see the Hellfire. Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty. Then you will surely be asked that Day about pleasure.

Everyone will see the Hellfire at close range, as mentioned in Sūrah Maryam:

وَأِنْ مِنْكُمْ إِلَّا وَارِدُهَا كَانَ عَلَى رَبِّكَ حَتْمًا مَقْضِيًّا.

*And there is none of you except that he will come to it. This is upon your Lord an inevitability decreed.*⁴²⁹

Moreover, people will most certainly see the Hellfire with their own eyes, but those destined for Paradise will not be harmed by that; rather they will be grateful and overjoyed for having been saved from it. Only the heedless who had neglected their responsibilities and committed crimes will be compelled to enter it.

They will be questioned at the Judgement about *an-na'eem*, the good and pleasant state of comfort, satisfaction and advantage granted them in the world by their Lord. The Prophet (ﷺ) specifically mentioned two of the greatest worldly assets: "*There are two blessings of which many people are deprived – health and free time.*"⁴³⁰

For each of Allah's favors they will be called to account in the Hereafter – did they show gratitude to Him? Did they share those blessings with others? For indeed, all that which is accumulated and enjoyed thoughtlessly during the life of this world is in fact a means of trial. Every person will surely be asked about how it was obtained, how it was used and to whom it was attributed.

⁴²⁹ Sūrah Maryam, 19:71.

⁴³⁰ Al-Bukhāri, Muslim, at-Tirmidhi and an-Nasā'i.

SŪRAH AL-'AṢR (103) سُورَةُ الْعَصْرِ

This sūrah is an unparalleled example of comprehensiveness in one sentence. It declares in a clear and concise way that there is no good in mankind without faith and good deeds and it outlines the complete structure upon which to base an Islamic life. Al-Imām ash-Shāfi'ī stated that if people only reflected well on this sūrah, it would be sufficient for them.

It was reported by aṭ-Ṭabarānī that when two men among the Ṣaḥābah met, they would not part until one of them had recited all of Sūrah al-'Aṣr to the other before saying *as-salāmu alaykum*.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. وَالْعَصْرِ By time,

The sūrah begins with an oath. A few commentators have given the meaning of *al-'aṣr* as the period of late afternoon or the 'aṣr prayer. However, most consider it to be the passing of time throughout the ages.

Allah swears by time, which is one of His creations. It is a sense of direction instilled in the psychological makeup of man, as he remembers and records what is past, experiences what is present, and feels uncertainty about the future. It is a valuable commodity granted to man by Allah, and is what gives him the opportunity to procure a good status in the permanent life to come. But time is elapsing and running out; it will eventually end for both the individual and the entire creation.⁴³¹

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) awakened mankind to the importance of time, encouraging good use of it and instilling in the conscience a sense of responsibility concerning it. He said, "*Take advantage of five things before five: your youth before your old age, your health before your illness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before your busy time, and your life before your death.*"⁴³² And he (ﷺ) said, "*The best of you is one whose life is long and deeds are good, while the worst of you is one whose life is long and deeds are foul.*"⁴³³

'Umar bin 'Abdul-'Azeez observed, "The night and day are working within you, so work within them." And al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said, "The world is but three days: yesterday, which has gone with all it contained; tomorrow, in which you may not be present; and today, which is yours, so use it well."

Āyah 2. إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ Indeed, mankind is in loss,

With the exception of those mentioned in the final verse, the whole of mankind is in a state of loss. One who reflects on the affairs of this world and the transience of earthly existence

⁴³¹ As mentioned in Sūrah ar-Raḥmān, 55:26-27.

⁴³² Al-Ḥākim.

⁴³³ Narrated by at-Tirmidhi - ḥasan.

will observe that every material blessing, every advantage and every ability is lost at death, if not before. Age decreases one's remaining lifespan day after day, and each breath brings him further toward its loss. The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) encouraged visiting graves only to remind the living of death and what accompanies it of lost opportunity. Ibn al-Qayyim said, "Time passes and elapses by essence of its nature, so one who is unaware will find his time gone, his loss great, and his regret intense [at the time of death]. Then how will his condition be when he learns for certain the extent of what he has lost."

Allah (ﷻ) said, addressing His Messenger (ﷺ):

قُلْ هَلْ نُنَبِّئُكُمْ بِالْأَخْسَرِينَ أَعْمَالًا. الَّذِينَ ضَلَّ سَعِيُهُمْ فِي الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا وَهُمْ يُحْسِبُونَ أَنَّهُمْ يُحْسِنُونَ صُنْعًا.

*Say, "Shall we [believers] inform you of the greatest losers as to [their] deeds? [They are] those whose effort is lost in the worldly life, while they think that they are doing well in work."*⁴³⁴

People will be in loss to varying degrees. Some will be partially at loss with few or no good deeds to their credit on the Day of Resurrection. The self-deluded unbelievers will be entirely at loss, their work being of no avail on that Day. Allah has warned:

وَلَا يَحْسِبَنَّ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّمَا نُطَمِّلِي لَهُمْ خَيْرٌ لِّأَنفُسِهِمْ إِنَّمَا نُمَلِّي لَهُمْ لِيَزْدَادُوا إِثْمًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ مُّهِينٌ

*And let not those who reject belief think that because We extend their time it is better for them. We only extend it for them that they increase in sin, and for them is a painful punishment.*⁴³⁵

They will be overcome with regret in the next life when they experience the greatest loss – that of eternal Paradise, which could have been theirs if they had not refused it.

آيَةُ 3. إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds and advised each other to truth and advised each other to patience.

Allah then states the exception to the aforementioned generalization. It is people who do four things: they believe in what was conveyed by Allah through His final Messenger, Muḥammad (ﷺ); they do righteous deeds according to teachings of the Qur'ān and Sunnah; they advise one another to adhere to the truth; and they advise one another to endure the trials of this world with patience. The āyah is explicit in indicating the methods by which humanity can escape that loss.

None but a believer will enter Paradise. Through his faith, not only will he avoid the greatest loss but also obtain eternal profits and rewards. Righteous deeds are often mentioned in the Qur'ān along with belief, since in fact, deeds are the result of faith. They may take the form of prescribed acts of worship, of honesty and good conduct, or of assisting others to attain their needs. There are deeds of the heart, the tongue, and the limbs.

⁴³⁴ Sūrah al-Kahf, 18:103-104.

⁴³⁵ Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:178.

Allah then mentions the mutual encouragement of truth.⁴³⁶ This means to cooperate and advise one another to be truthful and to spread the truth of Islam. It is required between the ruler and ruled, parent and child, youth and elder, teacher and student, husband and wife. Muslims are responsible within their capacities to enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. When 'Umar assumed the caliphate he addressed his people, saying, "There is no good in you if you do not speak out and no good in us if we do not listen."

Finally, Allah mentions the mutual encouragement of patience. These servants of Allah counsel one another to patiently persevere, even during hardships and difficulties. Faith requires patience; righteous deeds require patience; upholding truth requires patience. Patience is the basis of nobility and good manners, keeping a person balanced by tempering his thoughts and actions. 'Umar said, "We obtained the best times of our lives by being patient."

SŪRAH AL-HUMAZAH (104) سُورَةُ الْهُمَزَةِ

The theme of this sūrah is similar to that of *at-Takāthur* and *al-'Aṣr* in that it portrays the ultimate loss, degradation and despair of those human beings whose only concern is worldly wealth and status. The sūrah shows an image of moral decline and how such people will be rendered hopeless and miserable.

Gossip, backbiting and the ridicule of others by speech or gesture of the body are all sinful acts which anger Allah, and He has prepared a severe punishment in the depths of Hellfire for those who engage in it. Thus, He honors and reassures the believers, conveying to them that He is fully aware of their enemies' abuse, and that He will adequately punish them by His own appropriate means.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. وَيْلٌ لِّكُلِّ هُمَزَةٍ لُّمَزَةٍ Woe to every scorner and mocker

People who respect others only for what they possess look down on those who have less than themselves. But Allah has cursed them with a promise of death and destruction, which is the meaning of *wayl*.⁴³⁷ Many scholars have understood that *humazah* refers to one who insults with words, while *lumazah* refers to one who ridicules by gestures. Ibn 'Abbās said

⁴³⁶ Truth is what is found in the Qur'ān and authentic Sunnah, and then in a consensus of Muslim scholars. Personal opinions are not included in this definition because although the views of qualified specialists carry significant weight, they are not infallible.

⁴³⁷ It may also mean a supplication against them, which will certainly come to pass.

that *humazah* is one who backbites and *lumazah* is one who continuously points out people's shortcomings. And he said, "They continuously insult and abuse people, [saying], 'that short man' or that ugly one.'"

The self-obsessed one habitually finds fault with people and belittles them. A wicked vanity drives him to put others down, to taunt and slander them. He criticizes, attacks their honor, demeans and mocks them with gestures, ridiculing their looks, movements or speech. Allah is warning His believing servants against such behavior. As He instructed:

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا لَا يَسْخَرُ قَوْمٌ مِنْ قَوْمٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُونُوا خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَلَا نِسَاءٌ مِنْ نِسَاءٍ عَسَىٰ أَنْ يَكُنَّ خَيْرًا مِنْهُنَّ وَلَا تَلْمِزُوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَلَا تَنَابَزُوا بِالْأَلْقَابِ بِئْسَ الْإِسْمُ الْفُسُوقُ بَعْدَ الْإِيمَانِ وَمَنْ لَمْ يَتُبْ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الظَّالِمُونَ.

*O you who have believed, let not a people ridicule [another] people; perhaps they may be better than them; nor let women ridicule [other] women; perhaps they may be better than them. And do not insult one another and do not call each other by [offensive] nicknames. Wretched is the name [i.e., mention] of disobedience after [one's] faith. And whoever does not repent – then it is those who are the wrongdoers.*⁴³⁸

Āyahs 2-3. الَّذِي جَمَعَ مَالًا وَعَدَّدَهُ • يَحْسَبُ أَنَّ مَالَهُ أَخْلَدَهُ

Who collects wealth and [continuously] counts it. He thinks that his wealth will make him immortal.

The one with an attitude of superiority due to wealth is obsessed with obtaining more and more of it, hoarding it and calculating for the future, spending it only when he perceives some worldly benefit for himself. He is deluded by the power of wealth, taking pleasure in counting it again and again, imagining that possessions and property will bring him security and wellbeing. He forgets about death and never considers that one day he will have to depart from the world with nothing, leaving all his treasures behind. Or perhaps he expects that by spending from it extravagantly his name and reputation will live on long after his death. This person has put his trust in creations rather than in the wisdom of his Creator, so Allah blames him for his *shirk* and is angry with him.

The lesson for believers is that although they should work hard to earn lawfully, they must not become overly preoccupied with wealth and property. Material possessions are not to be cherished in the heart; rather, they should be available in hand to use in ways acceptable to Allah and approved by Him.

Āyahs 4-5. كَلَّا لَيُنْبَذَنَّ فِي الْحُطَمَةِ • وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْحُطَمَةُ

No! He will surely be thrown into the Crusher. And what can make you know what is the Crusher?

But worldly prosperity cannot save wrongdoers from death or from Allah's punishment. The reply to those arrogant ones comes in the form of an awesome warning. *Kallā*, no! The reality is not at all as they imagine, for they will end up being thrown as worthless rubbish

⁴³⁸ Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt, 49:11.

into *al-ḥutamah*. It is the depths of Hellfire, which will crush and break them just as they thoughtlessly broke and destroyed others throughout their worldly lives.

A question is then asked to increase the foreboding: *And what can make you know what is al-ḥutamah?* It is directed to the Prophet (ﷺ) and implies that he can never really know its essence. The reason is given in the following verses.

Āyahs 6-7. نَارُ اللَّهِ الْمُوقَدَّةُ . الَّتِي تَطَّلُعُ عَلَى الْأَفْنَدَةِ

[It is] the fire of Allah, [eternally] fueled, which mounts directed at the hearts.

Its identification as Allah's Fire suggests that it is an exceptional, unfamiliar sort of fire, filling one with dread. It is a fire which will never subside or burn itself out. From the depths of Hell it slowly and painfully burns its way up the bodies of those who had scorned and mocked the humble servants of Allah. It climbs higher and higher, targeting the evil hearts⁴³⁹ which had directed their bodies to offensive and aggressive actions.

Early commentators said that the Hellfire will burn its inhabitants all the way to their hearts while they are alive. Just as they ate the flesh of others⁴⁴⁰ by backbiting and ridicule, their flesh will be eaten by *al-ḥutamah*. When the fire of Allah reaches their hearts it will cover, penetrate and burn them, causing unbearable torment; but they will not be relieved by death. The process will be repeated eternally.

Āyahs 8-9. إِنَّهَا عَلَيْهِمْ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ . فِي عَمَدٍ مُمَدَّدَةٍ

Indeed, it will be closed down upon them in extended columns.

Any hope they might have of escape could only be through the opening from which they were thrown into *al-ḥutamah*. But this hope will be removed as that entrance to the Hellfire is closed and sealed above them, leaving them in utter despair. Their cries of anguish unheard, they are forgotten and left to suffer therein forever.

The extended columns have been interpreted to be either columns of fire or columns of iron to which are chained the inmates of Hell.

