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The Inhuman Eloquence of the Qur'an



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About the Book and the Author

I initially started my studies in the wider field of Islamic studies but with time realized that it would be better to focus on the Arabic language itself. There is no shortage of scholars in the fields of ḥadīth, fiqh and other related fields. There is no shortage of scholars who exegete the Qur'ān either. But there really truly is a shortage of scholars who are capable of diving deep into Qur'ānic Arabic and explain it from a purely linguistic point of view. Historically, such scholars have been a rarity too, but when they have come around, they occupied the very top positions among the scholars of Qur'ān in history.

In my teenage years, I had more questions about the Qur'ān than answers. To me, it did not seem to make any sense, nor have any structure or context. It repeated itself a lot, it seemed it had no context or structure, and looked all over the place. Yet at the same time, it claimed to be a miracle and challenged others to produce something like it. Instead of dismissing it outright, I took it for its words and started exploring it rather than giving it a blanket verdict of being incoherent. With time I realized that if I am to truly understand it, I need to focus on its language - Arabic. Ḥadīth tradition claims that when the disbelievers heard the Qur'ān it mesmerized them. These disbelievers were staunch enemies of Islam and they did not sit down in classes where they studied the Qur'ān in detail. They marvelled at it upon simply hearing it. This led me to the conclusion that it has to be the Arabic language where the answer lies because these people were masters of Arabic. The fact that they were awe-struck by it on simply hearing it had to do with the language of the book.

Hence I pursued my studies in Arabic and as time went by, little by little, the incredible eloquence of the Qur'ān became clear to me. Some of what is inside this book such as surah al 'ādiyāt, al- shams, Ṭāhā and maryam, was written by me in those very early years, edited and better structured now.

This is volume 1 of my series with the ultimate goal of covering the entire Qur'ān. My approach follows the principle that has been universally understood and propagated by the scholars - القرآن يفسر بعضه بعضا - the Qur'ān explains itself. When the Qur'ān is read contextually and connected with what comes before and after, its meanings become clear.

Multiple sources have been used. Primarily, the tafsīr works produced by ibn Ashūr, Alūsī, al-Rāzi, Tabari and others are heavily relied on and referenced. For the

meanings of a word, I rely primarily on lexicons such as Mu'jam al Ishtiqāqi and Lisān al Arab.

How to Answer a Question

Surah 78: Al- Naba'



This surah centers around judgment day and the doubts expressed by people about its authenticity. Allah will use the concept of *zawj* - the fact that every object has an equal, yet opposite counterpart to prove its authenticity in a most unusual manner.

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ

Regarding what are they asking each other?

The speaker is Allah Himself and this question is not of genuine inquiry, but rather it is phrased as such to disapprove the manner in which they are questioning each other because these people are not asking it out of genuine curiosity or need, rather they do so mockingly.¹

We experience this in our daily lives as well. When someone says something that people do not take kindly to, more often than not their response is, "Did you really just say that?" They are not asking the speaker if he actually said it - he obviously did, they are just mocking him.

Secondly, it could be that they are debating this topic with each other, with some of them mockingly mentioning it to others as a way of pastime, but it could also be that they are directing their mockery at the prophet and the believers.²

¹ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 28, p. 197

² al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 28, p. 198; Ibn 'Ashūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 8

عَنِ النَّبِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ

Regarding the great hidden news

The word *naba'* has been translated as *hidden reality*. A lot has been said about the difference between the meaning of this word and *khavar*, which also means the same thing but not entirely.

Linguistically, *naba'* is news that was previously unknown, while *khavar* is news that is already known beforehand and recounted to the person. *Naba'* at its root was used for a flood that came from another land, an animal that arrived from another place as well as for a sudden surprise attack. The core meaning is for something unknown to emerge or appear.³

When somebody suddenly notices the arrival of a flood or a wild animal, he originally does not know where it came from just as a surprise attack is hidden at first, and later carried out and revealed.

Now the Qur'ān has not specified what they are mockingly asking each other about. It simply calls it *naba'* because it will come upon them all of a sudden, and catch them off guard like a surprise attack.

The Qur'ān will not specify what *naba'* precisely is but as you will see, the Qur'ān will display incredible eloquence by answering their question, not by addressing it directly, but precisely by not specifying what they are asking.

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ

Regarding what they are in disagreement

The pronoun “*they*” as well as the words “*in it*” are advanced to show the intensity of disagreement on part of these people specifically regarding this specific topic. They are not in as intense a disagreement over any subject as they are regarding this one.

³ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʾAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 559

This can also be for the sake of تعجيب (amazement). They are in disagreement over *this* subject? If there is something that is known to be true, yet someone disagrees with it, we display wonder at that person. How could you possibly disagree with it when it's a known fact? Same is the case here. This is a known and firm fact and as we will see, this surah itself will prove it.

The use of the word مختلفون (in disagreement) to make it a nominal sentence shows constant, continuous and longstanding disagreement.

Now how is being in a disagreement related to mocking it? Their disagreement is over the nature of its falsehood, not whether it is true or not. For example, they called prophet Muhammad a number of things. Some said he is a madman, some said he is possessed by a demon; some said he is a poet or a magician, while others accused him of being taught the Qur'ān from someone else. They called him a number of different things to come up with explanations, and then debated among themselves which of these is true. Same is the case here. They call this great hidden news, which the Qur'ān has not yet specified what it is, a number of different false things and this is their way of mocking it, because the idea that it could be true is never brought up among them to be even considered. Imagine them in their gathering, with some calling the Prophet a madman, some a magician, some saying he is demon-possessed; and then disagreeing which of these is really the case. This is mockery at its peak. The fact that he might be true is never brought up to be sincerely discussed.

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

No! They are going to know.

كَلَّا - *No!* This acts as a call to desist from disagreement over this subject, and as a warning to stop their mockery.⁴ Stop with this disagreement over a known, firm fact. There is no room for mockery or any disagreement over it.

This could also be a call to desist from going against anything the prophet preaches to them since he is Allah's representative. Whatever he says and preaches is absolutely true and so, stop going against anything he says including resurrection.⁵

⁴ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 11

⁵ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 28, p. 201

They will know - The use of the letter *sīn* with the sentence “ *they will know* ” denotes two things. The certainty of them coming to know, as well as it happening in the near future, not far. They will certainly come to know very soon that what they are mocking is indeed true.

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

Thumma, no! They are going to know.

Translations normally render this verse as “ *Then, no ! They will come to know.*” The word *Thumma* can be used to indicate a sequence in time, but it can also be used to indicate the higher status of something with respect to something else. Allah is saying that there will be another event, greater than the one described earlier, that will prove to them the truth of it.

We will go with the flow of the surah and let it speak for itself rather than presuming what these two great events are.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا

“Have We not made the earth a Mihād?”

This is the beginning of Allah’s answer to them.

Mihād comes from the root *mīm hā’ dāl* which was used for soft butter as well as for the cradle of an infant, made excessively comfortable and soft. The core meaning is of softness and gentleness inside something. This root predominantly came to be used for an infant’s cradle, since it is made excessively soft and comfortable for it.⁶

This is phrased as a question to articulate an undeniable fact. If a father says to his child, did I not bring you up, he is not asking his child if it is true or not. He is simply phrasing it as a question to highlight the undeniable fact that he did in fact raise his child.

What is meant by the earth being *soft*? The fact that it can be dug up to plant seeds inside it. You will see this mentioned at the very end in verse 16. This word *mihād* fits it perfectly. Firstly, since the earth is soft, it can be dug up and seeds planted inside

⁶ *Al-Mu ‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu’aşşal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 559

it. Then just as a mother acts as a womb for a child, so does the earth act as the womb of all the seeds inside it, so that it gives rise to plants and vegetation.

وَالْجِبَالِ أَوْتَادًا

And the mountains, stakes?

A stake is a peg driven deep into the ground to hold something together. The Arabs would drive the poles holding the tent cloth deep into the ground to prevent the wind from taking their tent away.

Similarly, mountains are embedded deep like stakes, forming part of the earth's crustal balance with their deep roots.

In this passage, this will be the only verse where Allah will not mention a verb. In each verse, He uses past perfect verbs such as made, created and constructed except this verse. Let us go with the flow of the surah and let it explain itself why that is the case.

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا

And created you as azwāj?

Azwāj is the plural of the word zawj. We need to understand this word as it is the central point of this surah. It comes from the root *zāy wāw jīm* which was used for a counterpart, opposite directions (left and right), and for a man and woman. The *zawj* of a woman is her husband while the *zawj* of a man is his wife. The *zawj* of the moon is the sun and of the sun, the moon.⁷

Zawj is the other half of something that completes it and forms a complete and working system with it. Like the male and the female who come together to form a family which is what continues life on earth via offspring, the sun and the moon come together to form a day. Two things, not only different but almost opposites of each other, inherently tied with each other to form a complete and working system.

Previously, Allah described the earth as a soft and gentle cradle that sustains life. What is the opposite of being soft? Being firm and solid. Hence, the very next ayah

⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 878

describes the mountains as solid stakes that maintain the balance. When something is soft, it naturally fades and melts away. You need something to hold it together. The softness of the earth refers to its ability to be cultivated and hence produce food which sustains life. The mountains are the pegs that hold this soft earth together and hence act as the *zawj* of the soft earth. They both come together to form a complete and working system. We know that if the deep roots of the mountains are taken away, it would lead to re-adjustment of the crust. It would cause large scale deformations due to the rise and fall of the surrounding regions as the earth seeks to find balance again.

This is why Allah did not use any verb when describing the mountains as pegs. To imply the necessary existence that would sustain the earth and to establish this relationship between earth and mountains as an indication that this is the theme being carried forward in this surah. From this verse onwards, Allah will continue to mention things with their *zawj*, except one thing; and that is how Allah will answer the disbelievers.

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا

And made your sleep - subāt?

We will break down the linguistic meanings of the verses and tie them all together at the end in verse 16.

The word *subāt* at its root was used for a land that did not produce any vegetation as well as for a motionless and unconscious sleeper. It is the cessation of any growth, movement or motion. A state of stillness that does not change, like the barren land that does not produce anything and the sleeper who does not move.⁸ Sleep is a state of unconsciousness. To experience life, you have to be conscious and therefore, sleep is the sister of death.

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا

And made the night a clothing

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا

⁸ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 946

And made the day, life/ a time of life?

There are two options regarding the word معاش - translated as life/ time of life. It is a verbal noun and hence معاش would mean life itself.

It can also be a ظرف - which denotes the time or the place an action is carried out on and hence, in this view, it would mean time of life. I have put both options in the translation as both are equally plausible and it will all come together later when I tie everything together.

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شَدِيدًا

And created above you seven strong ones?

This is a very interesting word choice. شَدِيد is translated as strong. At its root, it was used for not only strengthening something, but also for tightening a knot. It implies firmness and solidity that is obtained as a result of tight binding of its particles; such as the knot tightly bound.⁹ This is important to note because later on, Allah will describe the heavens as being opened up on judgment day, which implies the breakage and untying of these knots.

The seven heavens, unlike the earth, are not soft. They are strong, intense and firm. We can dig the earth up and plant in it, but we cannot subjugate the heavens. We cannot dictate or alter its behaviour in any shape or form. Unlike the earth which is at our disposal, and generates food and all sorts of benefits for us, we cannot make the heavens budge even slightly.

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا

And made a burning lamp

The sun.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا

⁹ Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm, vol. 2, p. 1114

And sent down, from the rain clouds, pouring water

From this verse onwards, you will see this all coming together.

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا

That We may bring forth thereby grain and soft plants

Grain, such as wheat. The grain gets planted back into the earth and gives rise to *nabāt* which are the soft and tender plants, in their initial stages of development that appear out of the earth.

Seed turns to plants which ultimately turn into trees. Hence,

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا

And dense, intertwined gardens

Notice the word *intertwined*.

Now take a step back.

For grains and Nabāt to come out of the earth, the seed has to be already present inside it. Allah mentioned it when He said:

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا

Have We not made the earth a soft cradle?

As explained there, what is meant by the earth being soft is the fact that it can be dug up to plant seeds inside it. The natural progression of the passage is as such:

Have We not made the earth a soft cradle? The mountains as stakes? And sent down from rain clouds pouring water? So, We may bring out, by it, grain and soft plants. And dense, intertwined gardens?

The sentences

And created you as pairs? And made your sleep - a cessation of consciousness? And made the night a clothing? And made the day a means of livelihood? And constructed above you, seven strong creations? And made a blazing lamp?

are advanced and foregrounded. The natural flow would have been to add the second passage after the first one. To understand what is going on in this passage, we need to consider the whole picture and pay attention to the word in the last verse - '*intertwined*.'

Life and vegetation appearing out of earth is not a simple one-off sudden event. Rather, it is the result of successive events, all tied and intertwined with each other. Step A leads to step B which leads to step C and so on, until we get life and vegetation out of the earth. It is not a random sudden appearance, but the result of an orderly cycle. This is why the use of the word 'intertwined' is important. Allah could have just said, He brought out gardens, or even dense gardens; but the word He uses means extremely dense gardens whose trees are *intertwined* with each other. He does not merely say *gardens*, but *intertwined gardens*, to show that life reaches its peak not in isolated growth, but in dense, interconnected systems where everything wraps into everything else, completing the journey from hidden seed to fully integrated life. Just as the final result of all this is intertwined with each other, so are all the steps leading to it intertwined and connected with each other. The result matches the process.

Allah applies the same phenomenon onto humans and life in general. It is all intertwined and connected with each. The male and female connect and intertwine with each other to produce new life. Just as rainwater impregnates the earth, the male impregnates the female. Allah called the night a clothing, something that hides. Just as our clothes hide and cover our bodies, so does the darkness of the night cover us as a whole. This veil of darkness descends and covers everything in darkness.

What happens with the grain? Allah says He brings out the grain and nabāt by means of rainwater. Which means the grain is previously there but hidden inside the earth. The water nourishes it which enables it to start producing the plant. Just as the night covers us in darkness, so does the earth cover the seed under it in darkness. Just as rainwater brings the grain, plants and hence life itself, out of the earth, and into the open, so does the day bring out life by bringing out people into the open, to earn their livelihood and makes them visible. Life is truly seen in the

day, not at night. This is why earlier, I translated معاش as both the *time of life* and *life* itself.

And created above you seven strong creations - The seven strong and intense heavens are contrasted with the soft earth. Allah pairs everything together with its *zawj*. Just as everything inside and on the earth has a *zawj*, the earth itself has a *zawj* as well, the seven strong and intense heavens. This is why Allah, instead of saying seven heavens, says seven strong creations because earlier, he had called the earth soft. Just as the male and the female, day and the night, are intertwined with each other and work in harmony, so does the earth work in harmony with the heavens, to form a complete and working system.

So the soft earth is paired with the strong heavens, the man with the woman, and the day with the night.

This leaves behind two things. Sleep and the burning lamp; they both do not have a pair attached to them, and this is how Allah answers them.

Since everything has been described as a pair, the male with the female, the night with the day, the earth with the heaven, you can quite easily figure out the *zawj* of sleep yourself. Recall that Allah called sleep *Subāt*- something that causes the loss of consciousness - death itself. Sleep is the sister of death. Think of it like a mini death. You yourselves can easily answer what is the *zawj* of sleep can you not? It is waking up. It is coming back to life. The same is the case with death. You will wake up after it.

This is why Allah did not even specify what they were arguing about, and just called it the great hidden reality. It is easy to know what comes after sleep. It is easy to know what they were arguing about. It carries this theme of the answer being extremely obvious and easy to know. I do not even need to tell you what they are arguing about, just as I do not need to tell you what follows loss of consciousness; because the answer is so obvious. This is why Allah expressed wonder at their disagreement over this subject in verse 3.

Now why did He not mention any *zawj* of the sun?

The *zawj* is implied by the context and you can easily come to know its conclusion. It is the moon which, unlike the sun, only receives light and reflects it. Now the question is why do this? Why not mention the *zawj* of the sun even if it is obvious?

Recall that daytime was called life itself. What makes the day, day? The sun. It is the rising of the sun that starts the day and its setting that ends it. When Allah described the soft earth, He mentioned sleep - the sister of death - and did not mention its *zawj*. When Allah mentioned the seven strong heavens, He described the sun - a source of life - and did not mention its *zawj*. The distinguishing feature of the earth is death, while that of the heavens, is life. Even the life you see on earth is because of the heavens.

This is why He mentions rain right after the burning lamp. Rain comes down from above and bestows life, to seeds hidden beneath the earth. In the same manner, will Allah's command come from above and bestow life to the dead bodies buried and hidden inside the earth. He associates the earth with death, and the heavens with life. The heavens are the source of life on earth. We are given life by Allah. Earth is given life from above, from rain. Hearts are given life from above, from revelation.

Recall that earlier Allah had said that they will gain the knowledge of the truthfulness of this great event, of judgment day and life after death two times.

This was the first time where Allah establishes proof for someone who is sincere, but for the one who still rejects, He has prepared a second event to make him certain of the truth. Imagine a student not paying proper attention to his studies, and indulging in useless past times. First, his professor advises him sincerely to change his behaviour and become serious about studies but he ignores it. After seeing the student carrying on in his behavior, the professor says to him, 'When you fail the exams and are left stuck in life, then will you come to know.' Same is the case here. Allah first answers them sincerely. Then, for the one who still rejects it and carries on in his stupidity, Allah says you will come to know when judgment day itself comes.

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتٍ

Indeed, the Day of separation, was the appointed time

The previous verses described things as pairs, man with woman, earth with heaven, and the day with night. It mentioned gardens that were intertwined because everything that led to it, was itself intertwined with each other. Allah now mentions a day that will cause separation, that separates these pairs from each other.

The day of separation was the appointed time for the stoppage and breakage of this relationship.

The coming verses will describe this separation. You will see how Allah will describe the breaking apart of the same things He has mentioned thus far in this surah.

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا

A Day the horn is breathed into, so you come forth as distinct groups

Allah described it as a day of separation which is evident here as well. People will be separated into different, distinct groups. *fawj*, was originally used for distinct batches of camels sent to a watering place, one after another.¹⁰

It implies distinct groups and clusters of creatures, not just one unified gathering. Earlier, Allah had said regarding them:

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ

Regarding what they are in disagreement

They will be grouped as per the view they held.

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا

The heaven was opened to become gateways

Earlier, Allah had said:

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شَدِيدًا

And created above you seven strong creations?

Remember that Allah had contrasted the seven strong heavens with the soft earth that could be dug and penetrated to plant seeds inside it. The same earth which could then be forced open by the vegetation inside the earth as they appear out of it. Contrasting the heavens with this earth implied its exact opposite, that the sky could not be opened, that it could not be subjugated like the earth.

¹⁰ *Al-Mu`jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu`aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur`ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1634

But here, on the day of separation, the tightly bound knots of heaven separate from each other, allowing it to open up, allowing free passage through it like a gateway, just like the earth.

وَسِيرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا

The mountains were floated away and hence, became a mirage

The word سِير describes a smooth elongation in a direction.¹¹ The Qur'ān has described in many places the fate of mountains on judgment day.¹² To summarize, the mountains will be pounded until they become dust that floats in the air. After breaking apart and rising into the air, they appear as if they are a mountain, but they are not at all. They are dense, accumulated dust, seen from a distance as though they were a mountain.

Earlier, Allah had described two strong structures; the mountains and the heavens. The mountains acted as stakes, as the firm support to the earth while the heavens were described as strong, tightly compacted structures with no weakness. Both these structures are now described as being turned into the very opposite. These two strong structures have now become soft, full of holes and openings, and light as dust. When the two strong objects, one of which was the holding blocks of the soft earth and what was on it, and the other intertwined with it to form a complete and working system; are blown apart and their strength converted to weakness and fragility, we need not even know what became of the earth. We can easily deduce it ourselves. Utter destruction. This again carries the theme of the answer being so obvious that it need not even be mentioned. The Qur'ān has repeatedly said that severe earthquakes will strike the earth on judgment day. (Examples include 22:1 and 99:1) The heavens that once formed a complete system by pairing with it have lost their capability to sustain this system because they lost their strength, leading to a full collapse of order.