⁴³⁹ *Af'idah*, plural of *fu'ād*, which is the seat of man's understanding, feelings and consciousness, his thoughts, motives and intentions.

⁴⁴⁰ As was described and prohibited in Sūrah al-Ḥujurāt.

SŪRAH AL-FEEL (105) سُورَةُ الْفِيلِ

During a period of difficulty at the outset of Muḥammad's prophethood, Allah reassured him with this sūrah. It was also a warning to the disbelievers of Quraysh and a reminder of how Allah had protected His House from harm, while the polytheists and their revered idols were helpless to do so. Similarly, Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) would be protected by Him until his mission was complete.

Abraham al-Ashram was a Christian Abyssinian ruler of Yemen. He had built a magnificent cathedral in Ṣan'ā' and decided to compel the Arabs to make their pilgrimage to it rather than to the Ka'bah in Makkah. The Arabs in Yemen were extremely angered by this and some individuals committed acts of aggression against the cathedral.

So Abraham determined to destroy the Ka'bah. He commanded an army of 60,000 men led by a great elephant.⁴⁴¹ His army advanced unopposed until it reached the outskirts of Makkah. The Quraysh, powerless to resist, could only hide in the nearby mountains. The way was now clear for the invading army to enter the city and attack the Ka'bah.

But Allah, the Almighty, had willed otherwise. Every time they urged the elephant toward Makkah, it refused to advance by command of its Lord. Allah then sent flocks of birds carrying stones which they dropped on the aggressors, tearing their skins and infecting them with disease. Many of them perished on the spot; others fled in panic and died on the way back. Abraham was carried back to Ṣan'ā' in agony, to die a terrible death witnessed by his people.

Prophet Muḥammad (ﷺ) was born later in that same year, which was known to the tribes as "the Year of the Elephant." While the polytheists assumed that Allah had saved His House for them, it later became clear that He had in fact preserved it for His final Messenger to restore the worship of Allah alone, without partners or intercessors.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِأَصْحَابِ الْفِيلِ

Have you not considered, [O Muḥammad], how your Lord dealt with the companions of the elephant?

This event was well known to the Arabs throughout the peninsula, so much so that it was the subject of their poetry, and the polytheists themselves regarded it as a manifestation of Allah's miraculous power. It was of recent occurrence and many of the people had actually witnessed it. The Prophet (ﷺ) too was familiar with the story, so there was no need to elaborate on its details.⁴⁴² Allah reminds him of it in concise words, focusing on its significance.

⁴⁴¹ Several other elephants (9 or 13 according to historians) were said to have accompanied his army.

⁴⁴² The verb *ra'a*, from which comes the question, *alam tara*, means to see, notice, perceive or consider. The Prophet's knowledge of this event was based on that of the elders who witnessed and often spoke of it.

And through these words came a warning to the disbelievers of Quraysh. Allah will cause His enemies to perish. They should consider *kayfa* (how) – that it might be in ways completely unexpected. And He is confirming support for His Messenger by describing Himself as *Rabbuka* (your Lord). Hence, they should beware of opposing the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).

Āyah 2. أَلَمْ يَجْعَلْ كَيْدَهُمْ فِي تَضْلِيلٍ Did He not make their plan into misguidance?

Allah alone is sufficient to protect His House, to do as He wills, and to destroy whom He wills. *Kayd* is a strategy or a plot. Abrahah had put much thought, time and effort into his plan to destroy the Ka'bah. He worked out the method and then instructed and trained his army and his elephants, certain of an easy victory. And Allah allowed them to enjoy this delusion of superiority up until the time He had willed for their elaborate plan to be defeated and wasted.

According to the Seerah⁴⁴³ of Ibn Is-ḥāq, Abrahah prepared to enter Makkah. He mobilized his army, and they directed the elephant toward the Ka'bah. But the elephant knelt and refused to go ahead. Abrahah's men beat it in an attempt to make it rise, but it refused by its Lord's command. They beat the elephant on its head with axes and pulled it with hooked sticks to make it stand, but it refused. Then they turned it toward Yemen, and it rose and walked quickly. When they turned it toward ash-Sham or toward the east it did the same. But when they turned it toward Makkah it knelt down again.

Āyahs 3-4. وَأَرْسَلَ عَلَيْهِمْ طَيْرًا أَبَابِيلَ . تَرْمِيهِمْ بِحِجَارَةٍ مِنْ سِجِّيلٍ

And He sent upon them birds in flocks, striking them with stones of hard clay.

As Allah said in Sūrah al-Mudath-thir:

وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُنُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ

*And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him.*⁴⁴⁴

Allah sent against them birds from the sea, resembling swallows and herons. *Ṭayr* are birds (*ṭuyūr*) of every kind, and *abābeel* are groups of every species. Allah sent flocks upon flocks these birds against the mighty army of invaders, targeting them with hard stones from a high altitude. Some of the army were destroyed immediately while others were broken gradually limb by limb while trying to escape. Abrahah was one of them. The historian, Ibn Is-ḥāq wrote: "Abrahah's body was afflicted by the pestilence of the stones and his army carried him away with them as he was falling apart piece by piece, until they arrived back in Ṣan'ā'. When they arrived there he was like the baby chick of a bird. And he did not die until his heart fell out of his chest."

Āyah 5. فَجَعَلَهُمْ كَعَصْفٍ مَأْكُولٍ And He made them like eaten straw.

The result of their evil plan was that Allah took such vengeance upon them that the mighty

⁴⁴³ Prophet's biography.

⁴⁴⁴ Sūrah al-Mudath-thir, 76:31.

army became like husks chewed by cattle. Ibn Zayd said, "'Aṣf are the leaves of vegetation and produce; when cattle eat it they defecate and it becomes dung." Ibn 'Abbās said, "'Aṣf is the shell of the grain, like the covering of wheat." Ibn Katheer defined 'aṣf as the leaves of crops which are left and not gathered, so they dry up and crumble.

He then added, "The meaning is that Allah, the Exalted destroyed them, demolished them and sent them back with their plan in failure, not having obtained any good. He destroyed them all, and not one among them returned [to Yemen] to inform about it but that he had been wounded, which was the condition of their leader, Abrahah. For indeed, he was split open with his heart exposed by the time he reached his land of Ṣan'ā'. He informed the people of what had happened to them and then he died."

It was recorded in the two *Ṣaḥeeḥs*⁴⁴⁵ that on the day of Makkah's conquest, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Indeed, Allah held back the elephant from Makkah, and He has [now] given His Messenger and the believers authority over it. And indeed, its sanctity has returned today as it was previously. So let those present convey to those absent."*

SŪRAH QURAYSH (106) سُورَةُ قُرَيْشٍ

Many early scholars considered this sūrah to be a continuation of the previous one – yet being a distinct sūrah, beginning with the words, *"Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem."* The meaning was understood to be that Allah protected His House and destroyed the army of *aṣḥāb al-feel* to enable security for the Quraysh in the city of Makkah.

For after Allah saved His House from the mighty invading army, the distinction of the Quraysh, as custodians of the Ka'bah, was enhanced throughout the land. Other Arab tribes believed that the Quraysh were supported by Allah, so their trade caravans were able to pass through any part of Arabia without fear of attack or harm. This in itself was a blessing for which they should have been grateful. But although their Lord had blessed them with wealth, prosperity and reputation, the Quraysh were still committing *shirk*. They had filled the House of Allah with idols and were worshipping them along with Him.

Allah appointed His final Messenger (ﷺ) from among the Quraysh. Before all other peoples, they were called upon to worship Him alone. For whatever they had attained of worldly benefits, it was due only to the Lord of this House.

⁴⁴⁵ *Ṣaḥeeḥ al-Bukhāri and Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim.*

Āyahs 1-2. لَا يَلَافُ قُرَيْشٌ • إِيْلَافِهِمْ رِحْلَةَ الشِّتَاءِ وَالصَّيْفِ

For the accustomed security of the Quraysh – their accustomed security [in] the caravan of winter and summer –

Eelāf has several related meanings: securing, bringing together, making something convenient, accustomed or habitual. So the extermination of those who had sought to destroy the Ka'bah enabled the Quraysh to gather and come together in Makkah, to be safe and secure and to continue with their customary trade activities. They were being reminded that this blessing was afforded to them by Allah, and hence, that gratitude and worship was due to Him alone.

Allah, the Exalted, honored the Quraysh with security, prosperity and prestige among the tribes of Arabia. The privilege and reputation they had gained as custodians of the Ka'bah allowed them to travel throughout the land without fear of being harmed or attacked by an enemy. It also enabled them to freely conduct commercial dealings with neighboring regions, and this was a source of abundant profits and great wealth. Every year their trade caravans would set out filled with goods, south toward Yemen in winter and north toward Syria and Palestine in summer.

The tribes along the trade routes held them in high esteem and would neither challenge them nor charge the transit taxes demanded from other caravans. Thus, the Quraysh became affluent, and Makkah became the most important commercial center of the Arabian peninsula. For all of this they were indebted to their Lord.

Āyahs 3-4. فَلْيَعْبُدُوا رَبَّ هَذَا الْبَيْتِ • الَّذِي أَطْعَمَهُمْ مِنْ جُوعٍ وَآمَنَهُمْ مِنْ خَوْفٍ

So let them worship the Lord of this House, who has fed them from hunger and made them safe from fear.

In spite of poor security conditions with the prevalence of attacks and raids in the regions surrounding Makkah, the sanctity of the House assured security to those living near it. The Quraysh attained their blessings due to the House of Allah; it was the guardianship of His House which enhanced their rank and position in Arabia. They themselves acknowledged that He was its Lord. It was only appropriate that they should worship Him alone.

All aspects of civilized life need a stable environment in which to develop. They cannot be realized in a land beset with hunger, fear, distress and poverty, where people have to expend all their energies in a struggle for bare survival, or where they live in perpetual fear for themselves and their families. Thus, security and sustenance were required before the message could spread to other lands and then to the far corners of the earth.

Freedom from hunger and fear is a basic requirement for any sound society, and it is among the greatest blessings bestowed upon a people by Allah. Yet, it is not enjoyed by many of the earth's inhabitants.

However, Allah did grant this blessing to the Quraysh. He saved them from the invasion of *aṣḥāb al-feel* after they invoked Him alone for help. He prevented them from being harmed

and then favored them with prosperity. He protected them from hunger by enabling them to be successful in their business and trade. And He protected them from fear by giving them the respect of other tribes. All that they achieved was possible only through the help of the Lord of this House; therefore they should worship Him alone. In fact, all people should show gratitude to Allah for His countless blessings by worshipping Him alone.

سُورَةُ الْمَاعُونِ (107) SŪRAH AL-MĀ'ŪN

The sūrah was named after the word *al-mā'ūn*, which occurs at the end of the last verse. There are two views regarding its revelation and about whom the description within it was given.

One view is that the second part of the sūrah was revealed in Madinah because it speaks about hypocrites and those weak in faith. Hypocrites appeared in Madinah only after Islam had gained acceptance and influence there. Since they dared not oppose the Prophet (ﷺ) openly, they declared themselves Muslims but were plotting against him in secret. At the same time, they took care to be seen at prayer in the masjid in order to be counted among the righteous Muslims.

The second view is that it describes corruption present in Makkah before the *hijrah* and depicts some characteristics of the disbelievers from Quraysh. Since they did not believe that Allah would call them to account for their deeds in another life to come, they were totally heedless and felt no responsibility toward weaker members of society.

Either way, describing the conduct of such people emphasizes the fact that man will not develop a pure and firm character without belief in the Hereafter. The sūrah threatens destruction to those who pray with the people merely to be seen as pious and not out of obedience and devotion to their Lord. This is evident in their behavior, for if they had actually been believers they would have acted in a more kind and generous manner.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. أَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِي يُكَذِّبُ بِالدِّينِ Have you seen the one who denies the Recompense?

This opening verse addresses the Prophet (ﷺ) in a way that shows favor and partiality to him while criticizing his opponent. It is also indirectly addressing every thoughtful, perceptive individual. *Ara'ayta* can mean: did you see, have you considered, do you know? Have you seen or thought about the kind of person who denies the rewards and punishments of the

Hereafter?" The word *deen* refers here to repayment and compensation, as in the words of Allah, "*māliki yawm id-deen*."⁴⁴⁶ On *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*, Allah will judge every individual, and then complete recompense will be given for whatever was earned of good or evil during one's life on earth. This question is not asked to ascertain whether or not he has seen such a person, but rather to make one think about the conduct of those who do not believe themselves accountable or do not acknowledge the life to come in which justice will be restored. Thus, the *sūrah* states that there is a moral significance to belief in the Hereafter.

Āyahs 2-3. فَذَلِكَ الَّذِي يَدْعُ الْيَتِيمَ • وَلَا يَحْضُ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ

For that is the one who drives away the orphan and does not encourage the feeding of the poor.

He who denies the Recompense is described as one who would oppress an orphan and not give him his right. If the orphan came to ask for help, he would refuse without showing him the least compassion. Neither would he feed him nor say a kind word, but would drive him away out of his sight. Similar are the words in *Sūrah al-Fajr*:

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تَكْرُمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ وَلَا تَحَاضُّونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْمَسْكِينِ.

*No! But you do not honor the orphan, and you do not encourage one another to feed the poor.*⁴⁴⁷

The *miskeen* is a needy person who does not have enough to sustain himself or meet his needs. He is either too proud or too shy to ask for assistance, so most people are unaware of his condition. The Prophet (ﷺ) described him saying, "*The miskeen is not one who circulates among the people that you can satisfy with a bite or two or a date or two, but he is one who finds not means of self-sufficiency, while no one is aware to give him ṣadaqah and he will not ask of people.*"⁴⁴⁸

One who denies recompense in the next life will not be bothered with the needs of an orphan, a poor person or any of the weaker members of society. He assumes that he is within his right, that he is not responsible for the plight of others and that he alone is entitled to every blessing bestowed upon him. He believes that the less fortunate are less deserving or perhaps that they are being punished for sins, as if they themselves were faultless.

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ أَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا رَزَقَكُمُ اللَّهُ قَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْطَعِمُ مَنْ لَوْ يَشَاءُ اللَّهُ أَطَعَمَهُ إِنْ أَنْتُمْ إِلَّا فِي ضَلَالٍ مُبِينٍ.

*And when it is said to them, "Spend from that with which Allah has provided you," the unbelievers say to the believers, "Should we feed him whom if Allah had willed He would have fed? You are not but in manifest error."*⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ *Sūrah al-Fātiḥah*, 1:4.

⁴⁴⁷ *Sūrah al-Fajr*, 89:17-18.

⁴⁴⁸ *Al-Bukhāri and Muslim*.

⁴⁴⁹ *Sūrah YāSeen*, 36:17.

They even claim that since everything is predetermined by Allah, there is no use trying to change the lot of the disadvantaged, shamelessly shifting blame from themselves to their Lord. They are unmindful of the return to Him who created them, when they will be stripped of all their wealth and influence. On that Day, everything they had withheld unlawfully and unjustly will become an inescapable and suffocating burden around their necks⁴⁵⁰ and they will face the Recompense they had once denied.

Through these two conspicuous examples which every sound-natured person will regard as hateful, Allah (ﷻ) shows how those who deny the Hereafter are afflicted with evil conduct. They become so selfish and callous that they are not prepared to make even the most minor sacrifice for the sake of others.

Āyahs 4-5. فَوَيْلٌ لِلْمُصَلِّينَ . الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَنْ صَلَاتِهِمْ سَاهُونَ

So woe to those who pray [but] who are heedless of their prayer,

Ibn 'Abbās and others have said, "This refers to the hypocrites who pray in public but do not pray in private." They are unconcerned if they miss prayers at times when no one is observing them.

The words of 'Aṭā' bin Dīnār are often quoted by commentators in explanation of this āyah: "Praise be to Allah who said, '*an ṣalātihim sāhūn*' (are heedless of their prayer) and did not say, '*fee ṣalātihim sāhūn*' (are heedless in their prayer)." The first would indicate those who do not think to perform the prescribed prayer at all or do it hypocritically, while the second would refer to a lack of concentration in the prayer or forgetting during it. And this is something that hardly anyone can avoid at times, even the most sincere of believers. It is a human weakness but not a sin. Being heedless of the prayer, however, as stated in this āyah, is neglect of it completely or merely going through its motions mechanically, without consciousness of Allah in the heart.

Āyahs 6-7. الَّذِينَ هُمْ يُرَاءُونَ . وَيَمْنَعُونَ الْمَاعُونَ

Those who make show [of their deeds] and withhold [simple] assistance.

Even when they pray, those who do not seek the reward of the Hereafter will not pray sincerely to Allah, but only do so because others expect it of them. While they pretend to be virtuous, it is only for show. As Allah said:

إِنَّ الْمُنَافِقِينَ يُخَادِعُونَ اللَّهَ وَهُوَ خَادِعُهُمْ وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا.

*Indeed, the hypocrites [think to] deceive Allah, but He is deceiving them. And when they stand for prayer, they stand lazily, showing [themselves to] the people and not remembering Allah except a little.*⁴⁵¹

⁴⁵⁰ Refer to Sūrah Aali 'Imrān, 3:180.

⁴⁵¹ Sūrah an-Nisaa', 4:142.

The verb *yurā'ūn*⁴⁵² refers to those who show or display something to others. They do acts of goodness and worship so that people will see or hear of them in order to gain position and status among them, to win praise and admiration or to obtain some worldly objective. The influential men of Quraysh would make a show of prayer at the Ka'bah in order to demonstrate to the people their position as its custodians.

This is why some early scholars would say, "Examine the intention (*niyyah*), for indeed, it is a more significant matter than doing deeds." For it is the intention, the truth of which is known only to Allah, which distinguishes a righteous deed from that of a hypocrite or what is done for a worldly gain. Scholars have pointed out that generally, the unbeliever's deeds are better than his intentions, whereas a believer's intentions [to please Allah] are superior to his deeds.

Ibn 'Abbās, Ibn Mas'ūd and others of the Ṣaḥābah and their students stated that *mā'ūn* denotes items of common use, such as a cooking-pot, bucket, hatchet, balance or other small items of common use which people generally borrow from one another. 'Alī bin Abī Ṭālib held that *mā'ūn* implies zakāh as well, for it is a small amount taken out of ample wealth that one must give in order to help the poor.

Those who withhold and avoid such small kindnesses and courtesies will not go to the least trouble unless they believe they can gain a worldly benefit. Ibn Katheer said, "This means they do not worship their Lord well, nor do they treat His creation well. They do not lend something which others may benefit from or be helped by, even though the article will remain intact and be returned to them. They are even stingier when it comes to giving zakāh and the various kinds of charity which bring one closer to Allah." Conversely, sincerely motivated worship will affect a person's heart, cause him to remember his Lord and to act righteously toward his fellow human beings.

SŪRAH AL-KAWTHAR (108) سُورَةُ الْكَوْثَرِ

Sūrah al-Kawthar is the shortest sūrah of the Qur'ān. It consoled the Prophet (ﷺ) with mention of his great reward in the Hereafter and foretold the elimination of his opponents. Because he had rejected and criticized their idolatry publicly, the Quraysh were making every effort to cut him off from his people. Additionally, he had just been saddened by the death of two sons, one after the other, while the members of his clan were rejoicing and saying, "Muḥammad is cut off [from successors] as a tree is cut off from its root and could fall to the ground any moment." Ibn Ishāq related that whenever the Prophet (ﷺ) was mentioned

⁴⁵² From the root, *ra'a*, which means to see or notice.

before al-'Aaṣ bin Wā'il, he would say, "Leave him, for he is *abtar* with no male offspring; when he dies, he will not be remembered."

So in one sentence Allah imparted to him (ﷺ) the information that he would be granted the most abundant good, better than that given to anyone else, and that his adversaries would be the ones who were cut off. They would be cut off from all good in this world and the Hereafter. Anas reported, "While we were in the masjid with the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), he dozed off briefly. Then he lifted his head, smiling. We said, 'What made you smile, O Messenger of Allah?' He said, 'A *sūrah* was just revealed to me.' Then he recited it and said, 'Do you know what is *al-Kawthar*?' We said, 'Allah and His Messenger know most.' He said, 'Indeed, it is a river in Paradise that my Lord, the Mighty and Majestic, has promised me; it has abundant goodness. It is a pond to which my ummah will be brought on the Day of Resurrection. Its flasks are as numerous as the stars in the sky. But then someone from among them will be pulled away [from it] and I will say, "My Lord, he is from my ummah." But He will say, "Indeed, you do not know what he did after you."' "⁴⁵³

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. إِنَّا أَعْطَيْنَاكَ الْكَوْثَرَ **Indeed, We have granted you *al-Kawthar*.**

Al-Kawthar means a great amount of good. It comes from the word *kathrah*, which linguistically means abundance or multitude. *Kawthar* is the most abundant – unrestricted and unlimited, and the context in which it is used conveys the meaning of an abundance of good, of countless blessings and spiritual benefits, unbounded and limitless. So Allah tells His Messenger (ﷺ) that if his opponents think he is ruined and deprived of the good things he enjoyed before his prophethood, the fact is that He has favored him with infinite good and countless blessings.

Ibn 'Abbās said about *al-Kawthar*, "It is the good which Allah gave to him (ﷺ)." It is also the name of a river in Paradise which Allah has prepared especially for the Prophet (ﷺ). Abū Bishr related, "I said to Sa'eed bin Jubayr, 'People are claiming that it is a river in Paradise.' Sa'eed replied, 'The river in Paradise is a portion of the good which Allah gave him.'" When the Prophet was asked about *al-Kawthar* he replied, "*It is a river which Allah has granted me in Paradise. Its mud is musk, it is whiter than milk and sweeter than honey.*"⁴⁵⁴ And he (ﷺ) said, "*It is a fountain at which my ummah will assemble on Yawm al-Qiyāmah.*"⁴⁵⁵

Āyah 2. فَصَلِّ لِرَبِّكَ وَأَنْحَرْ **So pray to your Lord and offer sacrifice.**

Some commentators took the word *ṣalli* (pray) to mean the five obligatory prayers. Others said that it means performing the 'Eed al-Adḥ-ḥā prayer and then offering the sacrifice of an animal. Yet others are of the view that it denotes prayer itself in the general sense. The

⁴⁵³ Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and an-Nasā'i.

⁴⁵⁴ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi.

⁴⁵⁵ Muslim.

meaning can be inferred to be: "O Prophet, given that your Lord has granted you such abundant blessings in this life and the Hereafter, then pray to Him alone and offer sacrifice for Him alone." This directive was given within an environment where not only the pagans of Quraysh, but of the entire Arabian peninsula and most of the world worshipped man-made gods and offered sacrifices to them. Therefore, the Prophet (ﷺ) was told that contrary to the widespread polytheistic practice, he must remain steadfast in *tawḥeed*; his prayer and his sacrifice were to be for Allah alone and no other.

Āyah 3. إِنَّ شَانِئَكَ هُوَ الْأَبْتَرُ Indeed, your enemy is the one cut off.

The word *shāni'* is used to denote one who holds hatred and spite against another to the point that he will try to harm him. It refers here every person who is blinded by hatred of the Prophet (ﷺ), who would mock him, bring false accusations against him and vent his malice in every possible way.

A person who had been cut off from his family, associates and assistants was called *abtar*. The word was also used for a man who has no male child or whose male children have died, for after him there remains no one to carry his name and he is considered lost to posterity.

Ibn 'Abbās, Mujāhid, Sa'eed bin Jubayr and Qatādah said, "This āyah was revealed about al-'Aaṣ bin Wā'il. Whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was mentioned he would say, 'Leave him, for he is a man who is *abtar* – cut off, having no male descendants. When he dies his remembrance will be cut off.' So Allah revealed this sūrah." Some others held that it was revealed concerning 'Uqbah bin Abī Mu'ayṭ, or that it was revealed about Ka'b bin al-Ashraf as well as a group of disbelievers from the Quraysh. Abū Lahab and Abū Jahl were mentioned specifically. Ibn Katheer concluded that it is a general description of anyone who fits it: those who were mentioned by name and others as well.

Allah, the Exalted is assuring His Messenger that anyone who hates him and what he has conveyed of truth, guidance, clear proofs and enlightenment will be the one cut off, with no permanence and doomed to failure. Although he is calling the Prophet *abtar*, it is he himself who will be *abtar*, cut off by failure to achieve his objective and left with no hope of any good or success. One who is an enemy to the Prophet (ﷺ) cannot possibly do any good in this life and thus will be deprived of all good in the Hereafter.

This was a prophecy of the Qur'ān which soon proved to be true. The influence of the Prophet's enemies was short-lived, while his impact on human life and history has continued to grow and deepen. For not only did Allah bless the Prophet (ﷺ) with descendants from his daughter, Fāṭimah, but also with countless followers all over the world who will continue to praise him up until *Yawm al-Qiyāmah*. Indeed, the Messenger of Allah is mentioned somewhere upon the earth at every moment. His prophethood is proclaimed in the *adhān* five times a day, Muslims everywhere hold him in high esteem and blessings are being invoked on him whenever his name is spoken. Ibn Katheer said, "They imagined in their ignorance that when his sons died the memory of him would be cut off. But far from it; Allah has sustained his memory for all to witness, and moreover, He imposed the law brought by him upon all people for all time until the Day of Assembly and Appointment."

SŪRAH AL-KĀFIRŪN (109) سُورَةُ الْكَافِرُونَ

This sūrah was revealed to tell the disbelievers of Quraysh and all others that Islam and kufr (unbelief) are not and can never be compatible, and to eliminate any possibility of their being combined.

At the time of its revelation, opposition had arisen within the pagan society of Makkah against the message of Islam, but the chiefs had not yet lost hope that they could reach some sort of compromise with the Prophet (ﷺ). So from time to time they would visit him with various proposals, considering that if he should accept one of them the dispute between them would be ended.