This is the day of separation from the old system; from the old qualities; from the past strength; from the past system which worked on the relationships of *zawj*.

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا

¹¹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 988

¹² Q. 27:88 and 101:5

Indeed, Hell has been waiting intently in ambush

The word **مرصاد** (ambush) is closely related in meaning to **مِيقَات** (appointed time) in verse 16. Both imply a fixed, determined time and place for the recompense of the transgressors respectively. **مِيقَات** (appointed time) implies the determined time whereas **مرصاد** (ambush) implies the determined place. Just as we say in daily language, I will take my revenge on that day, at that place.

Verses 17, 18 and 19 described the events that occur at the determined time, whereas this and the coming verses will describe the events that occur at the determined place. What is meant by Hell waiting in ambush will be explained later.

لِّلطَّغِينِ مَأْثَبًا

For the Ṭāghīn, a place of return

Ṭāghīn comes from the root **طغو** which means the highest point of a mountain that is difficult to reach. It was also used for a flood that submerged everything inside it. The core meaning is of height and elevation that submerges or covers things around it like the flood that submerged everything inside it.¹³ When applied to a human being, it means a person who summits the heights of sins and arrogance, covering all the good around him or even submerging (oppressing) others around him to attain his desires. This word will be used for Pharaoh in the very next surah because he oppressed the Israelites.

The word **ma'āb (place of return)** comes from the root **أوب** which was used for bees, as well as for the deepest point of a well where water gathers. The core meaning is of returning. Bees return back to their hives no matter how far away they fly and the water keeps on returning and collecting to the deepest point of a well or basin whenever water is drawn from it.¹⁴

The imagery drawn is incredible. As mentioned above, **طغو** was used for the very summit of a mountain. Consider this arrogant disbeliever. He summits this

¹³ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1331

¹⁴ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. ٦٣

mountain of sin and arrogance and is at the top of it. While on the earth, this mountain was strong and solid (verse 7) which enabled him to stand on it - to commit sins freely and benefit from them - but ultimately, Allah crushed this mountain and turned it into floating dust. (verse 18) Now, since the mountain on which they were standing was crushed, they are in a freefall. As he is falling down, he looks below and what does he see? He sees Hell with its claws outstretched to grab him.

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا

Indeed, Hell has been waiting intently in ambush

Hell has been waiting for God to crush this mountain of sin and pride so it can pounce on them. It has been waiting intently for the day of separation. So they may fall into its clutches. Currently, as they are engrossed in their sins, pride and arrogance, they stand carefree on this mountain, oblivious to the fact that Hell is looking intently at them, lying hidden in ambush for them. This is an imagery drawn from the real events that occur on judgment day that were described earlier. Allah uses those events to draw imagery.

God will crush the pride of the haughty. He will humble the arrogant, and disgrace the boastful. He will crush their very foundation - the mountain of sin and arrogance on whose summit they stand. He will force them to fall from it by crushing this mountain; and when they do fall, Hell pounces on them then and there. A perfectly set trap.

On earth, people get away with sins. Look around you, you will see many oppressors. They are standing securely on their oppressions and sins right now, but ultimately, Allah will crush their very foundations as Allah says:

فَأَتَى اللَّهُ بُنْيَانَهُم مِّنَ الْقَوَاعِدِ

Then Allah attacked their buildings from the foundations (16 :26)

Secondly, the disbeliever will fall from this mountain of arrogance and sin - He will renounce his arrogance and sin to Allah, admit his faults and hence desire Allah to give him a second chance. He will ask Allah to return him to earth, but:

لِّلطَّغِينِ مَثَابًا

For the Ṭāghīn, a place of return

لُثِّينَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا

Remaining in it for multiple ages

Another interesting choice of words. أَحْقَابَ is translated as long ages but at its root, it actually means to tie something. It was then applied to mean long duration of times, as if multiple periods were tied together one after another. When used in this meaning, it implies a period of time with no fixed limit (Mu'jam al Ishtiqaqi)

They will spend ages that do not end, tightly bound to Hell. They will never be free of it at any point in time. Recall how Allah described the heavens as being strong and tightly bound, then opened it up and broke its knots. Unlike the heavens, that were once strong but then made weak and opened up, they will be tightly bound to Hell with no end to this binding because the concept of *zawj* no longer exists. The day of separation has ended. The binding of the heavens gave away ultimately, but their binding to Hell does not. Hence, they will remain in Hell for *Aḥqāb* - for eternity.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا

While not tasting therein any coolness or drink

What is meant by coolness is not just coolness itself, but also comfort, because Allah will pair it later on with spouses that people in paradise have. Spousal relations are a means of comfort and coolness. These people will not have any comfort, any coolness to reduce their suffering, nor any drink to quench their thirst.

إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا

Except scalding water and corrupt discharges

Instead of water to quench their thirst and cool them, they get scalding, boiling water over their heads to make it even worse; and instead of a drink to quench their thirst, they are fed corrupt wound discharges. This is torture further increasing on top of existing torture.

جَزَاءٌ وِفَاقًا

Earned. Wifāq

Why are they punished so sternly? Allah says it is all earned. They earned this punishment. On top of that, He says *Wifāq* which is normally translated “*exact recompense*” but it is an emphatic verbal noun (*masdar*). *Wifāq* does not simply mean an exact, like for like reward. It means that this is the very definition of an exact and like for like reward, or justice in other words. You get what you earned in exact accordance. Allah says that if this is not justice, nothing is as relayed by the emphatic form *فعال*. He is emphasizing that Allah is totally just here. How?

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا

Indeed, they were not expecting an account

Remember the word *أحقاب* - long, multiple ages with no end. These people did not think they would be taken to account which led them to all sorts of wicked deeds again and again. If a criminal knows he will not be caught, he will only continue to commit more crimes and even more blatantly. These people, thinking they would never be caught, committed one crime after another and hence, they earned all these horrible punishments. This is why Allah said they will spend multiple ages with no end inside Hell. It is as a response for each crime they committed. For each crime, you get a *حقب* (an age). For all these crimes, you get all these long ages.

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا

By deeming our signs as lies.

The letter *Waw* at the beginning makes this ayah act as a *Hāl* - a circumstantial clause. This means that these people rejected that they will be taken to account for their deeds because they deemed our clear signs as lies. This surah has already proven above that the day of judgment is inevitable. The worldly life necessarily has an afterlife. Just as you wake up after sleeping, so shall you wake up after death. This is a threat from rejecting this surah, these signs that Allah has shown you.

Now there is a lot of emphasis placed inside this ayah because of the use of مفعول. They denied each and every single sign of Allah, be it the Qur'ān or any other sign of Allah. It can also mean severely and intensely denying it and the most intense way of denying something is mocking it, which is what they are doing at the start of this surah.

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا

While all things have we enumerated as a book

Every single thing, every single sign they denied, every single action they did, every single crime they committed thinking they would not be caught for it, has all been written in a book. As the Qur'ān states elsewhere, they will be shown every single crime they committed in writing. The word أحصى - translated as *enumerated* - implies understanding as well as knowledge. Every single action they did, Allah is recording not only the action itself, but what is behind it as well. The intention behind it, the reason behind it, why it was carried out, all of it - not just the act itself - is recorded in writing. A display of absolute and complete knowledge of Allah.

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَّزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا

So taste, and never will We increase you except in torment

Just as you only increased in sins and crimes because you thought you will never be taken to account, so will you now only be increased in punishment. This is how this punishment is earned and completely just.

So taste - Taste the punishment for the actions you did, that have been recorded justly, with all accompanying intentions and reasons. You are not being treated unjustly. You are merely paying for what you did.

There is no *zawj* anymore. There is no coupling of things with their pairs. Punishment will not be coupled with relief. The grief of the hereafter, does not have comfort coupled with it. These criminals did not expect to be taken to account. A criminal will only commit more crimes if he knows he will get away with it. Hence, these people only kept on increasing in their sins, crimes and arrogance.

You will only have punishment, which only keeps on increasing in intensity, just as you kept on increasing in your crimes. Just as you never turned back and did not increase except in crimes, so will we not turn back this punishment and will not increase you except in punishment. Hence,

جَزَاءٌ وِفَاقًا

Earned. Wifāq

He says next:

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا

Indeed, for those who keep safe, is a place of success

Earlier, in verse 12, Allah described events of the determined time and in verse 19, the events of that occur at the determined place. One determined place was Hell, whereas the second determined place is Paradise.

The word **مُتَّقِينَ** (those who keep safe) is foregrounded to place emphasis and restriction. Success will only be for those who kept themselves safe from breaking Allah's commandments unlike the *Tāghīn* mentioned earlier. Restriction leads to success. Discipline is the antidote of greatness.

حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا

Secured orchards and grapevines

A **حديقة** is an orchard that has a wall around it. If the orchard is not secured inside a wall, this word is not used for it.¹⁵ This implies secure possession and property.

وَكَوَاعِبَ أَتْرَابًا

Full breasted women, Atrāb

¹⁵ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 391

This verse raises many eyebrows but it denotes sexual attraction. Being full breasted implies sexual maturity and the fact that these will be women to whom their spouses are sexually attracted as that is a trait mostly desired by men. Spousal relationships are part of the many blessings in paradise and just as they are a source of comfort in this life, so will they be an even bigger source in the hereafter.

Atrāb is normally taken to mean that these women are equal in age to their husbands but this is just one aspect. The root of this word means equality.¹⁶ As Ibn ‘Āshūr says, this implies equality in everything including their beauty, their attraction and love towards each other, and the desire they will feel towards each other as well. Full breasted implies sexual attraction and by using the word *atrāb*, Allah is saying that both spouses will be equally sexually attracted to each other as well in addition to their beauty, age, and all other things. They will be *atrāb* - equal. Many times in marriages, sexual attraction falls apart, but not in paradise. This also answers the question normally asked, “What will women get in paradise?” Their husbands will be equal to them in all aspects including beauty and will love them back equally. They get equal to what men get. A husband equally handsome and beautiful.

وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا

Cups of vine filled to the brim

In ayah 24, Allah said about the disbelievers:

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا

While not tasting therein any coolness or drink

As explained there, coolness also includes spousal relationships because they are a means of comfort. The disbelievers did not get any comfort, whereas the believers - men and women - got spouses equal to them in all aspects.

The disbelievers did not get any drink to quench their thirst but the believers will not only have delicious drinks, but the cups will be filled to the brim with them. This also implies that everything will be given at its pinnacle in paradise. The cups could not be more filled. Everything in paradise will be perfect and could not be better

¹⁶ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 205

just as the cups could not be more filled. Everything will be as cups filled to the brim, utmost perfection, utmost bliss and the absolute peak of all things.

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذْبًا

No ill speech will they hear therein or any lie

The word لغو was used for any sound or noise that was meaningless such as the chirping of birds. It implies any speech or talk that contains no benefit such as gossip.¹⁷ Every single thing that they hear, every sound they encounter, will benefit them. They are already in a state of perfect luxury and comfort and this luxury just keeps on increasing. What is being said is that everything they hear will be to provide and offer them something that is even better and luxurious than what they had before. If they are offered a luxury, then after they have experienced it, they are offered a new luxury that surpasses the one they had before. This goes back to verse 30:

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَّزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا

So taste, and never will We increase you except in torment

The disbelievers were only increased in torment. When a punishment is carried out and completed on them, they then experience a new punishment that is more painful than the one they experienced before. Whereas the believers are offered luxury after luxury, with each new luxury surpassing the one before it.

The ayah goes on to say that they will not experience any falsehood either. This is the same that was used in verse 28

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا

By deeming our signs as lies.

This implies the absolute peak of joy experienced inside paradise. Every luxury they will experience, they will then experience a new luxury that will be even better than

¹⁷ Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. 4, p. 1982

the one before and this will continue on and on. Consider a man in paradise being offered one luxury after another, with each surpassing the one before it. When he is offered a new, better luxury, he will be amazed. Are you telling me there is something even better than this? Yes, you heard it right, We are not lying. Here, see it for yourself. And this goes on for eternity Hence,

وَلَا كَذِبًا

Or any lie

Secondly, this ayah mocks the disbelievers. Remember how they considered all signs of Allah, including the Qur'ān and hence this surah, as thorough, made up lies? Allah mocks them. You considered this a lie, but look, it is not. It is as if the believers are indulged in blessings inside paradise and Allah lifts the curtains allowing the disbelievers, who considered all this a lie, to actually see it for themselves. This is not a lie is it? It is how the pain of the disbelievers is compounded. Their punishment keeps on increasing while the blessings of the people of paradise keep on increasing. Every time their blessings are increased, is the torment also not increased on the disbelievers because of it? Because the greater the blessing, the greater the regret of missing out on it.

جَزَاءٌ مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءٌ حِسَابًا

A recompense from your Rabb—granting far beyond and fully satisfying.

This is a grammatically complex verse but we will keep it simple. When someone does good, Allah gives him much more in return. If you spend a dollar for Allah, He will give you at least 10 dollars in return. We have seen how Allah offers never ending luxury that just keeps on increasing and increasing for eternity. The word *jazā'a* at its root means an exact, like for like repayment; like how someone gets his salary according to the work he puts in.¹⁸ Allah says that this concept of *jazā'*, of like for like payment, when applied to Allah, actually means giving much, much more in return than what is actually owed. This is how Allah returns the wage of the worker. By giving him more than what he actually deserves. This is what *Jazā'a* is when applied to Allah.

¹⁸ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 307

The word *ḥisāb* is translated as fully satisfying. It is normally translated as “account” but this root also means something that satisfies and satiates.¹⁹

We humans are flawed entities. We lack the ability to achieve utter perfection. Allah says that when He gives, He will give much more than what is actually deserved because He intends to fully and perfectly satisfy the receiver. This satisfaction and bliss will carry on for eternity, with never ending luxury and bliss that just keeps on increasing to maintain perfect euphoria.

Lastly, Allah says Your *Rabb*- to the Prophet. *Rabb* at its root means caretaking, nurturing and bringing up.²⁰ It was commonly used for raising a child. This is a message to us. This God, the one who rewards so generously, and the only one who can grant you everlasting bliss, is the Lord and caretaker of Muhammad, who takes special care of him because He is His prophet and chosen messenger. If you want to reach this generous, loving God, then obey Muhammad. This then goes back to verse 4 where Allah warned people to not disagree over anything that His prophet says.

رَبِّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا الرَّحْمَنُ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

From the Rabb of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them; from Raḥmān! They do not possess any authority of speech from Him

The first part of this ayah “*From the Rabb of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them*” is a *badal* - an apposition - of the words *Your Rabb* in the previous verse. Whereas, the words *From Raḥmān*, are an apposition of the sentence *from the Rabb of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them*.

A recompense from your Rabb who is the same one who sustains the heavens, the earth and whatever is between them. These two descriptions are then substituted with the name of Allah - Raḥmān. All of this boils down to the word Raḥmān. But then the question arises, why not just say Raḥmān? Why start with *Your Rabb*, then replace it with *from the Rabb of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them*, and then replace this in turn, to end at Raḥmān?

¹⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 425

²⁰ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 737

Because it shows a beautiful sequence. Allah is the Rabb- the caretaker and nurturer of Muhammad, just as He is the caretaker and nurturer of heavens, the earth and whatever is between them. This is not an alien God accessible and loving to only a few. No, He is the loving God who is responsible for all good, who is maintaining and caretaking the heavens, the earth and whatever is between them, which includes the very disbelievers who are mocking God in this surah. He does not want to punish you, He wants to lead you to good. He sent Muhammad for this very purpose, to lead you to good out of love for you and so you can attain this everlasting bliss and euphoria inside paradise where He will give you much, much more than what you actually deserve. He does all this, because He is Raḥmān - the strongest possible word in Arabic to denote love.

Raḥmān comes from the root *rā' ḥā' mīm* which means the womb of the mother.²¹ The concept is of intense and unwavering love. A mother loves her child, despite undergoing severe discomfort during pregnancy and experiencing excruciating pain during childbirth. She loves it with no regard for all this, as if it never happened. When it comes to Allah, we cannot harm him as a child harms its mother, but we disobey Allah and break His commandments. Yet despite all this, Allah still takes care of us and provides us, and leads us to good and what is beneficial to us.

Allah did not create the heavens, the earth and whatever is between them including you, to cast you to Hell. He created you out of love. He wanted you to experience His love and care and ultimately for you to reach paradise to give you eternal comfort. He did not intend for you to land in Hell like those disbelievers. This is why He has sent down the Qur'ān to you, out of love and care for you. This is all rooted in love and mercy. The disbelievers received the justice of Allah, by getting repaid in exact accordance for their actions. While the believers received Allah's love and mercy, by being gifted more than what they deserved.

They do not possess any authority of speech from Him - None can point to Allah that He is unjust, or wrong in any matter. Allah is either merciful as He with the believers or just, as He was with the disbelievers. He is never unjust. None can point a finger at Him.

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

The Day that the Spirit and the angels will stand as a single row, none shall speak except for one permitted by Raḥmān, and said what is Ṣawāb

²¹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 776.

The Spirit - this is angel Gabriel; who brings the Qur'ān down from Allah to Muhammad. The Qur'ān has called him the Rūḥ (spirit) on multiple occasions.²²

This ayah explains the last one as well. They do not have the right to address Allah. Only the one given permission by Allah to speak will do so, and even then, they will only say that which is *ṣawāb*.

Ṣawāb comes from the root *ṣād wāw bā'* which was used for rain, as well as for an arrow hitting its target precisely. The core meaning of this root is the descent of something from up to down (like the rain) and for something to be precise and accurate like the arrow that hit its target.²³

They can only speak by Allah's permission and even then, they will only be allowed to say whatever Allah sends down on them - whatever Allah tells them to say. Whatever Allah reveals to them to say, will only be correct and accurate. Allah will not lie, nor will he be inaccurate in anything.

The reason for mentioning the spirit is because Gabriel is the angel that brings down the Qur'ān, which the disbelievers were mocking at the beginning of the surah. The permission to speak from Allah will go to the spirit and the angels.²⁴ *Ṣawāb* can refer to two things. What Allah commands them to say, and secondly, the Qur'ān itself. *Ṣawāb* means something that descends from above and is accurate. The Qur'ān descends from Allah to the earth via the spirit, and whatever it says will be proven to be accurate on judgment day. The disbeliever who used to mock it will be brought forward, and then he will be shown his mockery of the Qur'ān, the verses that he used to mock, will be read to him, as he sees with his own eyes the truth of what he used to mock. Raḥmān

Notice again how Allah calls Himself Raḥmān. Again, the obvious feeling induced when reading all of this is fear, but Allah says that the judge on that day is the Raḥmān, the exceedingly loving who forgives and ignores faults. One who is more loving than a mother to her child. Earlier we saw the graphic descriptions of the torments of Hellfire. This verse and the use of the word Raḥmān really force reflection. It forces you to think the other way around. Instead of having pity on them and questioning Allah's justice, ask what horrid actions must people have done to be subjected to everlasting punishment from Raḥmān Himself.

²² Q. 16:102

²³ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1186

²⁴ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 25

ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ ^ص فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا

That is the day of truth. Then whosoever so desires, let him take a place of return with His Rabb

That is the day of truth - That is the day characterized by truth and justice. Only the truth will be spoken that day. No false word will be uttered, nothing inaccurate or faulty will be spoken or done. Everything will be true, accurate and correct. No injustice shall be done, no one will be falsely accused or acquitted, no one will be falsely thrown into the fire, nothing false will occur.

You will either have Allah show you exceedingly profuse love and care, or you will be subjected to justice. No injustice or anything false shall be carried out. Those who entered Hell, were not dealt with unjustly, but truthfully and justly.

Then whosoever so desires, let him take a place of return to His Rabb - Ma'āb (place of return) is the same word that Allah used for Hellfire with regards to the disbelievers in ayah 20

لِّلطَّغِينِ مَآبًا

For the Ṭāghīn, a place of return

Whosoever wants, then let him choose to return to Allah instead of the fire. The use of the word *Rabb* again is profound which means a caretaker, a nurturer, and an upbringer. The one who takes care of you, who nurtured you, and provided for you, who took care of you and protected you. You have the choice to return to Him and you can deduce yourself what He will do to you. He is your Rabb, your loving caretaker. Go and return to His love and care.

This answers why Allah presented such graphic descriptions of Hellfire coupled with the mentions of extraordinary comfort in paradise. He has shown you the two destinations. You clearly see what is behind each door. Now, make a choice. Allah, or the fire.

إِنَّا أَنذَرْنَكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ يَلَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تَرَبًّا

We, like no other, have warned you of a near punishment. The Day man will observe what his two hands put forth as the disbeliever says, “Oh, I wish that I were dust!”

The dual use of the majestic pronoun We, creates exclusivity and restriction. We, *like none other*, have warned you...

The descriptions of Hellfire were quite graphic weren't they? Have you seen any scripture describe it in such graphic details? Such graphic descriptions of Hell are found in only the Qur'ān. Other scriptures like the New Testament will call it a lake of fire, but the Qur'ān describes in such details, it makes you uneasy, which is the entire purpose itself. You can feel it, visualize it, picture it happening in front of you. We have warned you, in this surah, of a punishment that will occur very soon, in a manner no one ever has.

as the disbeliever says, “Oh, I wish that I were dust!” - imagine being given your record on judgment day while there is another person beside you who is already reading his record. You have not yet started to read, but you hear that person say “ *I wish I were dust!*” What will this do to you? It will terrify you. You will pray for the life of you that things turn out right.

The Patient God

Surah 79: Al- Nāzi‘āt



وَالَّذِينَ غَرَقًا

By those who extract deeply while drowning

وَالَّذِينَ نَشْطًا

By those who release gently

وَالَّذِينَ سَبَحًا

By those who glide as in swimming

فَالسَّيِّئَاتِ سَبَقًا

Then reach quickly

فَالْمُدْبِرَاتِ أَمْرًا

And do tadbīr of all commands

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ

The day the trembling one trembles

تَتَّبِعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ

Subsequent ones follow it

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ

Hearts that day, will move up

أَبْصَرُهَا خَشَعَتِ

Its eyes, brought low

وَالَّذِينَ غَرَقًا

By those who extract deeply while drowning

All of these oaths are very generic. Instead of diving deep into different interpretations presented by scholars, I will only present the best opinion that stays true to the language and context of the surah. I will not dive into each opinion and explain they do not add up.

This oath refers to the reins of the horses pulled deeply back. This is a scene of a raid. Before their initial charge, the horsemen are pulling the reins back deeply to hold their horses back from charging. This opinion is present in major works of tafsir²⁵ although it is not regarded as the preferred position by them, because they preferred the position that these oaths refer to angels who take out the souls from the bodies. In my opinion, the most consistent position based on the context of the surah is that these oaths refer to horses carrying out a raid.

وَالَّذِينَ نَشِطًا

By those who release gently

This refers to the reins being released, allowing the horses to finally charge at the enemy.

وَالَّذِينَ سَبَحًا

By those who glide as in swimming

²⁵ The most major figure to hold this position is 'Aṭā' ibn Abī Rabāḥ, the famous early Meccan scholar from the Tābi'īn, and a major student of Ibn 'Abbās. See also al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 24, p. 64

Sabh literally means to swim while not submerging entirely.

When the reins are released, the horses charge. Arabia was and still is mostly a desert. When the horses run on a vast desert field, it seems to the naked eye as if they are floating over it. You cannot see their legs touching the ground for the most part because of sheer speed. The scene is of horses running extremely fast.

فَالسَّيِّدُ سَبَقًا

Hence, reach quickly

This is the ayah that makes it convincing to me it is referring to war horses because all the three actions that came earlier, lead to this one result. Because of what happens in the first, second, and third ayah, they reach their destinations swiftly, in the blink of an eye. In addition, it also refers to the fact that the raid has ended successfully because the Qur'ān itself has used this word in the meanings of victory and overpowering. (see 29: 4 and 56: 60) So they reached their destination quickly, and in the blink of an eye, overpowered their enemies.

Many people render this verse as, "Then race with each other" but this is incorrect because the root itself is used without adding the extra Alif after the second root letter. Had it been referring to a race where they were trying to get in front of each other, the word سباقا would have been used instead of سبقا.

فَالْمُدِيرِ أَمْرًا

Hence carry out plans/ commands thoroughly

The letter *Fa* can indicate two things; an order in time and it can also denote a causal meaning. Here, it has a causal meaning. It refers to the fact that their entire goal was to defeat the enemy which they have achieved. Because of all this swift and quick descent and raid, they have carried out the plan they had of defeating their enemy. The raid has been completed and the enemies overwhelmed.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ

The day the trembler trembles

A sudden change of subject. The previous scene describes a swift raid on a party. What happens to the raided party when they suddenly find themselves in a raid in the blink of an eye? They panic, there is chaos and confusion. They are gripped by fear and uncertainty. The raiders shook them up, they made them tremble in fear.

Similarly, there is a day that will come suddenly, carry out its raid swiftly and flawlessly, leaving you all dumbfounded, confused and trembling in fear.

The trembler - an object that makes something else tremble - is the earth. In the previous surah, the Qur'ān already mentioned the massive earthquakes that occur on judgment day. Those earthquakes will make the earth tremble and shake violently, and also terrify everyone on its surface.

Just as the horse riders were pulling the reins of the horses back and holding them back from charging, so has Allah been holding back the reins of the earth. The earth has been waiting to shake and tremble violently because of the amount of sin happening on it. Allah has been holding it back. It wants to take its revenge on those who sin and commit evil on it, but Allah is holding its reins back but one day, He will release the reins, and let it quake and tremble, and take its revenge.

تَتَّبِعُهَا الرَّاْدِفَةُ

Subsequent ones follow it

This refers to the events of judgment day that follow this initial shaking and trembling of the earth. After being shaken and terrified by these violent earthquakes, further terrifying events follow such as angels being gathered, the records being presented, Hell being laid bare for all to see, and ultimately, judgment itself. These events will be mentioned later in the surah. The word *Rādīfah* (translated as subsequent ones) has the Ta marbūṭah at the end which can be used for singular feminine as well as for multiple inanimate things. Therefore, it refers to multiple events that follow the earthquake on judgment day. Allah does not specify the nature of those events because it is understood from the context. What is being said is - Subsequent terrifying events will follow the initial earthquakes.

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ

Hearts that day, will move up

أَبْصَرُهَا خَشَعَةً

Its eyes, brought low

Hearts will tremble like the earth. First during the initial raid, then during all the subsequent events. *Wājifah* (move up) at its root means for something to move away from its original place.²⁶ Hearts will skip their places in horror.

The eyes refer to the eyes of the heart because the pronoun goes back to the heart. This refers to understanding and perceptions. We see with our eyes in the head but our feelings and emotions such as fear are inside the chest and these for the most part, influence our behaviour. Hearts will move up, but the understanding people held within them will be brought low. Now what is it specifically referring to? This will be answered by the surah itself in the very last verse. We will move with the flow and leave it off until then.

يَقُولُونَ أَأَنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ

They are saying, “Will we indeed be forced to return to the Hāfirah?”

There is a lot of emphasis placed inside this ayah. The phrasing of it as a question with the letter lām which is explicitly used to place emphasis, denotes their mockery. They are mocking and making fun of this idea. Are we really to be returned to the *Hāfirah*? Seriously? *Hāfirah* at its root was used for a well or pit that was dug into the earth and then widened beyond its size, but the root was also used for the starting or initial point from which one starts digging this well. Hence, it came to be used to mean the start or beginning of something.²⁷

Will we indeed be returned to the *Hāfirah*? Will we indeed be returned to start life all over again?

أَوَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظْمًا تَنَحَّرَةً

Even when we have become hollow bones?

²⁶ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 320

²⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 464

When the strongest structure in the human body, the bones themselves, have become hollow and decayed?

قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذَا كَرَّ خَاسِرَةٌ

They said, That, then, would be a worthless cycle

The normal flow is not to include the words “*They said*.” It should be - *They are saying, “Will we indeed be forced to return to the Hāfirah? Even when we have become hollow bones? That, then, would be a worthless cycle.”*

“*They said*” is extra and in the past tense as opposed to “*they are saying*” which is in the present. This is to show two different intentions they had behind each of these sayings. Allah uses the present tense to describe their continuous and consistent rejection, while He uses the past tense to describe their mockery. They continuously deny and reject it whenever it is brought up, and in one of their private gatherings, they even mocked it.

Their mockery is blatant here. If we are indeed returned back after having become decayed bones, then we truly will be losers because of rejecting it. Yeah, really! And the one who is warning us of it - this Muhammad, he would truly be the one who wins. Like that could ever happen!

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ

But it is but one Zajrah

Zajrah comes from the root *zāy jīm rā'* which was used for

- A camel whose vertebrates had become weak or broken, or who had collapsed due to an injury
- Giving birth
- Forcing an animal to stand up and walk.

The core meaning is of a forceful separation or distancing; like the vertebrates that separate from each other due to a severe injury, and the separation of the newborn from the mother during birth.²⁸

Zajrah is the forceful expulsion or tearing of something from what it was previously attached to. A single force that drives them out.

As you can see, one of the root usages of *Zajrah* was giving birth, which is the forceful expulsion of the newborn from the mother's body. The previous verses describe the violent quaking and shaking of earth on judgment day. The earth will forcefully expel the life hidden inside it and throw them out to the open with its violent shaking. It will only need one tremble to expel them. When the earthquake begins, the very first shake will be enough to expel them.

When referring to the horses it refers to the letting go of the reins. The reins have been pulled back deeply, and with great tension. When the hand pulling it back separates from the rein, and stops holding the horse back, that is *Zajrah*. It will only need one *Zajrah*, one release of the rein, and all of a sudden, they will find themselves in the *Sāhirah*.

فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ

And suddenly, they will be at the Sāhirah.

Sāhirah is a tricky word. At its root, it means constant and continuous activity such as the continuous flow of milk and blood through veins as well as for a water stream.²⁹ This came to be used for a person that did not sleep during the night since his activities did not cease even at night as *Lisān al Arab* points out

يَسْرُ سَهْرًا، فَهُوَ سَاهِرٌ: لَمْ يَنَمْ لَيْلًا

*Sahir is a person who did not sleep at night*³⁰

So *Sāhirah* means a sleepless night.

Suddenly, they will find themselves in a sleepless night. When you are suddenly raided by the horse riders, you wake up abruptly and look around in confusion at the chaos.

²⁸ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 880

²⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 1092

³⁰ *Lisān al Arab*, vol. 7, p. 287

Just as you will become sleepless and terrified in such a raid, so will you find yourself in a sleepless and chaotic night on judgment day after Allah lets loose the reins of the earth and it expels you out.

Sāhirah, can also mean a place with continuous activity. All of a sudden, they will be at the *Sāhirah* - at a place hustling and bustling with life. In a plain full of human beings with blood flowing through their veins.

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰ

Did the news of Mūsā reach you?

A complete change of subject once again, but just like last time, it flows beautifully. First let us look at this passage as a whole and break down its language, then we will tie it all together.

إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

When his Lord called to him in the sacred valley of Ṭuwā

Ṭuwā means something that is folded up. This either refers to the physical features of the land itself or to the fact that it is a land of multiple blessings as if blessings are folded or stacked up one on top of another like a piece of cloth.

أَذْهَبَ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ

Go to Pharaoh for he has transgressed

Same word as in the last surah, al- Naba', *Tāghīn* which literally means floodwater that submerges everything inside it. When applied to humans, it refers to a human being who commits all sorts of sins, submerging all good inside him in its darkness and even oppressing others around him. Pharaoh had transgressed all limits set by God and was oppressing people, so Allah sent Moses to him to make him repent.

فَقُلْ هَلْ لَّكَ إِلَىٰ أَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ

Then say to him, “Would you achieve tazkiyyah?”

I left the word *Tazkiyyah* untranslated though it is normally translated as *purification*. This is true but fails to capture the whole picture. The root of this word is زَكَّى which was used for:

- Fertile land
- Growth and increase in crops

A land is only made fertile, and its crops increased in both quantity and quality, through proper irrigation.

Look at how earlier, Allah described revelation as water and hence life flowing out from the sacred valley of Ṭuwā. Revelation is to the soul what water is to the body. Moses asks Pharaoh if he would be willing to give life to his soul. If he will let that water - revelation - nourish the garden of his soul to make it lush, green, and pure.

وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَخْشَىٰ

And if I guide you to your Master, so you may fear and change?

Khashyah was used at its root for lush plants that turned dry, and for good crops that turned black.³¹ It was used to mean ‘fear’ because fear is something that dries you up inside; but it also implies a change of state like those plants that underwent a complete change and turned black. It is one thing to have fear, but it is another when that fear changes you. *Khashyah* is a fear that changes your behaviour because you are afraid of the consequences otherwise. Pharaoh was being told to fear the inevitable consequences of what he was doing and hence, repent from his ways.

فَأَرَاهُ الْآيَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ

So he showed him the greatest sign

Whatever it was it is not specified. Scholars dived deeply into which one was the biggest sign Moses brought but it is not specified, so we will not indulge in either and remain true to the words of the surah. All we need to know here is that Pharaoh was shown the greatest possible sign to prove Moses was indeed sent by God.

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ

³¹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 559

But he denied and did not bend

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَىٰ

Then he turned his back, striving

He turned his back, he went in the opposite direction as Moses. He rejected him, turned away, and then strove in that path against Allah.

فَخَشَرَ فَأَنَادَىٰ

So he gathered people and called out

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَىٰ

Then he said, "I am your Lord, the most high."

We covered in the previous surah that *Rabb* is the caretaker, the nurturer and a loving Master who takes care of his subject. Pharaoh is saying that he is a better guide than Moses to the people. His way of life is what will take care of you, of what will suffice you, not the God of Moses. I will take better care of you and your souls than God and His revelation. We hear this today as well when people call Islam this and that and claim that if you follow it, you lose out and live in misery etc.

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْأَخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَىٰ

So Allah seized him in exemplary punishment for the last and the first.

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِّمَن يَخْشَىٰ

Indeed in that is a lesson for whosoever has khashyah

The first transgression being his tyranny before Moses came to him, and the last one being his rejection of clear and blatant signs presented to him by Moses.

Now, how is this all connected with what has come before in this surah? At the beginning, Allah mentioned how He has been holding the earth back from shaking and trembling violently because of the sins and transgressions committed on it. Here, He mentions how Pharaoh had transgressed all bounds set by God even before Moses reached him. Just as Allah is holding back the earth from trembling

and quaking violently, so had Allah been holding back His punishment from Pharaoh. He had been holding back the reins of His punishment. It could also be that the earth, seeing the transgressions of Pharaoh, wanted to quake and exact vengeance on him, but Allah held it back because He first wanted to give Pharaoh a chance to repent and redeem himself. So He sent Moses to him. When Pharaoh did not bend, Allah let loose the reins of His punishment on him and made him an example. This is consistent with other passages in the Qur'ān such as:

وَمَا كُنَّا مُعَذِّبِينَ حَتَّى نَبْعَثَ رَسُولًا

We were never to punish until We had sent a messenger. (17:15)

Indeed, in that, is a lesson for whoever would have khashyah - For the one who, unlike pharaoh, changes himself and repents in fear of Allah letting loose the reins of His punishment otherwise.

This is the end of the brief mention of Moses and Pharaoh.

أَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خَلْقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا

Are you a more difficult creation or the heaven? He constructed it

رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا

He raised its ceiling and proportioned it

وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا

He darkened its night and extracted its brightness.

وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا

The Earth, after all that, did He flatten and spread.

أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا

He extracted from it its water and its pasture

Remember how disbelievers mocked the idea of resurrection after having become hollow, decayed bones? Allah counters that He created the heavens, which are a far greater creation than you. If he can create all that, what are you?

The first thing you need to remember is that the Qur'ān is not a scientific book. It is a book with remarkable linguistic imagery. For example, we say in our daily lives the sun sank into the ocean. Did it really sink? No, it is just language to express how it seems to us when we look at the sunset. This is common to all languages without exception. Figurative language to convey scenes as they appear to our eyes, as well as to depict scenes and induce emotions. This is as old as language itself. Every single language has it and we see it most commonly in poetry.

Notice how Allah says, He darkened its night and brought out its brightness. He then uses the same language with the earth and says, He brought out its water and pasture to link the two. Water and pasture sustain life, remove them and life ceases. Allah called the day life itself in the previous surah. Now He connects it with the water and pasture produced out of the earth. Without these two, water and vegetation, all life would cease. Hence, Allah is saying that He made the earth something that gives and sustains life itself. Earth consists of life itself. Earlier, we saw how it will only take one *Zajrah* for us to be resurrected into the *Sāhirah*. Just as the earth conceals life inside it in the form of seeds, so will it conceal human beings inside it. Just as the seed only needs water to bring it to life, so will human beings need a command of Allah, one *Zajrah*, sent from the sky like the rain, to bring us to life.

وَالْجِبَالِ أَرْسَاهَا

And the mountains did He firmly fix below

This refers to the deep root of the mountains that also helps in maintaining the crustal balance of the earth which was mentioned in the previous surah as well.

مَتَاعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَمَ لَكُمْ

As a provision for you and your grazing livestock for a time

First he created life, then created the conditions that sustain life. The word **متاع** contains the meaning of temporariness inside its root. It means something enjoyable that lasts for a specific interval.³²

Allah is criticizing people who get lost in this world. Imagine a father sends his child to college in a distant town where the child will live in a hostel, but the father will manage the expenses. In his expenses, the father gives him some extra money with which the child can enjoy himself as well, subject to obvious restrictions. Imagine if the child neglects his studies, misuses that money, and wastes it all on entertainment. The father sent the child to the college for a purpose, to study, and gave him some extra money so he can enjoy himself as well because humans not only need it, but it will actually help the child in better focusing on studies. The child forgot his main purpose of studying, and made entertainment his entire goal. Same is the case in this ayah. Allah sent you on earth with a purpose, and provided you things with which you can enjoy yourself as well but people get lost in enjoyment and entertainment, and neglect their main purpose.

This is the root of all sins on earth, the chase of pleasure. If sins felt horrendous, nobody would do them. They feel good, that is why people do them. Pharaoh sinned and oppressed people because that sensation of power and might felt good. They chase pleasures, and make them their goal of life, and neglect their true purpose. The earth is itching to exact revenge on people for this, for their sins, for their blind chasing of pleasures, but Allah is holding it back just like He did with Pharaoh. But...

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَةُ الْكُبْرَىٰ

Then when there comes the greatest Overwhelming Calamity

When the overwhelming calamity - a calamity that overwhelms all earth and all those on it - comes, Allah will let the earth exact its revenge.

The word **Ṭāmmah** is translated as **overwhelming calamity**. At its root, it was used for the sea, but more commonly for covering or sealing something like a well completely with dirt. This is the calamity that overwhelms everyone. It will happen when Allah lets loose the reins of the earth that are holding it back.

يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَىٰ

³² Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm, vol. 4, p. 2024

The Day when man will remember that for which he strove

The same word that he used for Pharaoh when he turned back and strove against God. Man will dearly recall where he directed all his efforts for. By human nature, people only come to their senses when they face consequences. If someone continues on sinning without facing any consequences, will he ever repent? Human beings by nature come to their senses when they face the consequences of their actions and this is what happens that day.

وَبَرَزَتْ أَجْحِمٌ لِّمَن يَرَىٰ

As the burning blaze is exposed for those who see

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَىٰ

So for the one who transgressed

The same word was used for Pharaoh, for transgressing all limits of Allah and rising above them.

وَأَثَرُ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا

And preferred the lowly life of the world

The word **أثر** is translated as *preferred* but at its root, it means the *remains or remnants of something*.³³ This came to be used in the meaning of preferring or choosing something because of its lasting qualities. You choose it because you think it will remain and persevere.