'Abdullāh bin 'Abbās reported that the leaders of Quraysh told the Prophet (ﷺ), "We will give you enough wealth that you will become the richest man in Makkah. We will give you any woman you like for marriage. We are prepared to follow and obey you as our leader, but on the condition that you will not speak ill of our gods." They also offered that if he would agree to worship their gods, *al-Lāt* and *al-'Uzzā*, for a year, then they would worship Allah alone for a year. The Prophet told them he would wait for the reply from his Lord. By now it was clear that the pagans had to be given a decisive reply. Consequently, this sūrah was revealed, and there could no longer be any expectation of compromise.

It is confirmed in *Ṣaḥeeḥ Muslim* that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) recited Sūrah al-Kāfirūn and Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ in the two rak'ahs of the sunnah prayer of fajr and the two rak'ahs following ṭawāf. And Aḥmad recorded that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) recited these two sūrahs in the two rak'ahs of the sunnah prayer after maghrib. Ibn 'Umar said, "I observed the Prophet (ﷺ) for a month, and he would recite in the two rak'ahs before the morning prayer and those after the sunset prayer, *Qul yā-ayyuhal-kāfirūn* and *Qul huw-Allāhu aḥad*."⁴⁵⁶ And the Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*Qul yā-ayyuhal-kāfirūn* is equal to a fourth of the Qur'ān." And he said, "Recite *Qul yā-ayyuhal-kāfirūn*, for indeed, it is disassociation from *shirk*."⁴⁵⁷

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا الْكَافِرُونَ Say, "O disbelievers,

Sūrah al-Kāfirūn is one of the five sūrahs that begin with the command, "Say," directing the Prophet (ﷺ) to convey the words that follow it.⁴⁵⁸ However, this word (*Qul*) was never omitted in his recitation as he was entrusted to deliver the message exactly as it had come to him from Allah; and the same applies to believers. It also confirms that the Prophet (ﷺ) had no power to affect the content, time or place of revelation, and that he was no more than a messenger who conveyed what he was instructed to say.

⁴⁵⁶ Aḥmad.

⁴⁵⁷ At-Tirmidhi - ṣaḥeeḥ.

⁴⁵⁸ The others being Sūrah al-Jinn and the final three sūrahs of the Qur'an.

Kāfirūn is a plural form of *kāfir*, which literally means one who covers or conceals something. It can mean a planter who covers his seeds with soil after sowing them. And it can mean night or darkness which covers the earth. The general sense of covering (*kufr*) includes covering up the truth or suppressing one's *fiṭrah*, the natural inclination of man to believe in and worship his Creator. In this sense it is taken to indicate firm nonbelief or disbelief (i.e., incorrect belief) and persistence in it, whether out of arrogance, distrust or preference for one's own inclinations and customs. It can also denote concealment of a favor, i.e., ingratitude. The *kāfir* rejects and conceals the greatest favor granted to mankind – that of Allah's guidance.⁴⁵⁹

This āyah was revealed after years of da'wah by the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) in the language of his people. Known for their linguistic eloquence and skill, the Quraysh of Makkah could never claim ignorance or unawareness; they understood it perfectly. They had even acknowledged that the Qur'ān was unequalled in expression, impact and clarity. To worship Allah alone was clearly understood by the Arabs as complete obedience to His legislation, so for those in power it would mean some concession of authority and limitation of their social advantages. Hence, they refused and rejected it outright. Disregarding their traditional bonds of kinship, they lashed out against the Prophet (ﷺ), calling him a liar, a sorcerer and a madman, insulting, harassing and abusing him in every way. So their Lord addressed them appropriately as *kāfirūn*.

Ibn Katheer said, "Allah's statement: *Qul yā-ayyuhal-kāfirūn* includes every disbeliever on the face of the earth, although this statement was directed particularly to the disbelievers of Quraysh. Their chiefs had invited the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to worship their idols for a year, in return for which they would worship his God for a year. Thereupon Allah revealed this sūrah, and in it He commanded His Messenger to disassociate himself from their religion entirely."

Āyah 2. لَا أَعْبُدُ مَا تَعْبُدُونَ I do not worship what you worship.

Although initially addressed to the disbelieving Quraysh in response to their proposals of compromise, these verses are not confined to them alone. Allah has imparted to Muslims a permanent instruction that they should distance themselves from the doctrine of *kufr* in whatever form it should appear, and declare that there can be no negotiation with the disbelievers in the matter of *'aqeedah*. This and the following verses command a complete disavowal of that.

The verb *'abada*, (to worship) is repeated in various forms throughout these verses. From it is derived *'ibādah*, a comprehensive term which includes worship, servitude, obedience, slavery and everything done willingly for the acceptance and approval of the one worshipped. In Islam, worship means obedience to Allah as well as whatever righteous acts, intentions and attitudes are directed to Him out of devotion and trust. So worship has both external and

⁴⁵⁹ Non-Muslims cannot accurately be called *kāfirūn* until Islam has been presented to them in a proper manner and then they have refused it. In this sūrah Allah is addressing those who deliberately reject their Lord's final message after having understood it.

internal forms. Ibn Taymiyyah defined it as everything that Allah loves and approves of words and deeds, both apparent and unapparent.

Enslavement to Allah is an honor for man, for it frees him from servitude to all else. It necessitates submission and obedience to Him based on a combination of love, fear and hope. The slave loves his Lord, fears His displeasure and punishment and hopes for His mercy and reward.

The disbelievers of the Prophet's time acknowledged the existence and lordship of Allah, yet they remained in a state of disbelief on account of their refusal to devote worship to Him alone. The Quraysh were worshippers of idols – statues of stone, wood or even objects they had fashioned out of dates,⁴⁶⁰ enslaved by their pagan traditions and material interests.

Dissociation from *kufṛ* means to cease and avoid excessive veneration of any creation. Allah is the only one to whom all forms of worship should be directed, whether in the heart (reverence, gratitude, love, fear, trust, etc.) or in the form of speech and actions. There is nothing other than Him worthy of worship – *lā ilāha ill-Allāh*.

Āyah 3. وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ Nor are you worshippers of what I worship.

'Ābidūn is a plural of 'ābid, meaning a worshipper. The polytheists were to be told by the Prophet (ﷺ) that they are not and never have been worshippers of the One whom he worships alone, without associates or partners. Although they superficially acknowledged Allah as the Creator and Lord, they had never actually been in servitude to Him; otherwise they would not be bowing to their idols. Rather, they had invented some sort of religion out of the promptings of their own souls. In reality, they were subservient only to their own worldly interests and their objects of worship were many.

Use of the words *mā a'bud* (what I worship) rather than *man a'bud* (whom I worship) emphasizes the exclusiveness of Allah, the Exalted. He is like none other. He resembles no one among His creatures. His attributes are unlimited, absolute, complete and perfect. They are befitting to Him alone, as He has said:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ.

"There is nothing like unto Him."⁴⁶¹

If the *kāfirūn* have persuaded themselves to accept deities other than Allah, the reality remains unchanged; He is still the only Lord of this universe.

Āyah 4. وَلَا أَنَا عَابِدٌ مَا عَبَدْتُمْ Nor will I be a worshipper of what you worship.

In this āyah the Prophet (ﷺ) is told to say, "I will never worship what you are worshipping and I will not be subjugated or enslaved to it." In a similar āyah, Allah directed His Messenger (ﷺ) how to address the obstinate pagans:

⁴⁶⁰ Which they would then eat during times of hunger.

⁴⁶¹ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:11.

قُلْ أَفَعَبَّرَ اللَّهُ تَأْمُرُونِي أَعْبُدُ أُيُّهَا الْجَاهِلُونَ. وَلَقَدْ أُوحِيَ إِلَيْكَ وَإِلَى الَّذِينَ مِنْ قَبْلِكَ لَئِنْ أَشْرَكْتَ لَيَحْبَطَنَّ عَمَلُكَ وَلَتَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ. بَلِ اللَّهَ فَاعْبُدْ وَكُنْ مِنَ الشَّاكِرِينَ.

*Say, "Is it other than Allah that you order me to worship, O ignorant ones? And it was already revealed to you and to those before you that if you should associate [anything] with Allah, your work would surely become worthless, and you would surely be among the losers. Rather, worship [only] Allah and be among the grateful."*⁴⁶²

Commentators have stated that the repetition in these verses is intended for emphasis. This is clearly true, but while Āyah 2 said: "*I do not worship what you worship*," there is additional force in saying: "*I am not a worshipper of what you worship*," for it indicates: "It is so inappropriate that I could not possibly even consider such a thing." Most scholars have additionally understood that Āyahs 2 and 3 are referring to the past or the present, while Āyahs 4 and 5 indicate the future and deny any possibility of compromise for all time to come.

The prohibition against associating anything with Allah in His right to be worshipped is directed to all mankind. The Arabic phrase can also mean: "*Nor will I be a worshipper as you worship*," i.e., I will not worship Allah except in the manner which He accepts and approves. Some others may be performing certain rituals, but they are not worshipping Him alone or as He directed through conscientious obedience.

Āyah 5. وَلَا أَنْتُمْ عَابِدُونَ مَا أَعْبُدُ Nor will you be worshippers of what I worship.

While the words of this verse are the same as those in Āyah 3, both may be understood in the setting of what precedes them. Here, the Prophet (ﷺ) is being told that the disbelievers who were so viciously opposing him would never become true worshippers of Allah; it was not to happen. Their adamant refusal to worship Allah alone and to give up the worship of idols was an indication that he could not expect them to change in the future. The āyah states that those particular disbelievers would remain in a state of *kufr* until their death.

Āyah 6. لَكُمْ دِينُكُمْ وَلِيَ دِينِ For you is your religion, and for me is my religion."

The verses of this sūrah were revealed not long before the *hijrah* of Allah's Messenger (ﷺ) from Makkah. He had remained there despite the hardships of persecution for the purpose of da'wah. But now Allah was conveying to him that there is no longer any reason for him to continue, as the disbelievers of Quraysh were not going to change their ways. Al-Bukhārī explained that since "your religion" is disbelief and "my religion" is Islam, it means that my religion is entirely distinct and detached from your religion. I cannot worship your gods and you are not willing to worship my God; therefore, you and I can never follow the same path.⁴⁶³ The words communicate a sense of finality.

⁴⁶² Sūrah az-Zumar, 39:64-66.

⁴⁶³ There is no evidence that this āyah authorizes the acceptance of other religions as some secular-minded people have claimed. Rather, the Prophet (ﷺ) was being told to declare dissociation from the disbelievers as long as they continued to reject the worship of their Creator alone.

This is similar to Allah's statement in Sūrah Yūnus to His Messenger (ﷺ):

وَأِنْ كَذَّبُوكَ فَقُلْ لِي عَمَلِي وَلَكُمْ عَمَلُكُمْ أَنْتُمْ بَرِيءُونَ مِمَّا أَعْمَلُ وَأَنَا بَرِيءٌ مِمَّا تَعْمَلُونَ.

*And if they deny you then say, "For me are my deeds, and for you are your deeds. You are disassociated from what I do, and I am disassociated from what you do."*⁴⁶⁴

Then, in the same sūrah He instructed:

قُلْ يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ فِي شَكٍّ مِنْ دِينِي فَلَا أَعْبُدُ الَّذِينَ تَعْبُدُونَ مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ وَلَكِنْ أَعْبُدُ اللَّهَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُمْ

*Say, "O people, if you are in doubt as to my religion – then I do not worship those which you worship besides Allah; but I worship Allah, who causes your death..."*⁴⁶⁵

The declaration was ordered by Allah, Most High, after He had exposed the ineffectiveness of idolatry and superstition in the Qur'ān with clear logic. It states absolutely and finally that as regards the issue of religion, the Messenger (ﷺ) and his followers could never come to terms with unbelievers. Believers are now to be entirely disconnected from them in their creed and conduct.

In addition to "religion," the word *deen* can mean "compensation" or "recompense." It relates to *dayn*, meaning a loan or something owed. Thus, the Day on which every soul will be fully repaid for all it had earned during the worldly life and must repay whatever it owes to others is called *Yawm ad-Deen*. So another implication of this āyah is that both parties, believers and nonbelievers, will obtain exactly what they deserve – the consequence of their efforts and intentions.

سُورَةُ النَّصْرِ (110) SŪRAH AN-NAṢR

This sūrah, as well as *al-Bayyinah*, differs from the rest of Juz' 'Ammā in that it was revealed after the *hijrah*. According to Abdullāh bin 'Umar, it was sent down on the occasion of the Farewell Pilgrimage in Minā in which the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*O people, hear what I say, for I do not know – perhaps I will not meet you after this year at this place again.*"⁴⁶⁶ This was the beginning of *khuṭbat al-wadā'*, the farewell address, in which he clarified and confirmed many aspects of the law and called for justice to all people. He explained the fundamental principles of Islam and denounced polytheism and ignorance. He declared life, honor and property to be inviolable and that all practices of the pagan past were now abolished. He then requested those present to pass on what they had heard to those who

⁴⁶⁴ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:41.

⁴⁶⁵ Sūrah Yūnus, 10:104.