These people chose the worldly, lowly life because they thought their pleasures would remain. They can keep chasing pleasures and make them their entire goal in life, without any regard for the fact that it will all end one day. This goes back to the word **متاع** which had the meaning of something being temporal inside it.

فَإِنَّ أَجْحِمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

Then indeed, the burning blaze shall be the refuge of such

³³ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 237

There is an extra pronoun here before the word *refuge*. Since Allah calls both paradise and Hell “*refuge*”, the extra pronoun denotes that Hereafter alone, is the place of refuge and stay. A refuge - be it the fire or the garden - that actually lasts unlike this world. It could also mean that the burning blaze alone, and nothing else, will be his place of refuge.³⁴

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ

But as for he who feared the standing of his Lord and prevented the soul from worthless inclination

The word *Hawā* is translated as *inclinations* but at its root it literally means the air.³⁵ It refers to worthless, vain thoughts that enter your heart and brain continuously. It is like one thought comes into the heart and he follows it, then another comes and he goes after it. He sees one sin he goes after, he sees another and he goes after that one. One sin after another, one pleasure after another, one unlawful relation after another, one false indulgence after another. He forgot his main purpose like the student mentioned above, and made his pleasures the main goal of his life. But the one who resists all this,

فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَىٰ

Then indeed, Paradise will be the refuge of such

Again, the extra pronoun denotes that this life of the hereafter is the real refuge. A refuge that actually lasts unlike the world or it could also mean that paradise alone, and nothing else will be his place of refuge.³⁶

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسَاهَا

They ask you about the Hour: when will it be imposed

³⁴ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 28, p. 282.

³⁵ *Al-Muʿjam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Muʿaṣṣal li-Āfāz al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2276

³⁶ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 28, p. 284.

Remember how Allah constantly used the word *Khashyah*, which means a fear that is induced because of certain knowledge that produces a change in you? After hearing of all these descriptions regarding judgment day, these people are still mocking. Like Pharaoh, they have turned back and strove in the opposite direction. This is why the word *Ayyān* is used which is emphatic. WHEN is its arrival? WHEN will it come? You promise us it will come but WHEN is it? They are mocking it. Just like Pharaoh, they have turned their backs and are striving in the opposite direction, which they will dearly regret when the overwhelming calamity comes. For now, Allah is holding back the reins of His punishment from them.

فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرِهَا

In what position are you to mention it

This can mean two things. First, it could be directed to the prophet to say that neither you nor anyone else has any knowledge of it. Secondly, it could be a rebuke of their question. It could be that after the word *فِيمَ* (in what), the words ‘this question’ are omitted. In which case, it would be to condemn their question of it - of what worth or importance is this question? The next part of the verse would then be indicating the role of the prophet. You are only to mention and remind people of it, not to respond to these futile questions of theirs.³⁷

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَىٰ

To your Lord alone is its finality

There is an implied omitted word in this verse as well. Thus the meaning is: To your Lord belongs the knowledge of its finality/end-time. The advancement of the word “To your Lord” is to convey that to Allah alone, and none else, belongs this knowledge and this is an example of restricting an attribute to its subject.³⁸

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مِّنْ يَّخْشَاهَا

You are only a warner for those who have khashyah of it

³⁷ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 53.

³⁸ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 96

Khashyah has been mentioned multiple times in this surah already and here it is again. The Prophet can only warn those who, in fear of the day of judgment, change themselves. The fact that they will stand in front of Allah grips them in fear, and leads them to change themselves. Like the lush crops that turn black, they change and let go of evil inside them, and start fresh.

كَانَهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحًى

It will be, on the Day they see it, as though they had not remained except for an afternoon or a morning thereof

This verse ties the surah together.

Remember how they preferred this worldly life thinking its pleasures would last? When they wake up on judgment day, they will be convinced they only remained one afternoon or a morning. Their whole life, it was so fleeting and short to them, that looking back, it was like one morning or afternoon. It is like a man who tastes something sweet like honey, closes his eyes and gets lost in its sweetness. Then when he opens his eyes, he's in an entirely different world, with chaos and rupture all around him.

Earlier in the surah, Allah had said:

أَبْصَرَهَا خُسْعَةً

Its eyes, brought low

This world came out to be worthless and short-lived. The person who preferred it, and ran after it while neglecting the hereafter, on the day of judgment, will he not be humiliated by this fact? This world was not even one morning or afternoon, yet I got lost in its sweetness. He will be humiliated by the fact that he fell for such a worthless thing so easily.

The lofty perceptions and understanding people had regarding worldly life will be brought low and humiliated. They thought the worldly life and its pleasures to be lasting. Now, their lofty opinions of it have been turned into a recognition of its worthlessness and fleeting nature. They now think they lived just one morning or afternoon, let alone one complete day. Previously, they considered the world worthwhile and of great value, but now they consider it worthless.

The Dormant Seed

Surah 80: 'Abasa



عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى

He frowned and turned away

أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى

That a blind one came to him

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكِّي

Yet what can make you discover that he may nourish himself

أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الْذِكْرَى

Or be strongly affected and the reminder might benefit him

أَمَّا مَنْ أَسْتَغْنَى

As for the one who deems himself without need

فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى

Then you, to such a person, give attention

وَمَا عَلَيْكَ إِلَّا يَزَكِّي

While no blame is on you that he does not nourish himself



To understand this surah, we need to first look at the context of revelation.

حَدَّثَنَا سَعِيدُ بْنُ يَحْيَى بْنِ سَعِيدٍ الْأُمَوِيُّ، حَدَّثَنِي أَبِي قَالَ، هَذَا مَا عَرَضْنَا عَلَى هِشَامِ بْنِ عُرْوَةَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ، عَنْ عَائِشَةَ، قَالَتْ
أُنْزِلَ : (عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى) فِي ابْنِ أُمِّ مَكْتُومٍ الْأَعْمَى أَتَى رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ فَجَعَلَ يَقُولُ يَا رَسُولَ اللَّهِ أَرَشِدْنِي وَعِنْدَ
رَسُولِ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ رَجُلٌ مِنْ عُظَمَاءِ الْمُشْرِكِينَ فَجَعَلَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ يُعْرِضُ عَنْهُ وَيَقْبِلُ عَلَى
الْآخِرِ وَيَقُولُ أَتَرَى بِمَا أَقُولُ بَأْسًا فَيَقَالَ لَا . فَقَالَ هَذَا أَنْزَلَ . قَالَ أَبُو عِيسَى هَذَا حَدِيثٌ حَسَنٌ غَرِيبٌ . وَرَوَى بَعْضُهُمْ هَذَا
الْحَدِيثَ عَنْ هِشَامِ بْنِ عُرْوَةَ عَنْ أَبِيهِ قَالَ أَنْزَلَ : (عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى) فِي ابْنِ أُمِّ مَكْتُومٍ . وَلَمْ يَذْكُرْ فِيهِ عَنْ عَائِشَةَ

“He frowned and turned away” was revealed about Ibn Umm Maktum the blind man. He came to the Messenger of Allah saying: ‘O Messenger of Allah! Guide me.’ At that time, there was a revered man from the idolaters with the Messenger of Allah. So the Messenger of Allah turned away from him and faced the other man, saying: ‘Do you think that there is something wrong with what I am saying?’ He said: ‘No.’ So it was about that that it was revealed.³⁹

These were very high ranking officials from the polytheists. In early days, Islam was still new and the few Muslims that there were, were heavily persecuted and oppressed. If any of the strong and influential leaders had become Muslim, it would have been a source of great relief for the Muslims because with it would have come the support, whether financial or otherwise, that they would need to at least hold their own. A high ranking leader would also bring his followers to Islam as well. So naturally, the Prophet was really eager that these people accept Islam.

As is the case with high ranking officials even today, they do not meet in public places. If you were to meet the president of a country, you would either meet him in the president’s house, or at a very reserved, very luxurious, closed off place. You will not meet him at a random cafe on the street corner. Similarly here, this was a special appointment with the Prophet, in a reserved setting, where others would not be allowed to come in.

³⁹ Jami` at-Tirmidhi 3331

Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum was blind and he did not even know that the Prophet was in a special meeting. So he barged straight in and started asking questions about Islam. This, of course, is not a nice thing to do and high ranking officials do not take kindly to such incursions. The prophet frowned at this, which the blind could not see, and turned away from him to face the officials and preach to them. It was at this very moment that revelation started coming down to him.



عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى

He frowned and turned away

It is quite incredible how the Qur'ān says he turned away. The prophet turned towards the officials. Instead of saying you turned towards them, the Qur'ān says you turned away from the Muslim.

أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى

That a blind one came to him

The reason why the Prophet got angry was not that a blind person came to him, but that any person should interfere with a reserved setting. We would not welcome it as well. Allah calls him a blind one, not to degrade, but as a recognition of the effort he put in. Blind people face difficulties we may never know. God forbid any one of us loses his eye sight. It is not easy for them to even walk. Allah recognizes that despite being blind and facing challenges associated with it, he made the effort to get to know Allah and his religion.

This verse has been used as the basis for the higher reward reserved for people with special needs and disabilities. A person will be given reward for his effort, and since people with disabilities have to put in more effort, and face more challenges, they will be given more reward for the same actions.

So Allah recognizes the effort this man put in despite being blind and he reprimands His prophet for neglecting him.

وَمَا يَذُرِّكَ لَعَلَّهُ يُزَكِّي

What can make you discover that he may purify/ nourish himself

His blindness will not be any hindrance to spiritual purification. Life is unequal and harsh to many. Some people are born with disabilities, some people develop them later in life. These people never get the same opportunities as other people. They experience thorough inequality, and heartbreaking neglect. Allah regards their efforts more than others with no disabilities. That blind man who came running to learn the religion, will be rewarded more than a person with sight, who came running in the same manner, to learn the same religion.

Physical disabilities are a barrier for material success but they will never be a barrier for spiritual success - the success that really matters to Allah. *What can make you discover that he may nourish himself?* Yes, he is blind, but what makes you think he will not benefit from revelation just like other people? He is the same. His eyes are blind but his soul is not. He is just like other people, with the same spiritual potential. His physical disabilities will not hold him back from benefitting from revelation, as a matter of fact, he may get even more because he had to put extra effort.

The same word that was used in the previous surah with Pharaoh is used here. The Qur'ān drew imagery there. It means to purify oneself. Literally, it means to water the garden of our soul.

أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرُ

Or be strongly reminded and being reminded might benefit him

The word Dhikrā is translated as reminder. The words “strongly reminded” use the same root as well. At its root, Dhikrā means strength.⁴⁰ When this root is applied to speech, it means speech that has a strong impact on the listener. The Qur'ān is called Dhikr because it reminds people of what they are neglectful of in a strong, impactful and effective manner. Here, Allah first mentioned the blind person purifying himself and second being reminded by the Qur'ān. That is; either instruction and guidance may produce new understanding within him regarding what he did not previously know, or he may remember something about which he had been heedless.⁴¹

أَمَّا مَنْ أَسْتَفْنَىٰ

As for the one who deems himself without need

⁴⁰ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʿAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p.718

⁴¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 107

Who does not feel in need of moral guidance. We see this with the wealthy often. I have everything in my life, all that I ever wanted. What do I need religion for? What can religion give me since I am not lacking in anything? This person is compared to Pharaoh in the previous surah who, drunk in the power and riches he owned, considered himself free of the need to obey God. This attitude runs from Pharaoh to the common man. Pharaoh had a kingdom, but others might only own a house, a car, a wife and children to reach the same attitude and you do not have to look far to see this phenomenon. There are Pharaohs everywhere.

فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّى

Then you, to such a person, give attention

A flip of the coin. A lot of emphasis is being placed. The words “*Then you*” as well as “*for such a person*” are both advanced for emphasis. Then you - a prophet of God - out of all people - to such a person - to such an evil person - give attention?

Allah flips the coin. They are of great worth in their own eyes and also in the eyes of men, but Allah calls them worthless, and calls His prophet, who had no riches except the revelation from Allah, and who will live much of his life in poverty from this point on, the most honored. How can you, a man of such greatness, give attention to such a worthless human being?

Allah judges men by their character and their obedience to him. The blind one who came running to Allah is more worthy to Allah than the wealthy disbelievers who are viewed highly by men. The righteous prophet, who will go on to tie stones around his waist to deal with severe hunger-pangs because there was no food available to eat, and whose family would never eat a proper meal for three consecutive days until he passed away,⁴² is more honored in the sight of Allah.

وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزَكِّي

While no blame is on you that he does not purify/ nourish himself

Notice how it does not say “if he does not purify/ nourish” but says “that he does not purify/ nourish himself.” Allah is telling the prophet that the person he was teaching and talking to, he will not purify himself because he feels himself free of need.

وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى

⁴² Sahih al-Bukhari 5374

As for him who came to you with effort

In the last surah, Allah used the same word for Pharaoh as well as for the efforts that men will see on judgment day. Pharaoh turned his back to a prophet of God and strove in the opposite direction. This blind man comes running towards a prophet of God and hence, is striving in the correct direction. This is why Allah says next:

وَهُوَ يَخْشَى

And he does have khashyah

Same word as last surah. Unlike Pharaoh, he does have khashyah.

فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى

Then you, from him, turn away

Same structure as verse 6. Then you, out of all people, turn away from him? From such a noble person?

كَأَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ

No! It is a reminder

No! Stop and repent. This is a strong reminder. Perfect in itself. Whoever wants, let him be reminded and strengthened. Physical disabilities in no manner, make anyone less of a person. They are equal to Allah.

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَّرْهُ

Then whosoever wants, let him take heed from it, and be corrected.

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ

In honored scriptures

مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ

Lofty. Pure

When someone does not become guided by these words, it is not due to a fault in the Qur'ān but in the person himself. These scriptures are perfect, flawless and pure. They contain no error nor falsehood. Anyone who does not take guidance from them, is due to a fault in his own self.

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ

In hands of Safarah

The root meaning of the word *Safarah* is to uncover or reveal something.⁴³ They originally used it for a woman who uncovered her face, and for winds that scattered the clouds, revealing the blue sky above, as well as for writing, because writing reveals what is held inside. *Safar* from the same root means to travel because in those times, when someone had to walk large distances on foot or on camels under the scorching sun of the desert, such a tough task would reveal the real character of the traveler, whether he was strong enough to sustain it or not.

Safarah is generic and can mean a number of things and much has been said about it. It can refer to angels that travel with revelation from Allah down to the prophets. It can also refer to the angels that write down the word of God that they hear into the preserved tablet in heaven. I prefer the first position that it refers to angels that travel and bring down the revelation from God to the prophets on earth because as we will see, this ties in perfectly with the context of the surah.

كَرَامٍ بَرَّةٍ

Kirām, Bararah

Kirām means that these angels are free of any defect and flaw in their domain. We will cover the root meaning two surahs later, in surah al- Infiṭār when the same root will be used for Allah. When applied to Allah, it means perfection in all domains and spheres. When applied to anyone else such as these angels, it means perfection and being free of flaws in a specific domain only. When it comes to passing down revelation to the prophets on earth, these angels are perfect and flawless in this regard. They convey it as it is meant to be, in the manner it is meant to be. *Bararah* refers to constant and stable righteousness and we will cover it in detail in surah al- Infiṭār as well. These angels are sinless and comply fully to the command of Allah. They do not corrupt revelation, nor alter it in any shape or form. They are perfectly obedient to Allah. The purpose of this verse as well as this passage is to show that

⁴³ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 1023

revelation, its source, and its messengers are pure and without fault. Hence, the fault lies only in the one who rejects it, not in revelation itself.

قَتَلَ الْإِنْسَنُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ

May man be killed. How ungrateful/ disbelieving is he!

For rejecting revelation, despite it being so lofty, pure and without any blemish. The fault lies in man for rejecting revelation because revelation is perfect and flawless.

The word *kufr*, is normally translated as 'disbelief' or 'ingratitude.' This is the word the Qur'ān has used for a disbeliever - a Kafir, but its meaning goes deeper than simple rejection of faith.

Kufr comes from the root *kāf fā' rā'* which was used for:

- The leaves that cover what is inside the cluster of grapes
- The darkness and blackness of night
- A sown seed

The core concept is of completely covering something such that nothing remains visible.⁴⁴ A farmer was literally called a *Kafir*, because he sows or buries seeds underground and then covers them up completely. This is very important to note in the context of this surah.

Kufr firstly implies disbelief in Allah and also covering the seed of good placed inside us by Allah - the *fiṭrah*. This will be called to in this surah. It also refers to rejection of blessings as if covering them up and pretending they do not exist. The Qur'ān has used this word to refer to a disbeliever.

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ

From what substance did He create him?

There is a lot of تحقير (belittling and demeaning) in this verse. This verse is better put as - from what worthless thing did He create him? The high ranking official that turned away considered himself free of need to follow God. He had everything in life. This is pride. Allah is calling to account the humble origin of man. This human being was created from a disdained liquid. That little sperm drop needed a lot of maintenance and protection to impregnate the eggs inside the woman. He is not

⁴⁴ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 1907-1908

free of need. He needed constant protection and care to even bring him into existence. Yet how quickly he forgets it.

For the haughty and prideful, this also reminds him of his humble roots. You were a worthless little drop of a disdained liquid. How dare you show pride and haughtiness!

مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ

From a sperm-drop did He create him then determined for him.

Again the same tone and theme of harsh criticism. Imagine a father telling a disobedient son - "Do you know how much I spent on your education? \$200,000!" He could have just said, "I spent \$200,000 on your education!" That first question is to really drive the point home to his child and to intensify not only the harshness of his own statements, but also the magnitude of the child's disobedience.

From what worthless little thing did I create you? From a sperm-drop! This is your reality.

Then determined for him - A lot has been said regarding the meaning of these words. Scholars normally took them to mean the stages of creation, from the sperm drop to an infant, and then to the different stages of life such as a child, to youth to adulthood. Others said it refers to the proportioning of the limbs. I disagree with all of these because I want to remain true to the text of the surah.

This refers to two things, the path of life and the path that Allah has determined for all of us to follow - of obedience to him, of righteousness. We will see it come together later in the surah.

ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسْرَهُ

Then the path did He ease for him

This refers to two things, the path of this life as well as the path to righteousness. Both will be explained by Allah in this surah later on.

Allah made it easy for us to follow the path of righteousness. How did He do this? By placing inside us the seed of good - the *Fitrah*. We will connect it all together at the end when Allah Himself ties this all together but for now, Allah is saying that the

seed of goodness is already placed inside the human being by Him. You do not have to plant it anew, it is already there, Allah made it easy for you by placing it inside you already. It just needs to be watered with revelation. Then to make it even easier, Allah sent down the water itself - revelation. He planted the seed inside him, then sent down the water that nourishes it as well. How easy did He make it for man to follow righteousness!

Secondly, this refers to life itself, how Allah not only provided the means of survival, but of enjoyment as well. We will see this mentioned in detail later on.

ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ

Then He made him die, and then buried him

ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنشَرَهُ

Then when He willed, He resurrected him.

كَأَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَا أَمَرَهُ

No! He has not yet completed what He commanded him

This goes back to the present, to the ungrateful man. Notice the word 'yet', what is this referring to? Allah is not referring to a specific man but to all ungrateful men who consider themselves free of need. Who assume they do not need religion, or God. No matter who this person is, where he is, what his race or color is, if a person has this trait inside him, of deeming himself self sufficient and without need, he will not have completed what Allah commanded him to, regardless of what stage of life he is in. This is why the word 'yet' is used. As long as this quality is in you, you have not fulfilled Allah's rights on you, The initial interjection 'No!' is a call to desist from this behaviour, so man can finally fulfill what Allah commanded him. The next passage will tie the whole surah together.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ

Then let man look at his food

This is the passage that will tie the whole surah together. Allah will show us how He facilitated and eased this life as well as the spiritual path to righteousness for man.

أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا

At how we poured down water in abundance

Refers to rain.

ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا

Then we split the earth, thoroughly

When rain comes down, the earth opens up, allowing water to enter, penetrate and loosen the soil, and hence the soil cracks or splits. This can also refer to the germination of the seed after which the shoot shoots upwards and literally breaks the surface of the earth.

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا

So We grew within it grain

وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا

And grapes and fresh herbage

وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا

And olive and palm trees

وَحَدَائقَ غُلَبًا

And thick, dense gardens

وَفُكْهَةً وَأَبَا

And fruit and livestock pasture

مَتَاعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ

As a temporary enjoyment for you and your grazing livestock

In this last verse, there is a very strange word - أَب (livestock pasture) that has been the subject of much debate. We will not go into the details and I have only mentioned the meaning of the word after going through the debates and linguistic root.

What is the purpose of mentioning different types of plants and fruits? All of these produce different foods. The thing is, for us to merely survive, we do not need these different types of food. If the point was just survival, just a few types of foods, such as grains for example, or the fresh herbage that includes vegetables, just these would be fine. To really emphasize this point, Allah finishes by mentioning fruits. The word *Fākihah* at its root literally means to smile.⁴⁵ Fruits are delicious and their sweetness and amazing taste is enough to make you smile. But for our survival, we really do not need all these different types of foods.

Allah created things that not only ensure our survival, but also give us joy and happiness. Extra things, beyond what we need, for the sake of our enjoyment. Allah made different types of foods, and also made them taste delicious, just so we can enjoy ourselves. This is why he pairs many of these foods, that are often considered luxury, with necessities. Grain is a necessity. Grapes are often considered a luxury fruit and they are often misused for making intoxicants. Allah pairs grapes with fresh herbs inducing vegetables which are a necessary staple more often than not. He then pairs olives with palm trees. Arabs used the palm trees for a variety of purposes. They used the tree as a shade in their houses, They used its trunks as beams and roofs, its branches as walls and leaves as coverings. Everyday tools such as baskets, mats, ropes and containers were made from palm leaves and fiber. Whereas olives were a central part of their diet, with their oil mainly used as a topping on their dishes. Ultimately, all of these things come together in a garden. Allah is pairing what is necessary to survive, with what is extra and provides added luxury and joy. We are not living life just for the sake of it, but actually as a blessing, and Allah provides us the means to survive and to enjoy it as well.

This is how Allah eased and facilitated this life for us as He said earlier in verse 20, by providing us the means to enjoy ourselves in addition to mere survival. Without

⁴⁵ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1708

enjoyment, life would feel forced and prolonged. It wouldn't matter if you felt miserable as long as you survived. Allah provided us the means to be happy and to enjoy life in addition to ensuring our survival.

ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسْرُهُ

Then the path did He ease for him

The problem with the ingrate man is that he gets lost in these things that Allah provided to make his life easy and enjoyable. Lost in their sweetness, he closes his eyes and becomes oblivious to all the important things around him. You only live once, so enjoy it, they say. The Qur'ān says, enjoy yourselves yes, but do not get lost in their sweetness to neglect things that actually matter.

The Connection

In verse 17, Allah said:

قَتَلَ الْإِنْسَانَ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ

May man be killed. How ungrateful/disbelieving is he!

I mentioned before how the word *kufr* (translated as ungrateful/ disbelieving) actually means sowing seeds. A farmer was literally called a *kafir*. Inside the human being, there is a seed of goodness that Allah has placed called the *Fiṭrah*. This has been mentioned in many verses of the Qur'ān:

فَأَقِمْ وَجْهَكَ لِلدِّينِ حَنِيفًا فِطْرَتَ اللَّهِ الَّتِي فَطَرَ النَّاسَ عَلَيْهَا لَا تَبْدِيلَ لِخَلْقِ اللَّهِ ذَلِكَ الدِّينُ الْقَيِّمُ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ

So set your face to the religion, inclining to the pure faith -- Allah's original (Fiṭrah) upon which He originated (Fatara - from the same root as Fiṭrah) mankind. There is no changing Allah's creation. That is the right religion; but most men know it not. (30:30)

Man has buried this seed of faith and good that Allah placed inside him - the *Fiṭrah*. When rain comes from the sky, it makes its way through to the seed which germinates and produces plants. (verse 25) But when revelation comes from the sky, and finds its way to man, his seed does not germinate. This is why Allah first described the whole passage of revelation from the heavens down to the earth in verses 13-16. He contrasted it with rain. Just as rain comes down from the sky, so

does revelation. When rain comes down to the earth, it gives it life and makes the dry earth lush and green. Just so, revelation comes down from the sky and it gives life to dead hearts. Allah has already planted the seed inside every human being - *the fiṭrah*. Now Allah sends down water to make it germinate and grow, but man represses and buries this seed deep inside him, under the mud of sin and transgression against God.

Hence, Allah mentions how revelation is elevated, pure and lofty in verse 13-16. Revelation is pure and faultless, men do not respond to it due to faults of their own. The seed is buried deep inside, such that revelation cannot make its way to it due to the piles of mud of sin and disobedience, in its way.

In verse 20, Allah described how He facilitated and made it easy for human beings to follow the correct path of God. He planted the seed inside them, then sent down the water -revelation - to nourish and grow it. As a matter of fact, He poured down this water in torrents as He says in verse 25:

أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا

At how we poured down water in abundance

There is nothing to complain about. The seed is there, there is no shortage of water either, it is pouring down in abundance. Yet look at how ungrateful man is. He has buried that seed deep under the mud of sin, transgression, pride and arrogance, and refuses to let it grow.

قُتِلَ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ

May man be killed. How ungrateful/disbelieving is he!

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاخَّةُ

Then when there comes the Ṣākhah

Ṣākhah at its root means penetration into a soft object.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1200.

Just as the rain penetrates the earth, makes its way to the seed and gives it life, so will the command of Allah come, that will give us life inside earth. People have presented different opinions on it. Some said it is a deafening cry that penetrates the ears but I disagree. Firstly, the word is generic and does not specify its nature. Allah just describes it as something that penetrates and pierces through forcefully, and this is all we need to know because we can figure out the rest ourselves by looking at the context and the previous verses.

The disbeliever buried the seed deep inside him such that revelation could not reach it. This time, the command of Allah will penetrate the graves and force its way to the human being, regardless of how deeply buried inside the earth he is, and, unlike the last time, force him to respond to it, against his will.

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ

That day, man will flee from his brother

وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ

And his mother and his father

وَصَحْبَتِهِ وَبَنِيهِ

And his wife and his children

When it comes to materialistic people, you have to talk to them in their language. They understand the language of money, wealth and possessions. The one who sees himself free of the need to follow God's religion, does so mainly because of two things; money and family. On that day, firstly, the currency that will work is good deeds so there goes the money. With regards to family, you will desert your family in their times of need and run away from them because they would be asking you for good deeds. They will ask you to transfer some of your good deeds to them, just as you ask someone for money, but you will flee from them because you will only be worried about your own self.

Your children will do the same. They will run away from you just as you will run away from your own parents. Your brother will run away when you ask him to lend you his good deeds. Same for your wife. These things, which form the root of your pride, will come crashing down in a flash. You will experience the worst kind of betrayal. Imagine your own children and family running away hysterically from you, in your

time of utmost need. If that happens to you right now, it will break your heart. Well, it will happen to you eventually.

Hence, this is why you need God and religion. This is why you are not free of need as you presume yourself to be. Because the currency that will really work in the end, will be your deeds and actions, not money, and because your own loved ones, on whom you currently rely, that make you feel so fulfilled and free of any need, will desert and run away from you hysterically, in your worst moment of need.

لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يَغْنِيهِ

“For every man, that Day, will be a matter that frees him

This verse is a reality check. It literally uses the same word as verse 5:

أَمَّا مَنْ أَسْتَفْنَىٰ

As for the one who deems himself without need

It uses the same root, *Ghina*; just the different verbal form is used according to the context. The haughty man deems himself free of need to follow God right now because of money and family. On judgment day, his family will consider themselves free of the need to help him, or to interfere in his affairs. They will all have matters of their own, worries and stress of their own to deal with, so much so that they will free themselves of any responsibility towards him. This is why you need God. Even your own shadow leaves you at night. Your family will desert you when you really, actually need them. Pride rests on very flimsy foundations indeed.

وَجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ

Some faces, that Day, will be bright

ضَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ

Laughing, rejoicing

The word *Musfirah* is translated as bright. It comes from the same root as the word *Safarah* that was used in verse 15

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ

In hands of Safarah

As mentioned, the root meaning of this word is to uncover or expose something. The Arabs used this root for the dawn because it brightens and exposes everything with its light that was previously hidden in the night. Hence, this means faces that are bright and radiant like the dawn, but using the same root connects it with those angels that travel with revelation to the prophets which is especially important to note in light of the next verse. These angels are bringing down revelation, life itself. Allah compared revelation with life giving rain. In Surah al Naba' He associated the day and light with life just as we associate life with energy, vigour and brightness. This light of revelation, that nourished their hearts, will come out and be revealed on their faces. The light in their chests will come out and shine on their faces.

وَوَجْهِهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيَّاهُ غَبْرَةٌ

While some faces that day, will have dust on them

This again goes back to the buried and dormant seed. Remember how they buried their seed deep inside under mud piles of sin and transgression? So now, what was inside their chest is coming out and being revealed on their faces. Dust and sin. The light that was inside the breasts of the believers came out to be exposed on their faces while the dust and mounds of mud, under which they buried their seed, so that they could not nourish their seed nor bring it out to life, came out to be displayed for the disbelievers on their faces. Hence,

تَرْهَقَهَا قَتْرَةٌ

"Blackness will cover them

Sin is associated with blackness and gloom

أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجْرَةُ

Those! They are the ultimate Kafarah, Fajarah.

Kafarah comes from the same root as the word *Kafir* which we discussed earlier. In Arabic, there are multiple patterns to form plurals. The pattern used here contains hyperbole and emphasis to show the severe intensity of their *Kufr*. *Fajarah* comes

from the root *fā' jīm rā'* which means to explode and break out.⁴⁷ It means people who would impulsively explode into whatever they desired, who would impulsively break Allah's commands. Again, the plural pattern contains hyperbole to show the intensity of their impulsive behaviour.

On top of this emphasis inside the pattern itself, Allah adds two more layers of emphasis. First by using the extra pronoun *هم*, and second by using the definite articles with both words. There is a lot of emphasis here, and I mean a lot.

They, like none other, are the biggest *Kafarah* and *Fajarah*. Why? Because they broke the right of Allah, the one to whom they owe the biggest responsibility.

It is no coincidence that the same root is used as verse 17. The central point has been to show the ingratitude and arrogance of man despite the ease and facilitation Allah has provided him in both this world and the spiritual realm. These are the people who buried their seed deep within, so deep that revelation despite being poured in torrents, could not seep and penetrate its way through the sins and transgressions that cover it. *Fajarah* really diagnoses the problem. Why could revelation not affect them? Because of their impulsive sins, that acted as the mud that buried their good deep inside them.

⁴⁷ *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1634-1635

Overwhelming Might

Surah 81: Al-Takwīr



إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ

When the sun is wrapped up

In all of these oaths, the object is advanced and foregrounded. For example, in this verse, the sun is before the verb “wrapped up” while in normal usage, it should be delayed after it. This is to communicate something unusual. Just as this pattern itself is unusual, it is used for an unusual and strange phenomenon. A better way to translate this verse is, “When even then the sun is wrapped up.” This same pattern, of the object being advanced before the verb, is employed in each verse until verse 13.

This wrapping up of the sun can refer to the light of the sun just as well to the sun itself. Why does Allah say the sun will be ‘wrapped up’ instead of simply saying the sun’s light will be taken away? We will see this later.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ

When the stars are plucked

When the light of the sun is gone, the only sources of light left in the sky are the stars and planets offering tiny flickers of light; but they too shall be plucked. What is meant by being plucked is being removed from their places and thrown away. This word انْكَدَرَتْ at its root means to uproot something from its place like plants plucked from the roots.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ

When the mountains are made to sail away

For us, the strongest structure in the sky is the sun while the strongest structure on the earth is the mountains. Allah mentions first the destruction of the strongest structures in both spheres to highlight the utter destruction that will occur. If this is the fate of the strongest structures, what will happen to the rest?

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ

When the pregnant she-camels are neglected

The most valuable possession an Arab had were camels. Arabia was a desert, you needed camels to survive and travel long journeys. Since camels were highly valued, a pregnant camel was valued even more because it would sell like hot cakes. The Arabs used to take special care of pregnant camels, and considered it their most valuable asset.

This stands as a metaphor. On that day, people will pay no heed to their most valued possessions. They will be so gripped in fear, that their thoughts would not even concern themselves with even their most valuable possessions. Allah mentioned this in the previous surah:

لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ مِنْهُمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ

For every man, that Day, will be a matter that frees him



وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ

When the wild beasts are herded

Animals normally do not stay in one place. You can gather them together but they will break away. The fear of that day will grip even the animals and they will remain still, all gathered in one plain.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ

When the seas are made to overflow

There are two possibilities here. One is that the seas will overflow and flood the earth. Previously, the mountains were sailed away. Such a huge shift would cause huge earthquakes which will naturally cause the seas to overflow and flood.

Secondly, it can also mean that the seas will become fire. The root sīn jīm rā' at its root means to overflow but the Arabs used the same root to refer to fire that lights up the ovens.⁴⁸

In all of these events thus far, you can see a clear theme of things breaking away from their natural state. The sun is a source of light but its natural state will be taken away. The Arabs used to take care of their pregnant she camels but now they break away from it. Animals by nature flee and break away but here, they remain gathered in one spot. The seas are water, but now they become fire, the exact opposite of their natural state.

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ

When the Nufus are joined together

This refers to the joining of the spirit with the body again, to bring it back to life. The Qur'ān has defined death as the departure of the spirit from the body. On judgment day, the spirit will re-enter the body again, and hence, the human being will come to life.

Secondly, this can also refer to the groups of people on judgment day because the Qur'ān has used the same word for the three groups on judgment day.⁴⁹ There will be three groups, the righteous that will be on the right, the wicked on the left, and the foremost even among the righteous, that will be at the front.

وَإِذَا الْمَوْءُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ

When the girl buried alive is asked

The Arabs did not bury their daughters alive by first digging a grave. They used to put her on the ground and then bury her under mud until it suffocated her to death without any pre dug grave. This is why the word used for the buried girl is موءودة, which at its root means to press downwards with weight.

بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ

⁴⁸ Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. 2, p. 958

⁴⁹ Q. 56:7

For what sin was she killed?

At the start, Allah mentioned the strongest structures in the sky and earth; the sun and the mountain. Now, Allah will begin the reckoning of mankind with the very weakest among them. The small infant girl, who was buried alive. She will be the first one to be asked, and her killers, the first ones to be punished. In the sight of Allah, the weakest and the oppressed, are the most honored. Just as we consider the sun and the mountains lofty and great, so does Allah consider the weak, the oppressed and the helpless in great regard

وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ

When the scriptures are spread

The book of deeds. Each scripture will have all actions of man detailed inside it.

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ

When the sky is skinned

The word Kashata literally means to skin a dead animal after slaughter. When it is skinned, it exposes what was hidden inside the skin.

Earlier, Allah mentioned how the sun and the stars will be wrapped up and plucked out. It is as if Allah is slaughtering - destroying - the sky. Now Allah skins it, and takes away its coverings to expose what was hidden behind it. Paradise and Hell.

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِرَتْ

When the burning blaze is made to rise

After the sky has been peeled, what is behind - paradise and Hell - become visible. The word *سعر* literally means the price of something. Just as a price gradually rises, this root came to be used to mean rising and coming up. This verse shows that Hell fire will be below people on judgment day, and its flames will be made to rise up.

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ أُزْلِفَتْ

When Paradise is brought near

Paradise is above, it is brought near to people so that they can see both.

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ

Each soul will know, what it presented

Imagine a hypothetical scenario where you had an exam in your college and now the teacher is handing out grades. Before he hands them out, he presents before you two things, a beautiful lush garden and a blazing hot cauldron full of lava, and says that those who pass will enter the garden and those who fail will be thrown into the lava. You would lose your head. If the professor had told you earlier, before the exam that this is what will happen, you would have studied your head off.

Same is the case here. Whatever you are doing, good or bad, will be repaid back to you, but the day this happens, Allah will present Hell and Paradise in front of you. The sun, the stars, the planets, the mountains will get destroyed and the sea will turn into fire, and the oppressed will be given voice like that girl buried alive. Unlike the professor, Allah is telling us beforehand the end result of the exam to tell us to prepare well in advance.

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِالْخُنُوسِ

Therefore, No! I swear by the retreating ones

الْجَوَارِ الْكُنُوسِ

Those that enter, then disappear

The word Jawār is translated as “those that enter.” At its root, it was used for a neighbor, as well as for a farmer digging the ground to plant seeds. The core concept is of entering something and then staying there, like the neighbour who enters your neighbourhood and then resides there, and the farmer who digs the ground and plants seeds for them to remain inside it.⁵⁰

Next up is the word Kunnas, which was used for a shelter in which cattle and gazelles would take shelter from the sun. So the root meaning is to hide inside something after previously being out in the open. So these are entities that first enter and become visible, and then become hidden.

⁵⁰ Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm, vol. 1, p. 295

These two oaths refer to the stars and planets in the sky that become visible during the night, but disappear during the day because of the sun. This is consistent with the context of the surah as well as it just talked about the sky and the stars. Hence, the next two things Allah will mention are the night and the daybreak.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسَسَ

And by the night as it departs

The word عَسَس can mean two things. It can refer to the beginning of the night as darkness begins, or it can also refer to the last part of the night when darkness begins to fade. The root meaning is of penetrating or moving into something dense. Darkness is dense, so it can mean the initial part of the night when the day moves into darkness, and it can also refer to the last part of the night, as hints of light begin to show up as if penetrating this cover of darkness.⁵¹

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ

And by the dawn as it breathes

As it begins to appear.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

Truly, this is the word of a karīm messenger

This is the answer to all these oaths. We will first cover these verses then tie them all together.

This is in response to the people who said that Prophet Muhammad forged the Qur'ān from himself. The Qur'ān responds that no, it is not his word but the word of a noble messenger, the angel Gabriel. One might say that this then means that it originates from Gabriel then and not God, but the verse calls him a messenger here. A messenger only conveys from one end to another. The Qur'ān is explicit that it is the word of Allah Himself.

Karīm means perfection and being free of flaws. We will cover the meaning of this word in detail in the next surah. For now, it is enough for us to know that karīm

⁵¹ Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm, vol. 3, p. 1461-1462

means that Gabriel is perfect with regards to his duty of being a messenger. He is the perfect messenger. The next verses explain why that is the case.

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ

Owner of power. With the owner of the throne, secure.

If the messenger is weak, someone could overpower him and snatch the message away from him. So Allah says he is powerful and strong. Allah calls him “owner of power” rather than simply saying he is powerful. The use of the word ذِي (owner) is to say that he is characterized by power. It is one of his distinguishing qualities that he possesses power that is extremely rare. On top of that, the word قُوَّة (power) is indefinite which adds further emphasis. A power that is great and massive in scale.

The Qur’ān calls him ذِي قُوَّة - Owner of might or power. This is literally what the name Gabriel means. In the Old Testament, he is called Gavri’el, which becomes Jibrīl or Jabrā’īl in Arabic.

Gavri’el means the mighty one of God, Gavr in Hebrew means strength, which becomes Jabr in Arabic, also meaning strength. The Hebrew Gimel becomes Jīm in Arabic. Beth in Hebrew is the same as Ba in Arabic. Here, the beth lacks a dagesh and hence it is softened and pronounced as v rather than b. El means God. Hence, Gabriel means the mighty one of God in both Hebrew and Arabic. The Qur’ān literally translated his name in this passage by calling him owner of might/power.

مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ

Obeded there. Trustworthy.

The Connection

We can see the connection clearly in the last two verses. By the night as it deepens or departs, and then the daybreak, that turns this darkness into light. This is the Qur’ān - the word of this noble messenger Gabriel. It overcomes the darkness inside the heart and replaces it with light. Recall that the previous surah mentioned this as well when it mentioned how revelation germinates the seed of goodness and purity placed inside us by Allah.