⁴⁶⁶ Al-Bayhaqi.

were absent, finally inquiring of them, "*Have I conveyed the message?*" Upon hearing their unanimous reply to the affirmative, he concluded, "*O Allah, witness it.*"

It was during this pilgrimage that Allah revealed these verses which alluded to the fact that the Prophet's mission on earth was completed and the time of his death was near. It is recorded that Ibn 'Abbās asked 'Abdullāh bin 'Utbah, "O Ibn 'Utbah, do you know what was the last sūrah revealed of the Qur'ān?" He replied, "Yes. It was: *When the support of Allah has come and the conquest.*" Ibn 'Abbās said, "You have spoken the truth."⁴⁶⁷

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. إِذَا جَاءَ نَصْرُ اللَّهِ وَالْفَتْحُ

When the support of Allah has come and the conquest,

Allah fulfilled His promise of support for His Messenger (ﷺ) when He granted him and his companions a great victory over the disbelievers who had made every effort to crush the Muslims for so many years. The conquest of Makkah enabled them to establish Islam there and in due course spread it to new lands. The words of this verse convey that it is none but Allah who enables His servants to do His work and achieve their aims. As long as they strive for His cause, their success will come when and how He wills.

All scholars agree that the meaning of *al-fath* here is the conquest of Makkah. For many of the Arabs had been waiting for this to happen before they would accept Islam, saying, "If Muḥammad is victorious over his people, then he is really a prophet."

Āyah 2. وَرَأَيْتَ النَّاسَ يَدْخُلُونَ فِي دِينِ اللَّهِ أَفْوَاجًا

And you see the people entering into the religion of Allah in multitudes,

'Amr bin Salamah reported, "When Makkah was conquered, all the people hastened to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) to declare their Islam. The tribes of various regions were delaying acceptance of Islam until Makkah was conquered. They would say, 'Leave him and his people alone. If he is victorious over them then he is a [true] prophet.'"⁴⁶⁸ So when Allah gave him victory over Makkah, entire clans entered Islam. And within two years after the conquest, most of the Arabian peninsula had professed their acceptance of Allah's religion.

They entered Islam for various reasons, and not always belief. If the chief of a tribe accepted Islam, the whole tribe would do so out of loyalty to him. And when people observed the Prophet's triumphant entry into Makkah, they saw benefit in coming over to his side. Faith had not entered all of their hearts.

But after observing that justice was established and upheld, former enemies came to the Prophet (ﷺ), asking for forgiveness and declaring their allegiance to him. Most of those who

⁴⁶⁷ An-Nasā'i. He meant that it was the last complete sūrah sent down at on one occasion.

⁴⁶⁸ Al-Bukhāri.

had initially joined the Muslims for worldly advantage or material gain now accepted the religion wholeheartedly, dedicating themselves to Allah. And all praise and blessings are due to Him.

Āyah 3. فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَاسْتَغْفِرْهُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ تَوَّابًا

Then exalt [Him] with praise of your Lord and ask forgiveness of Him. Indeed, He is ever Accepting of Repentance.

Gratitude and praise were due to Allah for the conquest of Makkah and for the people's collective acceptance of Islam. So the Prophet (ﷺ) was instructed to praise Him and seek His forgiveness. Abdullāh bin Mas'ūd reported that when this sūrah was revealed, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) began to recite frequently, "*Subhānak-Allāhumma wa bi-ḥamdik. Allāhummaghfirli.*" (Glory be to You, O Allah, and praise. O Allah, forgive me.)⁴⁶⁹ Indeed, Allah is always ready to forgive anyone who repents sincerely to Him. This is the meaning of His attribute, *at-Tawwāb*. More literally it means: He who perpetually returns, reminding and enabling His servant to repent from sins and then forgiving him. Thus, He is also the constant motivator of the repentance which He accepts.

ʿAbdullāh bin ʿAbbās reported that after the revelation of this sūrah the Messenger (ﷺ) said, "*My death has been announced to me,*" and he passed away that year.⁴⁷⁰ And he added that after the revelation of the sūrah, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) began to strive more intensely than ever in the matter of the Hereafter, meaning that he increased his worship and supplication.

ʿĀ'ishah said, "The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) often used to say in his *rukū'* and *sujūd*, "*Subhānak-Allāhumma rabbanā wa bi-ḥamdika; Allāhummaghfirli,*" in obedience to the Qur'ān.⁴⁷¹ And she said, "Toward the end of his life, the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would often say, *Subhānak-Allāhumma wa bi-ḥamdik. Astaghfirullāha wa atūbu ilayh.*" (Glory be to You, O Allah, and praise. I seek forgiveness from Allah and repent to Him.)⁴⁷²

Ibn ʿAbbās also related, "ʿUmar would invite me to join the company of elders who were present at Badr. Some of them were uncomfortable and asked why I should be allowed since I was the same in age as their children. But ʿUmar said to them, 'You know to what family he belongs.' One day ʿUmar invited them all and invited me as well. I felt that he wanted to show them why he had favored me. He asked them, 'What do you say about Allah's words: *When the support of Allah has come and the conquest?*' Some of them replied, 'It is an order that we praise Him and seek His forgiveness whenever His help comes and we attain victory. Others said it indicated there would be conquest of cities and forts. And some remained silent. Then ʿUmar asked me, 'Do you agree with this view, Ibn ʿAbbās?' I said, "No." ʿUmar asked again, 'Then, what do you say?' I replied, 'It was an indication from Allah to His Messenger (ﷺ) that when the support of Allah had come and the conquest, his term of life

⁴⁶⁹ Aḥmad.

⁴⁷⁰ Aḥmad.

⁴⁷¹ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁷² Al-Bukhāri.

would be nearing an end.' 'Umar said, 'I do not know other than what you have said.'" And he told those present, 'How can you blame me after you have seen why I invite this boy to the assembly.'⁴⁷³

A neighbor of Jābir bin 'Abdullāh related that once he returned from a journey and Jābir came to greet him. So he began telling him about the discord and schisms appearing among the Muslims. Jābir wept and said, 'I heard the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) say, "*Indeed, the people have entered the religion of Allah in multitudes, and they will leave it in multitudes.*"'⁴⁷⁴

SŪRAH AL-MASAD (III) سُورَةُ الْمَسَدِ

This sūrah has been named for its last word: *masad*, meaning palm fiber. It was also called Sūrah al-Lahab after the Prophet's paternal uncle, Abū Lahab, whose original name was 'Abd al-'Uzzā bin 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib. He had been given this nickname, meaning "father of flame" because of his reddish complexion and was considered to be good-looking. He was also among the prominent and influential leaders of the Prophet's tribe of Banū Hāshim. But from the initial stages of prophethood, he became his nephew's staunchest and most vicious enemy. The sūrah was sent down as a reply to the malicious campaign of Abū Lahab and his wife against the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ).

It was related by Aḥmad, al-Bukhāri, Muslim and at-Tirmidhi that when the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) was commanded to warn his nearest kinsfolk, he ascended the hill of Ṣafā and called out, "*If I was to inform you that horsemen were in the valley behind this hill ready to attack you, would you believe me?*" The people replied, "Yes, for we have never known you to lie." Having obtained their confirmation of his honesty, he continued, "*Indeed, I am a warner to you of a severe punishment.*" Abū Lahab snapped, "Is this what you gathered us for? May you be ruined (*tabban laka*) for the rest of the day!" Thereupon, Allah sent down this sūrah.

Abū Lahab and his wife were neighbors of the Prophet (ﷺ), and to spite him would throw filth into his house. When the Prophet's son passed away, Abū Lahab came out joyfully shouting, "The lineage of Muḥammad has been cut off!" At that time Allah revealed *Sūrah al-Kawthar*. He also ordered both his sons who were married to the Prophet's daughters, Ruqayyah and Umm Kulthūm, to divorce their wives.

When the pagan chiefs sent an ultimatum to the clan of the Prophet demanding that he be delivered to them for execution, every member of Banū Hāshim, including the polytheists among them, rejected the demand, remaining loyal to their ties of kinship. So the chiefs

⁴⁷³ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁷⁴ Aḥmad.

determined to boycott the entire extended family of Muḥammad and any who supported them. Abū Lahab was the only one who opposed his own kinsmen and joined the boycott in support of the enemies of Islam, violating the customary ethics of his tribe.

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would approach the various tribes during their visits to Makkah and in the marketplace, telling them, "*O people, declare that there is no god except Allah and you will attain success.*" But Abū Lahab would follow him and appear wherever people assembled around him, shouting, "He is misguided and a liar! He wants you to abandon your gods and goddesses. Do not let him lure you away from your religion and the religion of your forefathers."⁴⁷⁵

Upon the death of his brother, Abū Ṭālib, who had consistently defended the Prophet's right to speak, Abū Lahab became the clan's chief. Persecution of the Messenger (ﷺ) and his followers increased. But after the Prophet's *hijrah* there was no longer any contact between them.

Following the battle of Badr, Abū Lahab was informed about the defeat of the Qurayshi polytheists and several of their leaders. In his fury, a fatal abscess developed in his head and the people of his household avoided him, fearing contamination. After he died no one would approach the decaying body for three days while its odor became unbearable. Finally, neighbors rebuked his sons for this, so they had the corpse removed by slaves. A pit was dug outside of Makkah and the body pushed into it with poles of wood, and stones and earth were thrown over it from a distance.

During his lifetime, Abū Lahab could have discredited the Prophet and his message merely by professing Islam, even if only hypocritically. If he had done so, he could then have declared that the Qur'ān was wrong about him. Although the opportunity remained for years after the revelation of this sūrah, Allah (ﷻ) had known that he would never accept the religion and would die in a state of hostility toward it.

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. تَبَّتْ يَدَا أَبِي لَهَبٍ وَتَبَّ

May the hands of Abū Lahab be ruined, and ruined is he.

The verb *tabba* (f. *tabbat*)⁴⁷⁶ means to be ruined or destroyed, to perish, collapse or deteriorate. It is a curse which was invoked upon Abū Lahab, but it is also a prophecy described in the past tense, to confirm that its future occurrence would be certain and inevitable.

Ruin of the hands denotes total failure to achieve one's aim and the objective for which he had exerted his utmost effort. Abū Lahab had indeed exerted his utmost effort to obstruct and defeat the message of Islam. In this sūrah Allah gives His Messenger (ﷺ) good tidings; not only would Abū Lahab be defeated in the Hereafter, but in this world as well.

⁴⁷⁵ Aḥmad and at-Tirmidhi.

⁴⁷⁶ The feminine form of the verb is used in reference to the hands.

This is the only place in the Qur'ān where one of the enemies of Islam has been condemned by name, perhaps due to the particularly evil nature of his animosity. For it had always been a moral principle of Arabian society that an orphan would be cared for, protected and supported by his paternal uncle, even in adulthood. But the hateful conduct of Abū Lahab toward his nephew showed outright disregard of those ethics.

Āyah 2. مَا أَغْنَىٰ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ وَمَا كَسَبَ

His wealth will not avail him or that which he gained.

The wealth and assets of Abū Lahab did not benefit him in this world when he was ill and dying, and they will not benefit him in the life to come when he will be driven into the Hellfire.

Mā kasaba means "what he earned" or the benefits accumulated from his wealth. It may also mean his children.⁴⁷⁷ Both these connotations correspond to the fate met by Abū Lahab. For when he was afflicted with pain and illness, his wealth availed him nothing and his children also left him alone to die a miserable death. They did not even bury him in an honorable manner. Thus, within a few years people witnessed the prophecy of this sūrah being fulfilled; the evil oppressor was totally defeated, crushed and condemned.

Āyah 3. سَيَصْلَىٰ نَارًا ذَاتَ لَهَبٍ **He will [enter to] burn in a Fire of [blazing] flame**

And as the truth of the previous two verses was witnessed by his contemporaries on earth, the truth of what is to come in the life yet unseen is just as certain. Very soon Abū Lahab will be plunged into a fire having *lahab*, (flame) so the nickname of which he was once proud is now given another meaning – that he will abide forever in the flame of Hellfire.

Āyah 4. وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ حَمَّالَةَ الْحَطَبِ **And his wife [as well] – the carrier of firewood.**

The blazing flames of Hell will be inhabited by Abū Lahab and his wife, Arwā, Umm Jameel, who was among the prominent women of Quraysh and the sister of Abū Sufyān. She zealously supported her husband in his animosity toward Islam and was intent upon harming the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). She would collect thorns and sharp pieces of wood and scatter them at night in his path and in front of his door.

And she also used to compose poetry against the Prophet (ﷺ) and slander him. So when this sūrah was revealed, she assumed that he was doing the same to her. Ibn Is-ḥāq related in his *Seerah*⁴⁷⁸ that when Umm Jameel heard what the Qur'ān had said about her and her husband, she came with a handful of stones to the Ka'bah looking for the Prophet (ﷺ), who was with Abū Bakr. She saw only Abū Bakr and said, "Where is your companion? I heard he has been satirizing me. When I find him I will throw these stones in his face. I am also gifted

⁴⁷⁷ The Prophet (ﷺ) said that a man's son also is his *kasb* (earning). (Abū Dāwūd)

⁴⁷⁸ Biography of the Prophet (ﷺ).

in poetry," and she chanted, "The contemptible we obey not, nor do we accept what he says." "Abū Bakr turned to the Prophet and said, "Do you think she saw you?" "No," he replied, "Allah made her unable to see me."

Ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab literally means "the woman who constantly carries wood." Commentators have given it several meanings. Slave girls who use to bring in firewood were called *ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab*. Since Umm Jameel thought of herself as superior, Allah dishonored her with this title. Some of the Ṣaḥābah suggested that she was described as the carrier of wood because she used to collect wood and thorns to place at the Prophet's door.

Other Ṣaḥābah mentioned that she used to carry evil tales among people in order to create hatred. The word "firewood" (*ḥaṭab*) was used by the Arabs to allude to slander and backbiting; therefore in this āyah, she was called the carrier of wood idiomatically. Sa'eed bin Jubayr said, "One who is loading himself with a burden of sins is described as loading wood on his back. So *ḥammālat al-ḥaṭab* means "she who is carrying the burden of sin."

Another interpretation by early scholars is that she will bring and supply wood to fuel the fire of Hell in which her husband burns in the Hereafter, helping to carry out his punishment and increase his torment.

Āyah 5. فِي جِيدِهَا حَبْلٌ مِّن مَّسَدٍ Around her neck is a rope of [twisted] fiber.

Sa'eed bin al-Musayyab and Qatādah reported that the wife of Abū Lahab used to wear a valuable necklace. She would swear by the goddesses, al-Lāt and al-'Uzzā that she would sell that necklace and spend its worth to satisfy her hostility against the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ). Thus, the neck (*jeed*) is mentioned, indicating that instead of the necklace about which she was boasting, she will have a rope of twisted palm-fiber (*ḥablun min masad*) around her neck in the Hellfire.

These words describe the rope which will be tied around her neck. According to some commentators, *masad* means a tightly twisted rope or cable; others said that it is a rope made from palm-fibers or leaves. Ibn 'Abbās and others inferred that because she used to put thorns in the path of the Prophet (ﷺ), that those fibers are thorns.

سُورَةُ الْإِخْلَاصِ (112) SŪRAH AL-İKHLĀŞ

While *Al-Ikhlāş* is among the shortest sūrahs of the Qur'ān, it is one of the most eloquent and profound in meaning. All the verses of this sūrah complement one another and follow a logical order. *Ikhlāş* means purification – the purification of faith. It completely eliminates pagan concepts and doctrines as well as false attributes that the ignorant have attributed to Allah, the Exalted. The sūrah declares that there is no true deity other than Allah and hence, that He alone has the right to be worshipped without any intercessor or associate. The reason for that is stated in the Qur'ān:

ذَٰلِكَ بِأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْحَقُّ وَأَنَّ مَا يَدْعُونَ مِن دُونِهِ هُوَ الْبَاطِلُ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْعَلِيُّ الْكَبِيرُ.

*That is because Allah is the True Reality, and that which they invoke besides Him is falsehood; and because Allah is the Most High, the Most Great.*⁴⁷⁹

This sūrah has been known by several other names, among them:

- *At-Tawhēed* – the surah which states that Allah is one
- *At-Tafreedh* – the sūrah stating that Allah is unique, with none comparable to Him
- *At-Tajreed* – the sūrah which removes all false concepts about Allah
- *Al-Asās* – the sūrah which is the foundation, essence, or core of Allah's message to mankind

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) often used to recite *Sūrah al-Kāfirūn* in the first rak'ah and *Sūrah al-Ikhlāş* in the second rak'ah of the sunnah prayers of fajr and maghrib, as well as in the sunnah prayer following ṭawāf of the Ka'bah. Each of these two sūrahs deals with *tawhēed* from a specific angle.

Al-Ikhlāş was revealed to the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) during the early days of his prophethood. Ubayy bin Ka'b related that the idol worshippers had said to him, "O Muḥammad, tell us the lineage of your Lord." They were inquiring about the origin of Allah, from where He came or from what substance He was made, assuming something similar to the stone, wood and clay of their idols. So Allah revealed, "Say: 'He is Allāh, [who is] One; Allah, the Eternal Refuge. He neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent.'"⁴⁸⁰

Anas reported, "A man from the Anṣār used to lead the people in prayer at Masjid Qubā'. He would always begin his recitation of the Qur'ān by reciting *Sūrah al-Ikhlāş* and then follow it with another sūrah. His companions told him, "You should either recite the sūrah alone or leave it and recite another sūrah instead." The man said, "I will not leave it. I would rather give up leading the prayer if you prefer." The people did not approve that another take his place as imām. When the matter was brought before the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ), he asked, "What prevents you from conceding to what your companions want? What makes you recite

⁴⁷⁹ Sūrah al-Ḥajj, 22:62.

⁴⁸⁰ Aḥmad.

this sūrah in every rak'ah?" The man replied, "Indeed, [because] I love it." The Prophet said, "Your love for it will let you enter Paradise."⁴⁸¹

Mu'ādh bin Anas reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"If someone recites, 'Say, He is Allah, [who is] One' [i.e., Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ] ten times, Allah will build for him a palace in Paradise."*⁴⁸²

And Buraydah bin al-Ḥusayb reported that a man was supplicating, "O Allah, I ask You by [affirming] that You are Allah, there is no god but You, *al-Aḥad, aṣ-Ṣamad*, who neither begets nor is born, nor is there to Him any equivalent." When the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) heard it, he said, *"By Him in whose hand is my soul, this man has invoked Allah with His greatest name, with which when one supplicates the supplication will be accepted, and when one asks by it, it will be granted."*⁴⁸³

Abū Sa'eed al-Khudri reported that the Prophet (ﷺ) said about Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ, *"By Him in whose hand is my soul, this sūrah is equal to one-third of the Qur'ān."* And in another narration he said to his companions, *"Is it difficult for any of you to recite one-third of the Qur'ān in one night?"* This was difficult for them, so they said, "Who among us has the ability to do so, O Messenger of Allah?" He replied, *"Say, He is Allah, [who is] One, Allah, the Eternal Refuge"* [Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ] is equal to one-third of the Qur'ān.⁴⁸⁴

Al-Ikhlāṣ was described as being equal to a third of the Qur'ān as an indication of its importance and inherent excellence. But additionally, as Ibn 'Abbās pointed out, "The Qur'ān addresses three matters:

1. Those commands and prohibitions which comprise the law and practical living – These form the subject matter of the sciences of fiqh and ethics.
2. Stories of the prophets and messengers of Allah and their peoples – The punishments and disasters which befell those who resisted and denied the messengers of Allah with their promises, rewards, warnings and punishments.
3. The science of *tawḥeed* and matters relating to the names and attributes of Allah

Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ contains the third matter and a general explanation of it; thus, it is considered equal to one third of the Qur'ān."

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ Say, "He is Allah, [who is] One,

This verse refutes all polytheistic beliefs and negates partnership with Allah in every sense. It basically states that all power and capability belongs exclusively to Him and nothing else, unlike what pagans believe. It states the Lord's uniqueness in His perfection, magnificence and majesty.

⁴⁸¹ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁸² Aḥmad.

⁴⁸³ At-Tirmidhi, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah.

⁴⁸⁴ Al-Bukhāri.

The word, *qul* (say) is an integral part of the message which was conveyed to the Prophet (ﷺ). In answer to questions posed to him concerning the essence and nature of Allah, he was commanded to "say" the words which follow in this sūrah. Hence, the entire sūrah is also an instruction to believers about how to define their Lord.

Aḥad means alone, without another, having absolute and permanent unity and distinct from all else. Allah is the one and only true deity, unique in His essence, attributes and deeds. And He is unique in that His unity is indivisible.

The word *aḥad* expresses an uncountable oneness with no second following it. It is neither one in a series nor can it be added to or divided into fractions or components. It stands for a singular, unique entity, free from every kind of plurality. In Arabic grammatical usage, it is the form of "one" used to distinguish an individual from all others.

Consequently, the divine name *al-Aḥad* it is more emphatic and exclusive in its meaning than the name *al-Wāḥid*. It refers specifically to Allah's essence, conveying that He is absolutely singular in His essence and unique in His attributes. No one is like Him in any way. As He has stated elsewhere in the Qur'ān:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ وَهُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْبَصِيرُ.

*There is nothing like unto Him, and He is the Seeing, the Hearing.*⁴⁸⁵

Āyah 2. اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ Allah, the Eternal Refuge.

Allah's names *al-Aḥad* and *aṣ-Ṣamad* do not appear in any other sūrah. *Aṣ-Ṣamad* has many facets of meaning. The āyah indicates that Allah is the Lord who controls and disposes of all affairs, who is immortal, absolute, perfect, complete, self-sufficient and sufficient to meet the needs of all creation; the one eternally and constantly required and sought, depended upon by all existence and to whom all matters will ultimately return. He is the refuge sought out by those in need while He has no need.

He sustains and is not sustained. Everything turns to Him, consciously or unconsciously, for its survival and fulfillment of needs. Allah is unique in His self-subsistence and self-sufficiency. In contrast, all created beings have needs and are dependent on others to fulfill their needs. The Creator is not in need of any of His creation in any way, because nothing they can do will improve or benefit His already perfect state. None is equal to Him and none is similar to Him. His sovereignty prevails over the entire universe and He is supreme in every sense.

Allah's attribute of self-sufficiency induces believers to reflect on the purpose and goals of their worship. Their Lord did not create man to enrich Him or empower Him, but merely to worship Him. As He said:

وَمَا خَلَقْتُ الْجِنَّ وَالْإِنْسَ إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُونِ. مَا أُرِيدُ مِنْهُمْ مِنْ رِزْقٍ وَمَا أُرِيدُ أَنْ يُطْعَمُوا.

*I did not create the jinn and mankind except to worship Me. I do not want from them any provision, nor do I want them to feed Me.*⁴⁸⁶

⁴⁸⁵ Sūrah al-Shūrā, 42:11.

⁴⁸⁶ Sūrah al-Dhāriyāt, 51:56-57.

Āyah 3. لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ He neither begets nor is born,

Another aspect of tawḥeed is contained in the words: "*He neither begets nor is born.*" This means that nothing emerged from Him nor did He emerge from anything else.⁴⁸⁷ So the āyah expresses a fundamental aspect of Allah's perfection and negates any parallel, resemblance or likeness associated with kinship. An additional interpretation is that it is not befitting to attribute offspring to Allah as this view would reduce Him to the status of His creatures or imply similarity. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, "*There is no one more patient with abuse he hears than Allah. They attribute to Him a son, while He gives them provision and wellbeing.*"⁴⁸⁸

And in the words of the Qur'ān:

بَدِيعُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَنَّى يَكُونُ لَهُ وَلَدٌ وَلَمْ تَكُنْ لَهُ صَاحِبَةٌ وَخَلَقَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ.

[He is] Originator of the heavens and the earth. How could He have a son when He does not have a companion, and He created all things? And He is of all things Knowing.⁴⁸⁹

Allah's perfection and self-subsistence are unknown to human experience and exceed the limits of human imagination. Commentators have pointed out that often people have children out of a need for support in life or a wish for continued existence through their progeny. By describing Himself as *aṣ-Ṣamad*, Allah has already refuted this possibility. It has been said that this āyah is in fact an explanation of the divine name, *aṣ-Ṣamad*.

On the other hand, for Allah to have been born would mean that He previously did not exist, and this contradicts His unique attribute of eternity. So the āyah affirms that He has always existed and was not brought into existence through a biological or chemical process at some point in time. And He will never die or cease to exist. The pagan Arabs understood this matter well. Nothing is born except that it dies, and nothing dies except that its legacy is inherited by others. Allah does not die, so none can inherit His divinity.

Āyah 4. وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ Nor is there to Him any equivalent."

Moreover, nothing is comparable to Allah in any way. This verse makes it clear that Allah is separate and distinct from His creation. And it refutes the claim that Allah manifests Himself in His creation, or in some of His creation, or that Allah becomes one with His creation or with some of His creation, or that the Creator and creation are the same.

The sūrah ends with a reaffirmation of the opening verse. While every creation has a counterpart or parallel, Allah is unique, so nothing can be equal to Him. This is implied in the statement of his being *al-Aḥad*, but it is restated to emphasize and elaborate upon that fact.

⁴⁸⁷ Allah does not beget or give birth; He has no son, as claimed by some of the Christians, and no daughters, as the pagan Arabs believed, because offspring are produced from the bodies of their parents and are similar to them in form and features while nothing is similar to Allah. The verse also refutes the notion that Prophet Jesus (ﷺ) could have been God, because he was born into this world.

⁴⁸⁸ Al-Bukhārī.

⁴⁸⁹ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:101.

The word *kufuw* means a similar thing, one equal in status and position, something comparable, a likeness or an example. It may also be a rival or opponent who is equal in rank or similar in skill. Allah declares that He has no equivalent in His uniqueness. There is no similarity whatsoever between the Creator and His creation in essence, in attributes or in what He does. Once again, it is as He said:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

*There is nothing like unto Him.*⁴⁹⁰

Because man cannot compare Allah with anything in his own experience, he is commanded:

فَلَا تَضْرِبُوا لِلَّهِ الْأَمْثَالَ

*Do not assert similarities to Allah.*⁴⁹¹

So the Creator cannot be understood according to the terms of material existence. The human mind is itself among Allah's creations and subject to the limitations of its created nature. Any similarity between His attributes and those of mankind is in name only and not in essence. The attributes of Allah must be understood in the absolute sense, free from any human deficiency or imperfection.

أَفَمَنْ يَخْلُقُ كَمَنْ لَا يَخْلُقُ أَفَلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ

*Then, is He who creates like he who does not create? Do you not reflect?*⁴⁹²

The scholars have defined correct belief as acceptance of what the Qur'ān and Sunnah have described about Allah, without assuming that His attributes resemble those of creation, and without applying to them allegorical meanings or attempting to explain how a certain attribute or quality might be, because that knowledge belongs to Him alone.

The Creator is not bound by the physical laws which He created for this material universe. His existence was not preceded by nonexistence, nor will it ever come to an end. And because He is superior to all His creations, there can never be anything resembling Him. Therefore, He alone is worthy to be worshipped by His creatures.

⁴⁹⁰ Sūrah ash-Shūrā, 42:11.

⁴⁹¹ Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:74.

⁴⁹² Sūrah an-Naḥl, 16:17.

AL-MU'AWWIDHATĀN الْمُعَوِّذَتَان

The last two sūrahs of the Qur'ān are referred to as *al-Mu'awwidhatān*, meaning the two [sūrahs] seeking refuge.⁴⁹³ Although they are categorized as Makkan sūrahs, many commentators mention that they came down in Madinah, citing several ḥadīths as evidence. Yet it occurred at times that a sūrah or āyah which had been previously revealed came down again later in response to a particular occurrence. Most likely this was the case with these two sūrahs. Their subject matter shows that they came down at Makkah during the time when persecution of the Prophet and his followers was intense. And subsequently in Madinah, he was instructed to recite them once again, as is mentioned in narrations by several of the Ṣaḥābah.

Ibn Mas'ūd did not include these two sūrahs in his own hand-written muṣḥaf as he considered them to be supplications rather than part of the Qur'ān. However, none of the other Ṣaḥābah agreed with this view and ḥadīths confirmed that the Prophet himself had recited them in prayer. Thus, Ibn Katheer was of the opinion that Ibn Mas'ūd later agreed with the consensus of the Prophet's companions, so nothing was made of the issue.

'Uqbah bin 'Āmir reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "*Consider some verses sent down this night, the like of which has never been seen. They are: Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak and Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind*" (i.e., the sūrahs al-Falaq and an-Nās).⁴⁹⁴

'Ā'ishah reported that when the Prophet (ﷺ) went to bed at night he used to blow into his hands after reciting Sūrah al-Ikhlāṣ, Sūrah al-Falaq and Sūrah an-Nās, and then wipe his hands over his head, his face and the front of his body. He would do it three times.⁴⁹⁵ She also said, "Whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) became ill, he would recite al-Mu'awwidhatān and blow over his body. Then when his pain became severe, I recited them over him and passed his hand over his body in hope of its blessing."⁴⁹⁶

And Abū Sa'eed al-Khudri reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to seek protection from the evil eyes of the jinn and mankind. But after al-Mu'awwidhatān were revealed, he took to them [for protection] and left everything else besides them.⁴⁹⁷

With these two sūrahs one seeks refuge in Allah from every kind of evil (*sharr*), and they may be recited for any circumstance in which one fears harm. They serve to remind the believer to put his trust in Allah and depend upon Him alone.

Sūrah al-Falaq mentions external evils which threaten mankind, such as what occurs in the darkness of night, the plots of magicians and the harms caused by those who envy and harbor jealousy. And *Sūrah an-Nās* deals with internal evil which is found within the self, such as the suggestions of the Shayṭān and corrupt inclinations of the soul.

⁴⁹³ Refuge is sought from evil only with Allah. Dependence upon anything other than Him is a form of *shirk*.

⁴⁹⁴ Muslim.

⁴⁹⁵ Al-Bukhāri and Muslim.

⁴⁹⁶ Al-Bukhāri.

⁴⁹⁷ At-Tirmidhi, an-Nasā'i and Ibn Mājah.

سُورَةُ الْفَلَقِ (113) SŪRAH AL-FALAQ

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of daybreak

As in the previous sūrah, Allah begins by commanding the Prophet (ﷺ), and through him the believers, to "say" what follows in its verses. For these words are specific for seeking protection from all that threatens man externally.

Seeking refuge is an act of worship which should be directed to none other than Allah. It is a request for protection from something that is feared. And it was confirmed in the authentic Sunnah that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) used to seek refuge in Allah from evil on various occasions and would instruct his companions to do so as well. He would supplicate, *"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from bad manners, deeds, desires and diseases."*⁴⁹⁸ *"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from anxiety and grief, from failure and laziness, from cowardice and stinginess, from the constriction of debt and being overpowered by men. And I seek refuge in You from the torment of the grave and from the trials of life and death."*⁴⁹⁹

The word "*falaq*" in this verse literally means cleaving or splitting,⁵⁰⁰ and was understood by the Arabs to mean the break of dawn, because Allah cleaves the daybreak out of the darkness of night. In addition, *falaq* is similar in meaning to "creation" given that new life comes into existence by breaking out of something else. *Falaq* in this āyah has been explained as daybreak, when the sun breaks through the darkness of night before rising in the east. This brings to mind the power of the Creator and impresses upon the mind of a believer that it is Allah alone who has the power to protect him from evil.

Āyah 2. مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ From the evil of what He created

In this āyah, protection is sought from those evils which are known to be harmful and dangerous as well as from the evil due to accidents or misuse of what Allah created for the benefit of man, such as fire.⁵⁰¹ Protection is also sought from the evil consequences of human error and sin. And this comprises two categories of evil: that which exists and whose removal is sought, and that which has not occurred but is feared.

Evil (*sharr*) was defined by Ibn al-Qayyim as "suffering and the causes that lead to it." He explained that sins, disbelief, shirk and various forms of oppression are all evils, even though the person who commits them might experience pleasure. Nevertheless, they are evil because they cause suffering and pain for others. The evil effects of their particular causes, whether sinful or inadvertent, are both physical and mental. Thus the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ)

⁴⁹⁸ Narrated by at-Tirmidhi - saheeh.

⁴⁹⁹ Narrated by al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁵⁰⁰ In Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:95, Allah refers to Himself as *fāliqul-ḥabbi wan-nawā* (cleaver of the grain and date seed), adding, *"He brings out the living from the dead and brings out the dead from the living."*

⁵⁰¹ Similarly, water, although essential for the maintenance of life, can cause widespread destruction.

would teach his companions to seek refuge in Allah both from evil causes and evil effects. He said, *"Whoever enters a place and says, 'I seek refuge in the perfect words of Allah from the evil of what He created,' nothing will harm him until he departs from that place."*⁵⁰²

Allah created both good and evil; however, evil is not attributable to Him because He created it for a purpose which is ultimately good. Without the existence of evil on earth, man could not appreciate goodness. He would not feel the need for help and protection. If not for calamities, very few would turn to their Lord. If not for hardship and difficulties, people would not seek relief from Him, nor would they long for His Paradise.

Allah's punishment for those who deserve it is wisdom and justice. Although He has willed the existence of evil, He does not like it, is angered by it, has prohibited it, and punishes for it. Moreover, His trials for believers are opportunities for them to earn great benefit. The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"The greatest reward comes from the greatest trial. When Allah loves a people He tests them, and whoever accepts it gains the approval of Allah and whoever complains earns His anger."*⁵⁰³

The attributes of Allah are complete and perfect, free from any deficiency, fault or malevolence. So evil (*sharr*) is attributed only to created beings. Thus, it is one of His creations.⁵⁰⁴ Ibn al-Qayyim stated that *"the evil of what He created"* refers to whatever evils might emanate from some, but not all, of Allah's creations. From among the qualities He created in certain creatures in order to fulfill the purpose of their creation, at times evil appears. Examples of this are mentioned in the verses that follow.

Āyah 3. وَمِنْ شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ And from the evil of darkness when it settles

First, protection is sought from the evil of darkness. Most commentators have explained it as the darkness of night, which is often a time of fear.⁵⁰⁵ The night provides a cover under which evil elements can operate more easily. Ibn 'Abbās explained *ghāsiq* as the night bringing its darkness which settles over everything, making it invisible, and this is denoted by addition of the verb, *waqaba*. Ibn al-Qayyim mentioned that the reason for seeking refuge with the Lord of Daybreak is that the appearance of light at dawn drives away the evil forces of night.

Some scholars have additionally explained "darkness" as ignorance, because the Qur'ān describes every kind of falsehood and misguidance as darkness while truth and right guidance are called light. Allah said:

وَالَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا صُمُّ وَبُكْمٌ فِي الظُّلُمَاتِ

*And those who deny Our verses are deaf and dumb within darknesses.*⁵⁰⁶

⁵⁰² Muslim.

⁵⁰³ At-Tirmidhi and Ibn Mājah.

⁵⁰⁴ As Prophet Ibrāheem (عليه السلام) pointed out to his people, *"And Allah has created you and that which you do."* (Sūrah aṣ-Ṣāffāt, 37:96)

⁵⁰⁵ It is known that many major crimes and immoral activities are committed in the darkness of night, so darkness becomes a potential source of danger and harm.

⁵⁰⁶ Sūrah al-An'ām, 6:39.

اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَوْلِيَاؤُهُمُ الطَّاغُوتُ يُخْرِجُونَهُم مِّنَ النُّورِ إِلَى الظُّلُمَاتِ.

Allah is the ally of those who believe. He brings them out from darknesses into the light. And those who disbelieve – their allies are ṭāghūt. They take them out of the light into darknesses." ⁵⁰⁷

Āyah 4. وَمِن شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ And from the evil of the blowers⁵⁰⁸ in knots

Here, protection is sought from the evil of those who practice magic. This was mentioned by the Prophet (ﷺ) as one of the seven major sins which make one deserving of the Hellfire.⁵⁰⁹ A common method used by magicians was to tie knots (*'uqad*) on a cord and then recite words and blow them onto the knots with the intent of casting a spell or afflicting someone with harm. Abū Hurayrah reported that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, "Whoever ties a knot and blows on it has committed an act of magic, and whoever commits an act of magic has committed an act of shirk, and whoever wears an amulet will be left to its control."⁵¹⁰

Āyah 5. وَمِن شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ And from the evil of an envier when he envies."

Finally, protection is sought from the evil of those who envy others. For they often try to destroy the work or property of those they envy, or even harm them physically. The words do not refer to one who merely would like to have what another has without wishing to deprive him of it; this is not prohibited as long as there is no desire to affect the other adversely.⁵¹¹

But this āyah specifies *ḥasad*, which is the jealous desire that a blessing bestowed upon another be removed from him. It is harmful not only to the envied one but also to the envier, causing him distress without benefit and perhaps leading him to sinful speech or actions that harm his soul in the Hereafter. And it is an expression of dissatisfaction with what Allah has willed, and rebellion against Him, especially when accompanied by efforts to change the good condition of the one envied. Such an attitude can only earn Allah's anger; therefore, human inclinations toward selfishness must be disciplined,⁵¹² and the believer also needs to request Allah's protection against the evil intent of envious people.

⁵⁰⁷ Sūrah al-Baqarah, 2:257. While the light of truth is one, the darknesses of disbelief, doubt and error are many. *Ṭāghūt* indicates false objects of worship, such as idols, heavenly bodies, spirits, human beings, etc.

⁵⁰⁸ Although the word, *naffāth-thāt* is feminine in gender, it has been pointed out that it does not refer explicitly to females. According to Arabic usage, it may denote souls (*anfus*) or groups (*jamā'āt*), which are feminine words but include both genders.

⁵⁰⁹ As narrated by al-Bukhārī.

⁵¹⁰ An-Nasā'i.

⁵¹¹ One may ask Allah to grant him the same blessing and to maintain or increase it for his brother. When it concerns religious matters and is manifested by seeking greater reward in the Hereafter, it becomes a virtue as demonstrated by the Prophet (ﷺ) in several ḥadiths related to intention.

⁵¹² One who is overwhelmed by such feelings despite himself is not considered to be sinful. But he must strive to do away with envy (*ḥasad*) and replace it with love for his brother and pleasure at his accomplishment or good fortune. This is called *ghibṭah* and is the quality of a true believer.

Envy can be individual or collective – as when a group of people or a nation envies another. And envious people are of several kinds. There is one who seeks to remove a blessing from another and transfer it to himself, and this is prohibited and blameworthy. But one who seeks to remove a blessing from another without wishing it for himself is more evil than the first.

The *ḥāsīd* (envier) may not only harm with his hand or his tongue, but also through his envious eye. This happens when someone likes a thing, and then his evil feelings affect it by means of his staring at the object of his jealousy.⁵¹³ The Prophet (ﷺ) said, *"The evil eye is true, and if anything could overtake destiny, it would be [the effect of] the evil eye."*⁵¹⁴ As the evil eye is but one particular aspect of envy, it is included when one seeks refuge in Allah from the evil of an envier. And because danger arises only when envy becomes translated into action, the āyah specifies: *"an envier when he envies."*

The Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said, *"Faith and envy cannot exist together in the heart of a servant."*⁵¹⁵ And he said, *"Do not envy one another, do not exploit one another, do not hate one another, do not turn your backs on one another; but be brothers, O servants of Allah."*⁵¹⁶

So Allah instructs believers, as well as taking physical measures to obtain safety, to seek refuge in Him from the envier and from all other evils, and then to trust and rely upon Him. When a Muslim constantly remembers his Lord and seeks refuge with Him, he is less likely to be affected by the evil eye and other kinds of harm. The most effective means for protection is seeking it with one's Creator, as He alone is aware of the evils of His creatures and it is He who monitors and controls them. The believer should have certain faith that unless Allah wills it, nothing can harm him in any way, and that only He can provide true protection. Refuge in Him is in that of the Sovereign whose power none can equal, and in His refuge is protection from all evils of this world and the next.