So these two oaths are referring to revelation as it overcomes the darkness of misguidance. What about the oath by the retreating planets, that become visible in the night - during darkness - and disappear during the day - under light?

The dawn is the Qur'ān. The Arabs, and even us to this day, used the stars in the night for navigation. Arabia is a desert, for travellers in a desert, there were no fixed landmarks to determine direction. So they used the stars such as the polaris as fixed reference points to find direction. They even used them to track seasons. They noticed that certain stars rose at predictable times of the year which would sometimes coincide with seasonal changes. It was a sort of natural calendar. Hence, stars were their source of guidance to find direction.

In these verses, stars refer to whatever religion, books, scriptures or guidance they were following because just like stars, they are their source of guidance. But these religions, or books that they have, their light and guidance is like the tiny flicker of light produced by a distant star during the night, almost nothing. These scriptures may contain some guidance - some right instructions and truths - some tiny flickers of light, but all this is still during the night, in darkness. They are all false. When the Qur'ān comes, it overpowers all of these books, religions and scriptures, and overcomes them just as how the sun makes the stars invisible. It overpowers them, and becomes the sole entity of guidance, and unlike those stars, its illumination is perfect and complete. The Qur'ān illuminates everything clearly and brightly like the dawn, while whatever they have, can hardly be called light, it is but a mere flicker. Just like there are many stars in the night, there are many false religions; but there is only one sun during the day - only one correct path, and when it appears, they all disappear.

Hence, this Qur'ān, this brilliant guidance that overshadows all false religions and scriptures, is the word conveyed by a noble, mighty messenger of God, not by a false prophet as with those religions. It is not made up, nor forged like other scriptures nor is it corrupted or changed.

The one who brings this from Allah is mighty and strong. No second party can overwhelm or subjugate him. He is situated and well established right by the throne of God. He is accepted and of a high rank near Allah. He is a messenger approved by the king himself. He is obeyed by legions of angels as he comes down to pass revelation to Muhammad, who clear the way for him, and protect the path of revelation. Now that this messenger is strong and powerful, authorized and accepted by God and is followed by legions of angels who guard his path to Muhammad, the only thing that can harm revelation is if the messenger himself is unreliable. Hence, Allah says next that he is trustworthy.

Because this revelation comes from Allah and is conveyed through a noble, trusted and powerful messenger through a protected and well guarded path to the Prophet, the Qur'ān remains secure, protected and perfect. Because it comes from Allah and remains perfectly preserved, it is able to overcome all darknesses and falsehoods, and shine brilliantly as the sole true guidance. Had it not been such, the Qur'ān would lack these qualities.

This was the connection of these oaths with each other. Now what is the connection of all these oaths with the events of judgment day described earlier? Allah had said:

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ كُوِّرَتْ

When the sun is wrapped up

In these oaths, the sun referred to the Qur'ān. The Qur'ān will be wrapped up i.e, it will be closed. The disbeliever will ask God to return him to life so he may do good actions instead of what he committed on earth,⁵² but the Qur'ān will be wrapped up, it will be closed and not revealed again. You had the opportunity to read, learn and act on it, but now, that door is closed. You will not be returned and given a second change to obey the Qur'ān.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ

When the stars are plucked

The stars referred to the false religions, scriptures and belief systems of people. When these false religions will come crashing down and collapse. Allah said earlier:

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ

Each soul will know, what it presented

They will see the falsehood of their beliefs. Their actions, that they did by following those false religions and scriptures, will be laid bare as false and unacceptable in front of them. Whatever they did following those falsehoods, will be presented, then deemed worthless and hence, they will not benefit or save them, rather it will be counted against them.

Secondly, when Allah said

⁵² Q. 32:12

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ

Truly, this is the word of a karīm messenger

He is referring to the Qur'ān as a whole but in this context, He is referring to what has come before in this surah, namely the first fourteen verses. These verses that describe the events of judgment day are conveyed by a karīm - a perfect messenger. Even in the last two surahs, the central topic was judgment day. From the next surah onwards, the topic remains judgment day but with Allah's attribute of justice as the core. This surah establishes the divine roots of the Qur'ān and the next surahs describe the central pillars of it. The disbelievers deny judgment day and hence, justice itself. This connection will be made even more explicit in the next surah. Allah is telling them that these are the words of Allah, conveyed through a perfect messenger. They are not made up. The events described earlier in this surah will in fact happen, they are the words of Allah. And just as the Qur'ān reigns supreme and overwhelms all false religions and scriptures, so will these words overpower all false notions people have of this world. The last surah described those who preferred the worldly life thinking it would last. This false notion will be overwhelmed and destroyed when these events described earlier happen.

وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ

Your companion is not possessed in the least

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ

He indeed saw him in the clear horizon

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْغَيْبِ بِضَنِينٍ

He is, with regards to the unseen, not stingy

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ

Nor is it the word of an outcast Satan

فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ

So where are you going?

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ

It is only a Dhikr for the ‘Ālamīn

“Your companion” refers to Prophet Muhammad. He saw Gabriel in the sky in his true form, seated on a throne. When the Prophet claimed to have received revelation and to have seen Gabriel, the makkans claimed he had actually seen a demon. This is in response to that.

He is not stingy with regards the unseen - The unseen can refer to the Qur’ān itself. Earlier we saw how the Qur’ān remained perfectly preserved till it reached the Prophet, now Allah says that the Prophet does not withhold it either, he passes it on perfectly as well. So you, just like the Prophet, are receiving the Qur’ān perfectly preserved.

Nor is this the word of an outcast Satan - No devil advocates for justice. No devil tells people that they will receive justice for their actions. How can a devil seek to guide men to correct their actions in such a way that when they are in fact taken to account for their actions, they pass and do not fail. Is this what a devil does? No devil says he will bring justice to the oppressed like that infant girl buried alive. Nor does a devil have the ability to produce words such as these, nor the power to reign supreme like the Qur’ān. Nor is it in their power to produce words like these.

So where are you going?

It is only a Dhikr for the ‘Ālamīn

It is only a Dhikr for the ‘Ālamīn - Dhikr is an effective and strong speech. A speech that strongly impacts its listener. Its root was used for the male gender, because men are generally stronger than women.⁵³

‘Ālamīn refers to mankind and jinn. It comes from the root ‘ayn lām mīm which means knowledge or indication. Mankind and Jinn are so called because they serve as signs of Allah. They indicate that Allah exists.

The Qur’ān is only meant as an impactful speech for men. It is not lacking in its ability to impact or change a person, it is only up to the person himself if he wants to change or not. It is not forcing itself upon people, nor forcing them against their

⁵³ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 718

wills to accept it. Take it or leave it, but remember, if you reject it, it is not because of anything lacking inside it, but inside you.

لِمَن شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَن يَسْتَقِيمَ

For whoever wants, among you, to become upright

We need to first look at the first Mustaqīm because it is a rich word. At its root, it means for something to become straight and upright with no blemish. It came to be used to mean rectification or correction because when you make something straight and upright like a straight rod, you remove all the curves, turns and crookedness from it.

Secondly, the word شاء is translated as “want or will” and it is different from أراد which is also taken to mean the same thing. شاء - the word used in this verse - was used for something solid and tangible. The word شيء which means a physical object comes from the same root. It implies a strong, made up mind. It is different from desiring or wanting something because these are weaker thoughts. When someone has firmly made up his mind, and has truly decided within himself to do something, شاء is used.

The Qur’ān is only calling for people to correct themselves and become upright, nothing else. Is this what a devil does? The devil seeks to lead you to filth, not purity as the Qur’ān does.

For someone who recognizes the fact that he needs to be morally upright and good, he will find strong and impactful guidance in the Qur’ān. One does not have to be a Muslim to have this desire. People left and right come to terms with the fact that they cannot just waste life away. That money is not everything nor does it fulfill them. They realize that they need to have a good purpose in life and to live a morally upright life. Such people will find the truth in the Qur’ān and be guided. The Qur’ān is there to guide such people.

When people reject the Qur’ān, they do so more often than not because of a defect inside their own selves, not in the Qur’ān. They lack the will and the desire to become righteous, to sort their lives and to be guided. They lack the thirst for truth and knowledge. The Qur’ān here, is simply calling these people, who reject the Qur’ān, to look within themselves, not outside. This is why the question “So where

are you going" was interjected in between. Look at yourselves, look at where you are going in life, look at the state of your souls, when you reject the Qur'ān. A spoiled seed will not germinate no matter how much you water it. A corrupt heart and soul will not accept the Qur'ān no matter how many times it comes across it.

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

You will not will, except if Allah allows you to will, the Rabb of 'Ālamīn.

This statement has been misunderstood and has been the subject of much debate because one can easily take it to mean that humans do not have free will.

This verse is a تذييل - a concluding statement added at the end to reinforce or generalize the meaning. This is why there is no direct object. You cannot will, will what? Anything. It generalizes and extends it to all decisions, in addition to choosing the right path that came in the last verse.

What Allah is saying here is this. You can choose and will, but your ability to choose comes from Allah. You only will something, because Allah allowed that will to exist in you. You choose freely, but your ability to choose comes from Allah.

But since the topic is guidance and becoming upright, we need to focus there. You cannot desire to become guided and to be on the truth except by the will of Allah. Hence it naturally follows that one needs to beseech Allah sincerely for guidance. Whoever you are, whatever religion you follow, just ask God to guide you. God, lead me to the truth, wherever it is, and let me follow it. Be sincere and truthful in heart and God will lead you to it. You will recognize the truth in the Qur'ān. You will be impacted by it. What you do afterwards - whether you accept it or reject it - is up to you. The choice rests with you.

Next, Allah calls Himself Rabb of 'Ālamīn. We have covered both words earlier. By using the word Rabb, Allah again calls to mind His kindness and love. He is your caretaker and sustainer. Ask Him sincerely and He will lead you to good. He means good for you, not bad like the devils.

This verse again recounts the theme of absolute and overwhelming power present in this surah. We saw how revelation overpowers all false religions and falsehoods, how the angel that brings revelation down is himself powerful and accompanied by a powerful army of angels. Now, we see the absolute power of the very source Himself, Allah. He even controls what you decide. Absolute power.

Lastly, this verse again highlights the will of Allah. We saw earlier how Allah said He created man according to what He willed, according to His plans, not of anyone else. Here again, He emphasizes His will. The theme of absolute power and might runs throughout this surah.

The Just God

Surah 82: Al- Infiṭār



This surah follows the same pattern of speech as the last one, starting in a similar manner with the events on judgment day. The difference between this and the last surah is only subtle. After the initial events of judgment day, the last surah described the truthfulness of the Qur'ān. After the truthfulness of the Qur'ān has been established, this surah mentions the salient and core message of the Qur'ān - that people will be taken to account for their actions because this is what justice entails. This is why Allah will use the word Dīn for the accounting of deeds on judgment day which means recompense and religion both, simultaneously.

This surah serves as a short simple treatise by the Qur'ān on why judgment day is necessary, and why without it, God is defective. People often speak of the problem of evil which is a legitimate concern only if one focuses on this life and does not believe in judgment day. Any religion that does not believe in the final reckoning falls flat in front of this argument.

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ أَنْفَطَرَتْ

When the sky tears apart

This surah again follows the same principle of advancing the subject and the object before the verb, against normal Arabic usage to denote how unusual all these things are. A better way to render it is, "When even the sky is torn."

Allah uses the word Al -samā' for the sky, which is singular. Whereas, in other places of the Qur'ān, Allah has the plural Al Samawāt, for the heavens. Using Al -samā' here is to convey the ease and swiftness with which the sky will be torn apart.

Secondly, the word Infiṭār is translated as "torn" but it has a very interesting root. It was used for tearing something apart but specifically, the very first cut that you made. For example, when someone started digging a well, the very first dig was called Fatr, from the same root.

The use of this word denotes two things. Firstly, the heavens will be torn apart easily and swiftly despite their vast size and solid structure. Secondly, because of this, they will be restored to their original, initial state that they were in before Allah put them in order. This represents a complete collapse and destruction of the heavenly structure.

وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ اُنْتَرَتْ

When the stars scatter

The scattering and falling of the stars from their orbits is already included in the first verse because stars are part of the heavens. The destruction of the heavens leads to many events, which includes the stars falling from their orbits and scattering apart like little pearls but Allah highlights this specific event because they also metaphorically imply all false religions falling apart and being disproven as we covered in the last surah. The Arabs used the stars constantly for guidance and direction in their travels. It is as if Allah is saying - when your sources of guidance and direction fall apart. When these stars on which you depend for guidance, when the false gods and religions collapse, nowhere to be found nor available to lend you help. This is not to take away from the literal meaning that the stars will in fact scatter away like pearls.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ

When the seas are erupted

Notice how the structure has shifted to passive voice. Earlier, the action of tearing and scattering were attributed to the sky and the stars themselves respectively. Now, it has shifted to passive voice as if the action is being done by a third party against the seas and the graves in the next verse.

Some said that this will be because the eruption of the sea and the toppling over of graves are things that go against the natural phenomena and tendencies of these objects whereas this is not the case with the heavenly structures including the stars that are inclined to fall away if not for the cosmic powers employed by Allah that hold them together.

The first two verses talked about heaven, now the next two verses will talk about the earth. As Al Rāzi commented, when you want to destroy a building, you start with its roof and then the foundation.

With regards to this verse, scholars said it means the seas will be turned into fire as mentioned in the last surah, while in this surah, it means that they will be consumed to turn the earth into one flat plain. The water will erupt upwards, turn into fire. This is consistent with the fact that Allah wants the earth to become flat because He removed the mountains as well. All of this to prepare the earth for the gathering of all mankind and to make it flat.

وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعِثَتْ

When the graves are overturned

The word **بعث** is translated as “overturned.” At its root, it means for something to be overturned in such a way that its highest point is made its lowest and vice versa but in a disorderly manner. ⁵⁴For example, if you have a bag containing many things inside it and you are searching for one tiny object inside it, you will take out all the other objects inside it and throw them away until you find what you need. This is an imagery associated with this root.

This root is closely related to the root **بعث** which means to raise and the Qur'ān has used this root for the opening of graves on judgment day as well. There is only one slight difference. The word used in this ayah, **بعث** has the letter **رā** with it, which is a letter associated with swiftness. This denotes that this invasion, overturning and destruction of graves to bring out the human beings, will occur swiftly and quickly.

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ

Each soul will know what it put forward and kept back.

The words **قدمت** and **أخرت** do not have an object to widen the scope. Man will see whatever he preferred and prioritized in this world versus what he delayed or left hanging and did not do thinking it worthless and unneeded.

يَا أَيُّهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ

⁵⁴ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 144

O you man! What has deceived you concerning your Lord, the Karīm

We need to look at the word Karīm first. At its root, it was used for a tilled land that did not have any stones, for a necklace of gold and silver, as well as for a cloud that rained abundantly.⁵⁵ The necklace is of pure gold and silver only, the land is pure and free of any stones, and the cloud rains profusely without holding anything back, as if being free of the quality of not giving generously.

The meanings of purity and of being free of defects stand out as we can see. This root then came to be used in the meaning of generosity because the generous person is free of ulterior motives and his intentions are pure. Hence, it came to be used for a person who gives without asking for anything in return as Taj al Urus points out:

وَقِيلَ: الْكَرَمُ: إِفَادَةُ مَا يَنْبَغِي لَا لِغَرَضٍ، فَمَنْ وَهَبَ الْمَالَ لِحُلْبِ نَفْعٍ أَوْ دَفْعِ ضَرَرٍ، أَوْ خَلَاصٍ مِنْ ذَمٍّ فَلَيْسَ بِكَرِيمٍ.

Karam means providing or giving what is needed without any ulterior motive or asking for anything in return. Hence, whoever gave money to gain some benefit, or to ward off some harm, or to be safe from blame, is not Karīm.

When applied to Allah, Karīm means a number of things. Firstly, Allah is pure and free of all impurities, flaws and deficiencies. He is independent and free of all needs. He is the owner of all good, and He provides from it freely and independently, as He wishes, and this giving does not reduce the amount of good that is with Him, because He, whatever He does, and all His attributes, are pure - free from all flaws. But this word Karīm is an inclusive term which encompasses all good and praiseworthy things inside it because the root meaning of purity and being free of any defect, negate anything that is defective or flawed, and hence what is left behind is only goodness and purity as Lisan al Arab points out:

الكَرِيمُ: مِنْ صِفَاتِ اللَّهِ وَأَسْمَائِهِ، وَهُوَ الْكَثِيرُ الْخَيْرِ الْجَوَادُ الْمُعْطِي الَّذِي لَا يَنْفَدُ عَطَاؤُهُ، وَهُوَ الْكَرِيمُ الْمُنْطَلِقُ. وَالكَرِيمُ: الْجَامِعُ لِأَنْوَاعِ الْخَيْرِ وَالشَّرَفِ وَالْفَضَائِلِ. وَالكَرِيمُ. اسْمٌ جَامِعٌ لِكُلِّ مَا يُحْمَدُ، فَاللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ كَرِيمٌ حَمِيدٌ الْفِعَالُ ...

“Al Karīm is one of the attributes of Allah and one of His names. It means that He is abundant in all goodness, the most generous, the giver whose giving does not

⁵⁵ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 1885 - 1886

cease, and He possesses these attributes in the absolute sense. Also, Al- Karīm gathers all types of goodness, honor and virtues. Al- Karīm is a comprehensive term for everything that is praiseworthy. Hence, Allah is Karīm, praiseworthy in all his actions.”

So Allah is al-Karīm. He is everything that is good, pure and praiseworthy and He is free of all impurities, defects and unpraiseworthy attributes. He is the perfect one, He is only good and praiseworthy, just as everything He does is good, pure, and praiseworthy.

In the last surah, Allah used the same word for angel Gabriel, but without the definite article. Here, when He uses it for Himself, He does so with the definite article to convey that Allah is karīm in the absolute and complete sense and that He is the source of it. Gabriel is karīm, but without the definite article, He is karīm in only the domain Allah has willed him to be, and even that is because of Allah Himself. It is a given quality and he is dependent on Allah for it.

Next, Allah asks man a powerful question. On judgment day, man sees what he preferred, gave importance to and what he neglected. The context indicates that this man, to whom the question is being addressed to, was neglectful of what is right and instead preferred wrong things in his life. He was neglectful of Allah, and preferred to disobey him.

Next, what is meant by being deluded with regards to Allah? The word used means something hidden at its root. It came to be used for deceiving or tricking someone by misleading him into something by hiding its true nature.⁵⁶

Allah asks this man, what caused him to be deceived regarding Allah, the Karīm - the one who is all good and praiseworthy? Who is free of all evil, impurities and unpraiseworthy things including injustice.

What caused you to develop a wrong impression of Allah? What caused you to develop a wrong understanding of Allah and His attributes while He is the karīm? Allah is karīm - the perfect one, free of all impurities and flaws. What caused you to believe that Allah will not serve justice to people? Justice entails that people pay for their actions, that they be taken into account for their crimes and wrongdoings just as we punish a criminal. If Allah does not punish the criminals and wrongdoers, then He is unjust, and this would be a defect and a flaw within Him. Since Allah is al Karīm, it entails that He is free from it, which necessarily entails that He will punish the criminals and serve the wrongdoers justice. What caused you to think that Allah

⁵⁶ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1552

will not take you to account on judgment day? This wrong impression that you had of Allah, led you to neglect your responsibilities and to give priority to the wrong things in your life.

Secondly, one of the meanings in which the root Karam was used was to bestow or give without seeking anything in return as mentioned above. Since Allah bestows and gives, it is easy for the one who disobeys Him to become deluded regarding Him. Despite my sins, He continues to bestow and provide for me. This leads man to continue to sin and develop a false impression of Allah that He will not take him to account. We see this often in our lives. More often than not, people only return to God when they are in a pinch. They turn to Allah to rescue them, but in happy times, they are content with living as they please.

So what caused you to feel secure from Allah's punishment? What deceived you into thinking that Allah will not punish sins? This is rooted in the language itself. The word غرّ (deluded) was used in the meanings of deceiving someone regarding a road, telling him that the road was safe and secure when it actually wasn't and was riddled with bandits.

This is why the manner in which Allah calls out to man is very emphatic. يَا أَيُّهَا is emphatic because it contains an extra letter (ي) in it. Just using أَيُّهَا without the ي would still be enough. It is as if Allah is saying, - O you human being engrossed in your error! What caused you to be deluded regarding your Lord, the Karīm!

الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ

Who created you, then did Taswiyah of you, then balanced you

The words Taswiyah and Adal (translated as balanced) both mean roughly the same thing and the difference in their meaning here is subject of much debate. Taswiyah comes from the root sīn wāw alif which means to even something out. This root was used for a man whose belly was in line with his chest, as well as for making something protruding even and flat.⁵⁷ Hence, this also came to be used in the meaning of removing defects because when you make something even, you basically remove what makes it uneven. Hence, when Allah says that He did Taswiyah of human beings after creating Him, He refers to the fact that not only did He create him, but made him a capable entity who is able to fulfill his roles. He

⁵⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 934

created you for a purpose, then gave you all the capabilities needed to fulfill that purpose, with no flaws or defects that would hinder you from fulfilling it.

Everything is complete now isn't it? Allah created you then gave you all the capabilities to fulfill your purpose and mission and did not leave any flaw in you that would prevent you from fulfilling it. What else do you need? Isn't this a complete working system? Then why does Allah mention balancing the human being after it?

Adal (translated as balanced) at its root was used for the balancing of scales in a measure. Similarly, when they loaded weights on a camel, they did so in a way that the load weighed equally on both the left and the right so that the camel would not fall in either direction.⁵⁸ Similarly, Allah has balanced us with two forces inside us that are necessary for our function. If the weight weighs more on one side of the camel than the other, the camel collapses in its direction. Similarly, if Allah had made either of the two forces inside us more heavy, then we would collapse as well.

These two forces can refer to many things, but in my opinion it primarily refers to two things. Firstly, to the balance of reason and emotion and secondly, to the balance of the physical and spiritual. Life cannot be lived purely on reason nor purely on emotion, but rather on a delicate balance of both. Same for the physical and the spiritual. You cannot live for the sake of pleasure nor should you become a monk in a distant mountain. Your body and soul both need to be tended to.

فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَّا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ

In whatever form He willed, He assembled you

This verse explains the previous one. The previous verse described three stages or actions that Allah performed with regards to man's creation. The word Rakkaba is translated as assembled. At its root, it means to form objects by stacking or compounding things on top of each other. The previous verse described the three stages that were stacked on top of each other, one after the other, that completed man. Then what is the point of mentioning them again?

The answer is the phraseology of this verse itself. The word Rakkaba (assembled) is driven to the very end against the norm to highlight that what Allah mentions before it is the important part being highlighted, not the mere fact that He assembled us. The norm is to say it this way:

He assembled you in whatever form He willed.

⁵⁸ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p.1423

Instead, Allah foregrounds the fact that He formed us in a form purely of His own choosing, will and wisdom. Allah is emphasizing these words:

In whatever form He willed

If I create a robot for example to lift heavy loads, I will optimize it for the role I have in my mind for it. I will make its components strong, sturdy, durable, resistant to degrading, and firmly assembled. I had a purpose for it, and according to that purpose, I formed it and optimized its part. In the above sentence. Allah is highlighting that He created us in a form that He willed. Allah is al karīm, the perfect one. If He creates us in a form of His own will, yet without purpose and in vain, is that not a defect or flaw? To do anything for vanity, is a defect. Our creation is purely subject to the will of Allah. If He so wished, He would never have created us. Yet He did create us. To say that Allah WILLED something in vain for no reason, is itself a defect. Yet Allah, being the Karīm, is free of this flaw. Since He is al Karīm, it necessarily follows that He does not do anything in vain, and this includes our creation.

Secondly, as mentioned above, what is implied by being deluded concerning Allah also includes the fact that someone can get carried away by the graciousness and kindness of Allah. Allah is kind and forgiving, this fact can lead a sinner to carry on in his sins and get deluded that Allah does not punish someone for his sins. This can even go one step further where this kindness of Allah leads a man to commit even more sins. I know this is a sin but Allah, being so forgiving and kind as He is, will forgive me for it. This is a false attribution to Allah who is also just and wise. This leads to the next verse:

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكْذِبُونَ بِالْدِّينِ

No! Rather, you deny the religion/ the recompense

The word Dīn can mean recompense itself as well as religion both. At its root, it meant a loan that had a deadline to return it.⁵⁹ Since a loan is returned like for like, this root came to be used to mean like for like recompense, which is what justice is. Secondly, just as a loan is tied and bound to a person for which he will be asked and is responsible to return, so are people responsible for their actions, for which they will be questioned. Your actions are a kind of a loan that you are responsible for.

Secondly, the Qur'ān has used the word Dīn in the meanings of religion and creed in numerous places. Just as a loan is tied and bound to the person under a loan, so

⁵⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 685-686

are his beliefs and creed firmly bound and settled in his heart. A loan is something that is binding the person while a creed is something that is binding the heart. This usage is rooted in Arabic itself:

دَيَّنْتُ الرَّجُلَ فِي الْقَضَاءِ وَفِيمَا بَيْنَهُ وَبَيْنَ اللَّهِ

I believed (dīn) the man to be truthful in the court and also in what is between him and Allah. (I accept what the man is saying in court and consider him truthful before Allah as well i.e he is not lying inside)

وَدَيَّنْتُ الْحَالِفَ -ض: نَوَيْتُهُ فِيمَا حَلَفَ “ (والنية محلها القلب)

I interpreted/judged (dīn) the person who took an oath on the intention I assume he meant - (I interpret his oath according to what I presume he intended.) Such judgment and belief is presumed inside the heart.⁶⁰

So from these usages, Dīn came to be used to mean inner beliefs and creeds held inside the heart, but the Qur'ān combines them seamlessly to highlight that recompense for actions - of justice being delivered to people for their actions - is the religion of Islam itself. It is its central pillar and core. If you deny it, you deny Islam. There is no Islam without it.

Imagine a father who is very kind and loving to his child despite his repeated mistakes and failures in his studies. This child gets deluded by the kindness of his father and assumes that he will never get strict with him for his failures. Then one day, when he fails yet again, the father gets strict and imposes restrictions on him - you can't do this, you can't go out during these times, you must study at these times, no more electronic devices and so on. The child gets shocked, what changed? How did father suddenly become so strict? The father was the same all along, he was just being kind and patient with him, hoping he would change.

Allah is being kind and patient with sinners. He is never not just. It is the same God. You cannot use this kindness of Allah to presume He will not take you to account for your sins one day because that would be a defect or flaw on His part. Since Allah is al karīm, it necessitates that He be just as well. His graciousness does not entail that He will not take people to account for their deeds.

⁶⁰ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʿAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 686

The word **كَلَّا** (No!) is to express divine displeasure over the fact that His kindness and graciousness is being misused to commit sins and to increase in His disobedience instead of thanking Allah and being grateful to Him for it.

The particle **بَلْ** (translated as rather) can also be a **بَلْ** **الْإِنْتِقَالِي** in which case it would be translated as “furthermore”, instead of “rather.” On top of getting deluded concerning Allah and by His graciousness to commit more sins, such a person also denies justice being delivered to him for his actions and this is the position of most of the scholars. In this case, this represents a bigger sin because a common use of this device (**بَلْ** **الْإِنْتِقَالِي**) is to move from a thing of smaller magnitude to one of a bigger one. Not only are you deluded by the kindness of your Lord, but even greater than that, you deny the attribute of justice to Him by believing He will not take you to account for your deeds. Dīn also means the religion of Islam itself as explained above. Not only do you use the graciousness of Allah to commit sins, but even greater than that is your crime of rejecting the religion of Islam. Both of these meanings are contained inside this verse.

وَأَنَّا عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ

While upon you are guardians

كَرَامًا كَاتِبِينَ

Kirām, Writing

يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ

They know whatever you do

There are two layers of emphasis in verse 10. First, by the use of **إِنَّا**, and second by the use of the letter Lām. This form of speech is used when addressing someone who denies what you are saying. There are angels soundly recording your actions, not neglecting a single thing, though you deny it.

Secondly, this whole sentence is to express wonder and amazement. You deny recompense while there are angels writing down your actions! This again goes back to what we mentioned earlier of Allah not doing anything in vain. There are angels stationed above you, watching you closely and recording your actions accurately

while not neglecting a single thing. Are they doing this in vain? Why would they be recording your actions if you are not going to be taken to account for them?

Allah describes these angels first as Ḥāfiẓīn (guardians) which at its root was used for retaining something whether in memory or otherwise and not forgetting. These angels do not lose memory of your actions. Many times, we forget as we are writing something down. They do not, they accurately and precisely preserve your actions in writing because Allah has made them such that they do not forget. Then Allah describes them as Kirām which is the plural of karīm, the same quality with which He described Himself in verse 6, and with which He described the angel Gabriel in the last surah.

When applied to these angels, it means that these angels, firstly, are free and pure (the root meaning) of any ulterior motive. They are not biased in favor of the person whose actions they are recording nor against him. They simply record and protect the actions as they are. Secondly, they are free of any defect with regards to this role. Remember, when applied to Allah, Karīm negates all defects, but when applied to other beings, it negates defects in their domain only. The role of these angels is to record, preserve and write down the actions of people and they are perfect in this regard. They possess all the qualities to perfectly carry out their duty, and are free of any and all defects that would prevent them from doing so. Remember how they deny the attribute of justice to Allah? Here Allah is displaying an example of His justice to them. They record your actions as they are, with no ulterior motive.

Kātibīn (writing) is a circumstantial clause. It is describing an action that is occurring at the moment, as these words were being revealed to the Prophet and as these words are being read by you. They are even recording the very fact that you are reading these words. It is a continuous and ongoing action that does not cease.

They know whatever you do - This is a quality that is already implied by the fact that these angels are set with and upon us, and also by the fact that they are Kirām since they possess all the necessary qualities for them to record everything accurately, of which knowledge is one. They need to possess knowledge of our actions to write them down in the first place. Mentioning it out separately, despite being implied, is to warn, and highlight its importance and gravity. Take the example of the child negligent of his studies mentioned above. After his father imposes restrictions on him, he also installs cameras to monitor him. The child already knows he is being watched 24/7 by his father, but the father comes to him, and especially says to him in a threatening tone, "I know every single thing you do." The child already knows that he knows. The father mentioned it out separately just so the child gets his act straight. These angels know every single thing that you do. Repent and get your act together.

Lastly, the use of the word ما (whatever) as opposed to الذي and the omission of the resumptive pronoun (ه) at the end is for added generality. They know WHATEVER you do, with emphasis placed on “Whatever.”

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ

The Abrār are in blessings

وَأَنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ

While the Fujjār are in a blazing fire

Two layers of emphasis inside each of these verses again, by using the same devices for emphasis as verse 10. Though you deny it, the Abrār will be indulged and engrossed in blessings, comfort and bliss while the Fujjār will be overwhelmed by a blazing fire. These people of course deny Dīn and hence, the righteous and the unrighteous are equal in their sight. It does not matter what you do, good or bad. Hence Allah says that contrary to your beliefs, the righteous will receive good for good and the wicked will receive what they earned as well.

Abrār comes from the root bā ’ rā ’ rā ’ which means land and a desert. There is a big discussion among linguists as to how this root can mean righteousness. Land, as opposed to the sea, implies safety and stability because the sea remains turbulent and unsettled with the constant surging and movement of its waves which can, at any time, overwhelm the ship sailing on it. The Qur ’ ān used this root to mean righteousness. It implies righteousness that remains constant and stable. Constant and unwavering obedience. Secondly, the Arabs used the same root for a person whose merchandise or products spread and sold across vast regions. The root bā ’ rā ’ rā ’ describes a vast land as if it spreads out like a desert. Obedience is derived from the expansive openness of the land described because obedience is submission, and submission comes from extending and opening your heart without hesitation or obstacles.⁶¹ In my opinion, this root refers to the constant and stable condition of righteousness in addition to submission.

In Surah ‘ Abasa, Allah used the same root for the angels who bring down revelation to the messengers on earth but with a different pattern. The pattern used there is used for a plural that is extremely high in number whereas the one used in this

⁶¹ *Al-Mu ‘ jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu ‘ aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur ’ ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 94

verse, is used for something that is in plural, but relatively less in number. There are less righteous human beings than angels.

Next, Allah says the Abrār are in blessings, bliss and comfort, as if engrossed in them, surrounded by them from all sides, being one with them. Their state of life and whatever surrounds it, is of blessings, bliss and comfort.

Same for the Fujjār, they will be overwhelmed, overtaken, and engulfed inside a blazing fire. Fujjār comes from the root fā ' jīm rā ' which means explosion and sudden outward spreading.⁶² This root was used for the dawn because the light of the dawn spreads outwards suddenly from the cover of darkness. When used for people, it describes a person who impulsively rushes into sins and disobedience to Allah. These people denied being taken to account. If a criminal thinks he will get away with whatever crime he commits, what will he do? He will rush impulsively into other crimes without even blinking. This describes people who are by nature, driven to commit crimes, who commit sins without even batting an eye, and this is the natural result of denying recompense on the day of resurrection.

يَصْلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

They burn therein, the day of Dīn

I left the word Dīn untranslated this time. This is a day that is defined by Dīn - by recompense, by justice being delivered to people for their actions. The construct phrase (day of dīn) is to describe the salient feature of this day. What is this day defined by? What is the most prominent and important act that occurs on this day? Like for like recompense for actions.

If a person denies this day to begin with, you can only imagine what his state will be. It is like a student who comes on an exam day, without even knowing there is an exam being held that day. For him, that whole day will be defined by failure and regret.

Lastly, the use of the imperfect verb (burn) is to denote renewal and repeated occurrence. Repeatedly, again and again they will burn inside it. Whenever their skins burn off, Allah will place a new skin above them to taste the pain again.⁶³ This also implies different and changing forms of punishment. Sometimes they will be tortured by the fire itself, other times they will receive boiling water, while at other times, they will be fed wound discharges in addition to all these.

⁶² *Al-Mu 'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu 'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur 'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1634

⁶³ Q. 4:56

وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ

Never from it, will they be absent

This time, Allah uses a nominal sentence as opposed to the previous verse. This verse describes their constant state, while the previous verse describes the action that is repeated on them. They will never be absent from it, ever, at any given point in time. While they are inside it - which they will be for every single moment for eternity - they will be repeatedly tortured and punished inside it.

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ

And what can make you understand what the Day of Dīn is?

ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمُ الدِّينِ

Again! What can make you know what the Day of Dīn is?"

These questions are repeated for the sake of magnifying the importance of the answer Allah will give. First, He asks this question not once but twice to gather attention and to highlight that this question, and its answer, are extremely important so pay attention.

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِّنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا ۖ وَالْأَمْرُ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ

A day no soul will possess for another soul a thing; and the command, that Day, is with Allah.

The word Youm (a day) is in accusative while the general principle in Arabic is that it should be in nominative. Much has been said about it, widely narrowed down to three possibilities. Firstly, it could be that there is an omitted verb at the beginning. Those who said this presented two possibilities as to what that omitted verb is, يدانون

(they are taken to account) and اذكروا (Mention/ Remember). They are taken to account on the day no soul will possess for another soul a thing..... Or, Mention/remember the day no soul will possess for another soul a thing....

Secondly, some treated it as a construct phrase (الإضافة) and said that when the second term of the construct phrase is a verbal clause like here, the first term can be accusative. This is the opinion of Al Zujjāj but as al Wāḥidī points out,

grammarians like Farahidi and Sibawayh said that this is only allowed if the verb is in past tense, not an imperfect verb like here. Ibn Ashur goes the other way and mentions that when a temporal noun specifically is in a construct phrase with an imperfect verb, it is permissible to make it accusative as in here.

The third possibility is that the word youm (a day) is an apposition of the words 'day of dīn' in verse 15. Since the word Youm is accusative there, its apposition has to match it and be in the accusative as well, but this seems a bit stretched.

I prefer the position that there is an omitted verb which is يدانون since it is the passive imperfect verb of the word dīn. This would render the whole sentence as - They are taken to account on a day no soul will possess for another soul a thing; and the command, that Day, is with Allah. We have already seen the word 'dīn' be repeated multiple times in the surah and this flows with the overall theme.

People in this life help each other, protect each other, work in communion, put in collective efforts to sustain their lives and the community as a whole. While some try to overpower others to gain power and authority. On judgment day, this system collapses so no one can help or protect another person. No one can gain power or authority either since that will rest with Allah alone who cannot be overpowered. Allah has given human beings ownership, power, authority, and the power to carry out their desires and plans on this earth. On judgment day, all of this is taken away to remain only with the source and root of it all - Allah. Hence, only righteousness and good deeds will save and bring you honor before Allah, not the possessions, authority or power that you possess in the world.

Redemption

Surah 83: Al - Muṭaffifīn



After establishing the fact that justice will in fact be served to people for their actions, in this surah Allah mentions those who have been wronged and oppressed by other people and how they will be redeemed and their oppressors be made to pay for their oppression.

وَيْلٌ لِّلْمُطَفِّفِينَ

Destruction for those who give less measure

The Arabs used a measuring container called a Mikyāl, in which goods were measured by filling it up to a defined level - usually the rim. When the contents reached that level, it was considered a full unit and priced accordingly.

If someone wanted to cheat, he would not typically alter the bottom of the container, but rather manipulate the top level (الطُّفَاف). When giving to others, he would reduce the level slightly below the rim, giving less than what was due while making it appear full.

It is a small, marginal manipulation at the very boundary. A barely noticeable reduction or increase yet Allah affirms a place in Hell for these manipulators and cheaters for this action. They are not robbing people of thousands or even hundreds but rather a handful of pennies.

With regards to the word Wayl - translated as destruction - it means punishment, grief, and destruction. There are hadiths narrated from the Prophet that Wayl refers to a valley in Hell in which the disbeliever is thrown. Al-Aṣma‘ī points out that whenever Allah uses the word Wayl for someone, then that person has earned a place in Hell. So these people, although they cheated people for a few pennies, have reserved a place in Hell for themselves for this action.

This surah is concerning those who wrong other people and how Allah will give justice to those whom these people wronged. This crime of cheating people of a few pennies stands for a larger reality that Allah will give people justice against those who wronged them, even for the smallest misdeeds. Since Allah will do this for even the smallest of actions, it naturally follows that He will do the same for bigger actions of injustice.

الَّذِينَ إِذَا أَتَاكُمُ عَلَى النَّاسِ يَسْتَوْفُونَ

Who, when they take a measure from people, take in full

When taking for himself, he would fill the rim completely. Now, the standard is to use the preposition min (from) instead of عَلَى (‘alā) with the word اَتَاكُمُ (take measure). Since their taking of measure from people involved harm to them and an unjust imposition upon them, عَلَى (‘alā) was placed in the position of مِنْ (min) to indicate that.

وَإِذَا كَالُوهُمْ أَوْ وَزَنُوهُمْ يُخْسِرُونَ

But if they give by measure or by weight to them, they cause loss

This verse seems simple on sight but is quite complex.

Firstly, the norm is to use the verbs كَالُوا (give by measure) and وَزَنُوا (give by weight) with the preposition lām but that is not the case here. The preposition lām is omitted. The people of Hijaz allowed omitting the lām and used these two verbs with the lām as well as without it.⁶⁴ So even though it is grammatically correct to use these verbs without being accompanied by the lām, it is still a usage that is rare in Arabic. So the question arises, why do this? Why use these verbs without the lām, which though grammatically correct, is still a rare usage? The reason is quite beautiful. The Qur’ān omits one small barely noticeable letter when describing their cheating that is also barely noticeable. Just as most people will miss that one letter is skipped here because of how delicate this omission is, so do people miss the cheating done to them by these people because of how barely noticeable the amount is.