⁵¹³ The evil eye is similar to an arrow shot from the soul of the one who envies at the one envied. It may strike or miss him. But only when the target is exposed and unprotected will it affect him.

⁵¹⁴ Al-Bukhārī and Muslim.

⁵¹⁵ Aḥmad.

⁵¹⁶ Muslim.

سُورَةُ النَّاسِ (114) SŪRAH AN-NĀS

Bismillāhir-Raḥmānir-Raḥeem

Āyah 1. قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ النَّاسِ Say, "I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind,

In Sūrah al-Falaq, Allah's protection is sought from the external evils which cause one harm, whereas in this sūrah, protection is sought against internal evil within the individual, by which harm is caused to the self and others. The Ṣaḥābah noted that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) would begin his speeches by saying, *"We seek refuge in Allah from the evils of ourselves and from the evils of our deeds."*⁵¹⁷ And he would supplicate, *"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from the evil of what I have done and from the evil of what I have not done."*⁵¹⁸ And, *"O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowledge that does not benefit, from a heart that is not humbled, from a soul that is not satisfied, and from supplication that is not answered."*⁵¹⁹

In this āyah the Prophet (ﷺ) is again commanded to say and convey the specific words which follow as protection against the devils among jinn and men who suggest evil to people's minds. Refuge is sought in the Lord of mankind from various afflictions of the mind and heart.

The Lord (*Rabb*) refers to Allah, and includes the connotations of owner, master, controller, sustainer, provider and guardian. For it is Allah who owns, governs and runs His universe. It is He who brings all beings into existence and manages their affairs. And it is He who sustains, directs and protects mankind, so this attribute has been mentioned to emphasize the Lord's relationship with His servants; He is their master and caretaker. Allah, the Lord of mankind, instructs His Messenger and all believers to recognize His attributes and seek His protection against the subtle forms of evil which can invade their hearts; for they can only be repelled with His support.

Āyah 2. مَلِكِ النَّاسِ The Sovereign of mankind,

Sovereignty is primarily ownership and authority. Allah is the owner of all He created, which includes mankind. Allah, *al-Malik*, possesses everything – the universe, its forces of nature and its living creatures. The human being, his body and his property belong to Allah, as well as his soul, his senses, his spouse, his friends and his enemies. The Lord's sovereignty indicates that He alone has absolute power and authority over mankind and other creatures, and that all people are His possessions and servants. He is their ruler with supremacy over them, absolute power, and the ability to intercede on their behalf. He alone can protect them and provide security for them in times of difficulty.

⁵¹⁷ Aḥmad.

⁵¹⁸ Muslim.

⁵¹⁹ Muslim.

Āyah 3. إِلَهَ النَّاسِ The God of mankind,

Then Allah states that He is the only true deity (*ilāh*) of mankind, meaning that He alone is worthy of their worship and obedience. There is no divinity and no legitimate object of worship other than Him, whether or not this is recognized by men. The Arabic word, *ilāh* is defined as "that which is worshipped." Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbali explained *ilāh* as "everything that is obeyed out of love and fear, together with hope and dependency upon that object, with supplication and prayer directed to it." He then added, "And none is worthy of all those matters except Allah, the Mighty and Majestic."⁵²⁰

Everything that takes place in creation does so according to His decree. Thus, Allah has described Himself in the Qur'ān as: "*Effector of what He intends*."⁵²¹ Knowing that Allah alone is the source of all benefit and harm, in whose hand is the final judgment and destiny requires by reason that He be loved and feared, and thus, worshipped and obeyed.

The repeated mention of mankind in these three verses is an additional reminder that human beings are under their Lord's attention and care. Some commentators have also concluded that Allah honored mankind by emphasizing that He is their Lord, Sovereign and God in particular.

Āyahs 4-5. مِنَ شَرِّ الْوَسْوَاسِ الْخَنَّاسِ . الَّذِي يُوَسْوِسُ فِي صُدُورِ النَّاسِ

From the evil of the retreating whisperer who whispers into the breasts of mankind

Evil (*sharr*) is the characteristic of the one described in this and the following verses – *the retreating whisperer*. He whispers with the evil intent to cause temptations, doubts, destructive emotions and false concepts to enter the hearts of mankind. The Arabic word, *waswās*, is an intensive form, indicating a frequent, recurrent and persistent whisperer – not one who might do it occasionally.

And Allah has drawn attention to the nature of this incessant whisperer – *al-khannās*, the one who continuously retreats – as well as the depth to which his whisperings can reach within the body. Ibn 'Abbās said, "It is the devil who sits on the heart of a son of Ādam."⁵²² Whenever one becomes inattentive and heedless it whispers, and when he remembers Allah it withdraws."⁵²³ Many scholars are of the opinion that the āyah refers specifically to Iblees, *ash-Shayṭān*, due to the definite article (ال) preceding *waswās*.

The sūrah shows the process by which evil is suggested so that believers are alerted to it. A human being is not normally persuaded by a single suggestion, so the effort is made repeatedly. Constantly striving to corrupt, the whisperer suggests and retreats, often

⁵²⁰ Jami' al 'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam, p.111.

⁵²¹ Sūrah Hūd, 11:107 and Sūrah al-Burūj, 85:16.

⁵²² Allah said: "...whispers into the breasts of mankind" rather than their hearts because the heart is located inside the breast.

⁵²³ The description indicates the evasiveness of this whisperer and its incapacity whenever it is perceived and resisted. Muslim recorded the Prophet's saying that whenever the *adhān* is called, Satan flees vehemently.

deceiving his target into thinking he has departed, only to reappear when least expected.⁵²⁴ As this malicious effort is ongoing, seeking refuge in Allah and remembering Him constantly is the most effective means of security and defense.

Many early and later scholars mentioned another form of internal evil from which protection is sought in this sūrah, and that is suggestion from the soul itself. Man's own mistaken concepts and philosophies misguide his intellect, and his own unlawful motives and desires corrupt his faculties of discrimination and judgment. Allah stated:

وَلَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ وَنَعْلَمُ مَا تُوَسْوِسُ بِهِ نَفْسُهُ

*We have created man and We know what his soul whispers to him.*⁵²⁵

And the Qur'ān quotes these words:

إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ إِلَّا مَا رَحِمَ رَبِّي

*Indeed, the soul is a persistent enjoiner of evil, except [those upon] which my Lord has granted mercy.*⁵²⁶

However, the origin of these thoughts is known to be in the evil suggestions of the retreating whisperer. An ignorant or heedless soul accepts them, likes them and then advocates them. So protection is sought from all the various evils of this whisperer, for an evil suggestion can lead a careless person to an evil desire and then an evil act. Allah has warned:

إِنَّ الشَّيْطَانَ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ فَاتَّخِذُوهُ عَدُوًّا إِنَّمَا يَدْعُو حِزْبَهُ لِيَكُونُوا مِنْ أَصْحَابِ السَّعِيرِ.

*Indeed, the Shayṭān is an enemy to you; so take him as an enemy. He only invites his party to be among the companions of the Blaze.*⁵²⁷

And the Messenger (ﷺ) himself was instructed:

وَأِمَّا يَنْزَغَنَّكَ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ نَزْغٌ فَاسْتَعِذْ بِاللَّهِ إِنَّهُ هُوَ السَّمِيعُ الْعَلِيمُ.

*And if there comes to you from the Shayṭān an evil suggestion, then seek refuge in Allah. Indeed, He is the Hearing, the Knowing.*⁵²⁸

وَقُلْ رَبِّ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ هَمَزَاتِ الشَّيَاطِينِ . وَأَعُوذُ بِكَ رَبِّ أَنْ يَحْضُرُونِ.

*And say, "My Lord, I seek refuge in You from the incitements of the devils, and I seek refuge in You, my Lord, lest they be present with me."*⁵²⁹

Ibn Katheer commented, "Since the Shayṭān sees man where man cannot see him, it is appropriate that believers seek refuge from Shayṭān with Him whom Shayṭān cannot see."

⁵²⁴ Every soul has weaknesses and is susceptible to certain forms of temptation more than others, and the Shayṭān is always looking for an opportunity to exploit them to the utmost degree. One should endeavor to recognize his own particular weaknesses and guard against them, and then recite *al-Mu'awwidhatān*.

⁵²⁵ Sūrah Qāf, 50:16.

⁵²⁶ Sūrah Yūsuf, 12:53.

⁵²⁷ Sūrah Fāṭir, 35:6.

⁵²⁸ Sūrah Fuṣṣilat, 41:36.

⁵²⁹ Sūrah al-Mu'minūn, 23:97

Those who live in consciousness of Allah are protected against provocations by the retreating whisperer. Ibn 'Abbās reported, "A man came to the Prophet and said, 'O Messenger of Allah, at times things occur to me that I would rather fall from the sky than mention them.' He (ﷺ) said, 'Allāhu akbar, Allāhu akbar! Praise to Allah who reduced his [devil's] plot to a whisper.'" ⁵³⁰ The Ṣaḥābah often worried about such thoughts and suggestions until the Prophet (ﷺ) reassured them, "Allah has overlooked for me in my ummah that which occurs to their minds as long as they neither speak of it nor act upon it." ⁵³¹

Āyah 6. مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ From among the jinn and mankind."

Evil prompters can be from men as well as from jinn, and this sūrah is taught for seeking refuge from the evil of both. This fact is supported by the Qur'ān and the Sunnah.

Allah says in the Qur'ān:

وَكَذَلِكَ جَعَلْنَا لِكُلِّ نَبِيٍّ عَدُوًّا شَيَاطِينَ الْإِنْسِ وَالْجِنَّ يُوحِي بَعْضُهُمْ إِلَى بَعْضٍ زُخْرُفَ الْقَوْلِ غُرُورًا.

And thus We have made for every prophet an enemy – devils from mankind and jinn, inspiring to one another decorative speech in delusion. ⁵³²

Human devils are mentioned in the above āyah because they were the strongest enemies of Allah's prophets and messengers, as they are against all who work to convey the message of Allah. Once Abū Dharr went to the Prophet (ﷺ) in the masjid and sat down. He told him to get up and pray two rak'ahs, and then he said, "O Abū-Dharr, seek refuge in Allah from the evil of devils of men and of jinn." Abū-Dharr asked, "O Messenger of Allah, are there devils from men?" He (ﷺ) said, "Yes." ⁵³³

Among them are the companion who corrupts his friend's mind, the slanderer who invents lies and spreads rumors, the business associate who exploits moral weakness, the advisor who turns a ruler into an oppressor... and so on. As Allah said in the Qur'ān:

وَجَعَلْنَا بَعْضَكُمْ لِبَعْضٍ فِتْنَةً أَتَصْبِرُونَ وَكَانَ رَبُّكَ بَصِيرًا.

And We have made some of you as trial for others – will you be patient? And your Lord is ever Seeing. ⁵³⁴

Devils from jinn and from mankind inspire a person to do wrong, making it appear attractive to him. Human devils suggest through the ear and the eye, while those of the jinn whisper directly into the breasts of men. In the words of Ibn Katheer: "Only Allah is able to prevent the evil of Shayṭān from touching a son of Ādam. Allah allowed us to be lenient with the human devil so that his softer nature might cause him to desist from the evil he is committing. However, Allah ordered us to seek refuge in Him from the evil of Shayṭān,

⁵³⁰ Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd and an-Nasā'i.

⁵³¹ Al-Bukhārī, Muslim, at-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd, an-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah.

⁵³² Sūrah al-An'ām, 6: 112.

⁵³³ Aḥmad and an-Nasā'i.

⁵³⁴ Sūrah al-Furqān, 25:20

because he neither accepts enticements nor does kindness affect him, for he is pure evil. Thus, only He who created the Shayṭān is able to prevent his evil."

The sūrah reassures the believer that he is not helpless to avoid evil, whether incited by Iblees or by his human agent. For the Lord, Sovereign and God of mankind is in control of all creatures and occurrences. Although He has permitted the Shayṭān to whisper and suggest, He still has power over him and has provided a means of defense for mankind. Allah leaves to the Shayṭān only those who neglect Him, but those who live in consciousness of their Lord are secure against intimidations and incitements of the retreating whisperer.

* * *

It was reported that whenever the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) completed the Qur'ān he would commence once again by reciting Sūrah al-Fātiḥah. The opening sūrah directs man to ask his Lord for guidance in order to find and remain upon the straight path leading to His eternal Paradise. Allah has granted man His guidance throughout the Qur'ān. Then, in its final sūrahs, He directs man to ask his Lord for refuge and protection against any evil beings who would deter him from that guidance and deprive him of its benefits.

And all praise is due to Allah, Lord of the worlds.

والحمد لله رب العالمين

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