⁶⁴ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 191

Secondly, it is also possible that what is omitted is not the letter lām, but rather the object itself. The verse is actually, "But when they measure their measured goods or weigh their weighed goods, they cause loss." The Qur'ān leaves out the possessed noun, and leaves only the possessor - the people who are buying things from them. Why? Because this would then drive the focus on the people they wrong, not the amount they take. Yes they take the amount but the important thing is that they wrong people! It is not the grains they steal that are important - it is a barely noticeable amount - but the fact that they wrong people! This is consistent with the last verse as well which breaks the norm by using the preposition **على** (over) instead of the letter lām to show how they exert dominance and wrong people in their dealings.

In my view, both of these are equally plausible and I hold that these both to be true.

So now, they give less to people but take it in full. Justice for them but injustice for others. A man who brings benefit to himself at the cost of others, but does not want others to do the same to him. Do to others as you would have them do to you. Be just to others just as you want others to be just to you, or in other words, the golden rule. The previous surah described the disobedience of men with regards to the rights of Allah, whereas this surah describes man's disobedience with regards to the rights of other men. Both of them stem from the same cause - denial of recompense on judgment day. Hence,

أَلَا يَظُنُّ أُولَٰئِكَ أَنَّهُمْ مَبْعُوثُونَ

Do they not think - those - that they will be raised?

The use of the word **ظن** (think) is to highlight their mental state. It does not even cross their mind nor do they entertain the slightest thought that they will be resurrected and held to account. Their mind is occupied with the goal of benefiting themselves here and now, with no regard for hereafter.

The standard norm of Arabic is again broken inside this verse by use of the demonstrative pronoun (those) instead of a pronoun. Demonstrative pronouns in Arabic point to something as possessing the quality being talked about itself unlike pronouns. Secondly, it also denotes, as al-Ālūsī points out, the fact that they are unique and set apart from other people in this quality of not thinking that they will be raised alive on judgment day because these people are being especially pointed out by the use of demonstrative pronoun instead of the pronoun. Among all those who deny judgment day, these people are the worst in this regard. This quality of

denying recompense is found most strongly and in the worst manner in these people.⁶⁵

The main goal of the person who does this is the luxury of this world and he exploits people for its sake. He does an action that benefits him in this world, but costs him his afterlife. If he truly believed in judgment day, would he have cheated? No. Allah is diagnosing the root of the problem. The false notion that people will not be taken to account for their actions leads people to commit sins and crimes. When a firm belief in judgment day settles inside the heart, people will desist from doing wrong. If a person who claims to believe in judgment day does it, it means that this belief has not settled in his heart.

لِيَوْمٍ عَظِيمٍ

For a great day

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ النَّاسُ لِرَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

On a day mankind stands for Rabb of ‘Ālamīn

First, the words Rabb of ‘Ālamīn. Rabb means the Master, the caretaker, and the nurturer as has been explained in earlier surahs, whereas ‘Ālamīn refers to mankind and Jinn since they serve as Allah’s signs as is the position of Zamakhsharī, and is supported by Ibn Abbas as well.

The word yawm (a day) is in accusative case again just like the last verse of surah al-īfīṭār. Ibn ‘Āshūr again holds the position that since the second part of the construct phrase is a verbal sentence, this is allowed, but as pointed before, that only holds true when the verb is in past tense, not an imperfect verb as in here. Al Alūsī says that yawm is governed by the word مَبْعُوثُونَ (they will be raised) in verse 4, which would make yawm an adverb of time, which seems to be the correct position to me.⁶⁶ In simple English, this would translate to, ‘They will be resurrected on a day mankind stands for Rabb of ‘Ālamīn.’

The use of the preposition ‘for’ instead of ‘on’ in both verses, contains multiple meanings. Firstly, they will be raised for His command, and for the sake of His judgment only, nothing else. This goes back to the last verse of the previous surah

⁶⁵ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 374

⁶⁶ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 374

where Allah said that all command, power and control will belong to Allah alone. This has been mentioned by al-Rāzī and al-Ālūsī.

In addition, Ibn ‘Āshūr says something really interesting. The proposition ‘for’ conveys that since Allah is the Rabb of ‘Ālamīn, it necessitates that people stand before Him on judgment day to receive His judgment and ruling.⁶⁷ It is a necessary consequence of Allah being Rabb of ‘Ālamīn. The context of this surah is about people who wrong others, even in small amounts. Allah is the Rabb, the kind and loving Master who nurtures and takes care of His subjects. This necessitates that He brings justice to those who have been wronged, in any shape or manner, of even a few pennies like the people who have been wronged by given less measure. Hence, since Allah is the Rabb, He will redeem all those who have been wronged and will bring them justice by pronouncing judgment on the wrongdoers.

The use of the future imperfect verb (stands) is for the mental evocation of the scene, so that the reader can paint the picture in his brain of the whole scene happening in front of him.

Lastly, notice the flow of the surah thus far. It started with those people who give slightly less measure to people and rob them of a few pennies. We would normally assume this amount to be insignificant and hence, would even ignore it. Think of it, if someone robbed you of a handful of wheat grains, or lentils, you would not even bat an eye. It is worth almost nothing. But after mentioning this relatively small crime, Allah repeatedly highlights the greatness and immense nature of judgment day. Zamakhsharī summarizes the whole picture beautifully:

وفي هذا الإنكار والتعجب وكلمة الظن، ووصف اليوم بالعظم، وقيام الناس فيه لله خاضعين، ووصفه ذاته
رب العالمين بيان بليغ لعظم الذنب وتفاقم الإثم في التطفيف وفيما كان في مثل حاله من الحيف وترك القيام
بالقسط، والعمل على السوية والعدل في كل أخذ وإعطاء، بل في كل قول وعمل

“In this denunciation or rejection (of the act of defrauders), in the expression of amazement (in verse 4) and the use of the word ظن (‘think’ in verse 4), in describing the Day of Judgment as great and mighty, in the depiction of people standing before Allah in submissive obedience, and in His describing Himself as the Rabb of ‘Ālamīn, there is a powerful and eloquent clarification of the gravity of their sin and the enormity of their crime in defrauding people by giving measure, as well as in all matters that resemble this injustice, including neglecting to uphold proper justice

⁶⁷ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 193

and fairness, and failing to act with equity not only in all matters of giving and taking, but also in every word and action.”

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْفُجَّارِ لَفِي سِجِّينٍ

No! Truly, the writings of the Fujjār is in Sijjīn

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ

What can make you understand what Sijjīn is?

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

A marqūm book

“No!” serves as a strong divine disapproval of this act of theirs, and also as a call to desist from their actions.

The word ‘fujjār’ has been explained in the previous surah.

“Writings” refers to the writing of the deeds of the person written by the angels that are stationed above him to record his actions, and watch all his actions as described in the previous surah. Allah describes the angels as kātibīn - writing - and uses the word Kitāb here which are both of the same root. People normally translate Kitāb as ‘book’, Kitāb can also be in the meaning of writing (maktūb) as if to say that whatever the angels write of the deeds of these people, is stored inside sijjīn. I prefer this opinion.

Secondly, the word sijjīn is the crux of this small passage. It comes from the root sīn jīm nūn which was used for a prison, for soft iron that can be molded to form different objects, as well as for trenches dug around the roots of palm trees when water is not naturally drawn towards them. Interestingly, these trenches were called sijjīn itself, the same word used in the verse. The core meaning is to confine or contain something inside a tight space.⁶⁸ This meaning is apparent in the prison, the soft iron described is used to make objects that restrain people such as chains, shackles and clamps, and the trenches force water into a tight space (the roots).

So sijjīn literally means a pit or a trench to restrain something inside it. Much has been said about what sijjīn means in this verse which in my opinion, is unnecessary since Allah Himself answers what sijjīn is and we will tie it together at that point.

⁶⁸ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 962

Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī quote a number of scholars who said sijjīn means the lowest part of the earth and I think they are all coming to this conclusion because of the root meaning itself. It is clear to me that sijjīn refers to something lowly, and physically below not only because of the root meaning, but also because later on in the surah, Allah will say that the writings of the righteous, as opposed to the fujjār are in ‘ Illiyīn, and ‘ Illiyīn comes from the root ‘ ayn lām alif which means height and elevation. So if the book of deeds of righteous is lofty and on high, it naturally follows that the book of the unrighteous is lowly and below. This does not mean it refers to the lowest earth as Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī mention, but to a point that is physically and otherwise lowly and despised.

But instead of delving into opinions regarding what sijjīn is, we need only look at the next two verses:

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا سِجِّينٌ

What can make you understand what Sijjīn is?

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

A marqūm book

Firstly, the question is asked to draw attention and to highlight the grand nature of what is about to be told.

Allah calls sijjīn a marqūm book or writing. Marqūm is generally taken to mean something inscribed or written which is largely correct, but if we look at its root usages, we see something really interesting. It comes from the root rā’ qāf mīm which was used for a meadow, a place in a valley where water gathers, as well as for a land with scattered patches of vegetation. The core meaning is of a distinct, limited patch standing out from its surroundings like a meadow within the surrounding dry land, patches of vegetation within otherwise barren land and a spot where water gathers in a valley.⁶⁹

Sijjīn is a book, confined inside a tight space. It stands out from its surroundings but not in a way we would normally expect. Since it was literally used for a pit dug inside the earth, it stands out as a deep pit in a vast area. Imagine a wide, expansive and homogenous area with a pit in the centre that stands out. Inside that canyon is the book in which the writings of the angels of the actions of the fujjār go. This is a

⁶⁹ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 841

closed off and confined pit. So there is one massive book inside which the actions of all Fujjār are recorded. It is as if each individual has a chapter of this book reserved for him.

Secondly, marqūm can also mean something that is marked distinctly so that it stands out. Sijjīn could be a book that is distinctly marked by a mark or symbol of wretchedness and misery on the day of resurrection.

وَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ

Destruction that day for the deniers

This goes back to judgment day as well as to sijjīn to say - destruction that day for those who deny that their actions are being recorded in sijjīn; from and by means of sijjīn. Sijjīn contains the record of their evil actions that will ultimately be the cause of their destruction.

الَّذِينَ يَكْذِبُونَ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ

For those who deny the day of dīn

Their denial of sijjīn and of the fact that their actions are being recorded necessarily entails they deny being taken to account on judgment day. I have explained in the previous surah that the genitive construction (day of dīn) is to highlight the salient and most prominent feature of that day. What is that day defined by? By people being taken to account for their actions.

As such, their denial of the day of dīn acts not as a badal (apposition) or ‘atf bayān (appositional clarification) of verse 10 as commonly understood, but as a separate quality that is necessarily entailed by the first.

وَمَا يُكَذِّبُ بِهِ إِلَّا كُلُّ مُعْتَدٍ أَثِيمٍ

And none deny it, except every transgressor and Athīm

إِذَا تُلِيٰ عَلَيْهِ ءَايَاتُنَا قَالَ أَسْطِيرُ الْأَوَّلِينَ

When Our verses are recited to him, he says, “Legends of the former peoples.”

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَىٰ قُلُوبِهِم مَّا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No! Rather, rust is over their hearts - what they were earning

One obvious meaning is that the one who denies that he will ever be taken to account, will consider himself free to do whatever he wants. A criminal will only commit more crimes if he thinks he will never be caught. So this denial of judgment day and of being taken to account, serves as the cause of their transgressions and sins. So in this case, denial of judgment day comes first, and sins follow naturally.

But this passage paints an additional picture. The first meaning holds and is true, but here Allah is saying that it is precisely because of their sins themselves that they deny judgment day. Sins come before denial of judgment day, not after. It is these transgressions and sins that lead a person to deny recompense itself. This is explicitly supported by verse 14.

Athīm means slowness at its root and refers to all sins and disobedience to Allah. Sins slow a person down from good, they make him lag behind from goodness and virtue.

The next ayah describes them as calling the Qur'ān as legends of former peoples i.e. a made up book that consists of old myths and legends. This denotes a denial of the Qur'ān being divine. The next verse forms the crux of this passage.

كَلَّا بَلْ رَانَ عَلَى قُلُوبِهِمْ مَا كَانُوا يَكْسِبُونَ

No! Rather, rust is over their hearts. What they were earning

Linguistically, Qalb (heart) means the inner part or core of something. So this word refers to the well known organ in the chest as well as to our inward faculty of intellect and reason.⁷⁰

The word كَلَّا (No!) is a negation of what they said earlier. The Qur'ān is not composed of myths and legends said by previous generations, but the truth itself. You cannot come to this conclusion not because of a flaw in the Qur'ān, but because your hearts have been blinded and covered by the rust and stain of your sinful actions - of you wronging other people. Notice how this goes back to surah 'Abasa where Allah criticized the disbeliever for burying the seed of good deep inside him. Simply put, do you expect one who cheats and wrongs other human beings to have a heart that will be receptive to good and purity? A heart that rejoices in causing harm and grief to others is filthy. Whereas revelation is good and pure. Purity cannot combine with impurity. If you add clean water to a glass of unclean water, the pure water becomes impure as well. Both cannot co-exist

⁷⁰ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʿAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 1828; *Lisān al-Arab*

independently inside the same space. Hence, when revelation comes in contact with their hearts, their filthy hearts perceive it as impure.

The word Rān (stain or rust) was also used in the meaning of covering or overpowering something as pointed out by Ibn ʿĀshūr and Abu Ḥayyān. They point out that this verb was used for wine when it intoxicates and overpowers the brain, for a person who gets caught in a problem from which he cannot escape (as if the problem overpowers him), as well as for a patient who becomes unconscious - as if the sickness overpowers him so much that he loses consciousness. In this case, this verse would be rendered as - “No! Rather, what they were earning has covered their hearts.”

If you take Rān to mean stain or rust, and not as a verb, then the sentence “What they were earning” would be an apposition (badal) of Rān. In other words, after saying that Rān has covered their hearts, Allah explains what Rān is. It is their sinful deeds that they were continuously committing. The deliberate harm they were doing to other people.

Next Allah defines Rān as what they were earning, because they cheated people to earn money. They were not earning money alone by cheating them, but also stain and rust over their hearts and intelligence.

Just as rust wears a thing away, eats it up and consumes it up, so have their evil deeds of wronging people eaten up and consumed the perception of right and wrong inside their hearts. Every deliberate act of wrong done to another human being eats away at the innate good placed inside our hearts by Allah.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُمْ عَنْ رَبِّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَمَحْجُوبُونَ

No! Truly they, from their Rabb - that day - will be barred

This time, كَلَّا (No!) is a call to stop and desist from rusting and staining the hearts.

The meaning of Rabb has been explained before.

Secondly, this verse affirms that we will see Allah on judgment day according to the standard position of the first three generations of the Muslims, as well the major scholars after them. We will see Allah, but our vision of Him, will not fully grasp or encompass Him as the Qurʾān says:

لَا تُدْرِكُهُ الْأَبْصَارُ وَهُوَ يُدْرِكُ الْأَبْصَارَ ۚ وَهُوَ اللَّطِيفُ الْخَبِيرُ

Vision cannot grasp Him, but He grasps all vision; He is the Subtle, the Aware (6:103)

With that said, and the apparent meaning affirmed, this implies further meanings in addition to these people being barred from seeing Allah because the verse omits the first part of the construct phrase to create generality. They will be barred from seeing Allah. They will be barred from the mercy of Allah. They will be barred from talking to Allah. They will be declared unfit to engage with the king. Just as a king only accepts those subjects into his court who are worthy to enter it, so will Allah not accept them into His court, into His presence, love, care, and mercy on judgment day.

The use of the word Rabb compliments these meanings as well. For example, imagine your mother, who raised you with deep love, gets upset with you so much that she refuses to even see you until death itself. This will hurt you more than let's say, your cousin who visits you once a year turning away from you. The more the love that exists, the more the separation will hurt. Now Allah is your Rabb and He is more loving to us than our own mothers as has been stated in a ḥadīth. On judgment day, the disbeliever will recognize this, he will admit the favors Allah bestowed on him in the world, the kindness Allah displayed to him, and the blessings with which Allah blessed him in this life. He will admit that Allah showed him more love than his own mother. In fact, the love his mother showed to him is also because of Allah Himself. When he gets barred from Allah, he will be more hurt and overwhelmed, than if his mother refuses to see him until death. To communicate this hurt and pain that the disbeliever will experience on judgment day, Allah uses the word Rabb, instead of the name "Allah." This is also why the phrase "their Rabb" is foregrounded and advanced for emphasis and prominence.

"That day" goes back to verse 6, to the day when mankind stands for the Rabb of 'Ālamīn. Remember, Allah said that since He is the Rabb, it necessitates that He bring people to account on judgment day and bring justice to those who were wronged. Here, He emphasizes that He was the Rabb of those who wronged others as well. But they misused his kindness to wrong people who are also under His care. Hence, He must redeem them.

ثُمَّ إِنَّهُمْ لَصَالُوا الْجَحِيمِ

Thumma, they shall be those burn in the blaze

Thumma can mean two things. Firstly, it could indicate a sequence in time, in which case it would mean that after being barred from Allah, they will be thrown into Hell.

Secondly, it can indicate a sequence in status. Meaning, they will be barred from their Lord, and even greater punishment than that is the fact that they will be thrown into the fire. Scholars debated widely over this meaning because being

barred from Allah is the ultimate misfortune, so how can the fire be given a greater status? The answer lies in the context. As explained above, being barred from Allah implies not only the fact that they will not see Allah on judgment day, but also that they will be barred from entering into His presence. When Allah refuses to let them enter His court and to accept them into His presence, this humiliates them. They are not worthy to enter His presence. The context is of humiliating and disgracing them because of their actions. So first they will be disgraced by not being considered worthy of entering into Allah's court and being able to see Him, and then they will be further humiliated inside Hell via various forms of punishment. Al-Ālūsī pointed out that for these people, who do not love Allah, being barred from Allah is not as big a punishment as it is for the believers. For the believer who loves Allah, nothing surpasses the punishment of being barred from Allah, but for the disbeliever, who neither loves nor believes in Allah, being punished in the fire is the bigger punishment.

This verse is emphasized two fold by the use of the word **إِنَّ** and the letter lām. This style of speech is used when addressing those who deny what you are saying to them. These people, who wrong other people, deny they will ever enter the fire for their deeds. If they did, they would stop.

Lastly, the phrase “who burn in the blaze” is a genitive construction. (iḍāfah) A genitive construction in Arabic, indicates an action having been completed already in the past. For example, if I use a genitive construction with reading a book in Arabic, it means that I have already completed reading the book. So what does it mean in this verse? The language literally means that they have already entered the fire.

Two things. Number one, this is a form of warning. In semitic languages, a future event that is yet to occur, can be spoken of in the past tense as if it already happened to denote the sure certainty that it will indeed happen. The Qur'ān mostly speaks of judgment day in the past tense, not in the future, to communicate that judgment is absolutely certain to happen, as certain as an event that has already occurred in the past. So in this verse, this serves as a warning to those who wrong other people. You are absolutely certain to burn in the fire because of your actions.

Secondly, consider how we say in normal English, “He sealed his fate then and there”, for an action that is absolutely sure to lead to consequences in the future. Imagine someone runs a business and makes a poor decision, that is sure to lead to bad consequences in the future. Those consequences have not yet been faced, but they are sure to in the future. We say that this person sealed the fate of his business

then and there with that poor decision, even though the business is running smoothly at the time these words are spoken. Same is the case here. These people sealed their fate, of entering hell fire, when they wronged other people. They may be safe and sound right now, but it is simply a ticking clock. Your fate is sealed with no way out. The only way to undo this, is to undo the wrong you have done. So this serves not only as a statement of pure fact that they have sealed their fate, but it is also a call to these people to undo the wrong they did to others and to redeem themselves, before Allah Himself redeems those they have wronged. Just by using a genitive construction, a usage so subtle that it has even gone unnoticed by almost all scholars, Allah conveys these profound meanings.

ثُمَّ يُقَالُ هَذَا الَّذِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ

Thumma, it is said to them, "This is what you used to consider a lie."

Thumma again means two things which have been explained above.

The words **به** seem extra. As a matter of fact, even without this phrase, the meaning remains complete. There are two possibilities here.

Firstly, its use is subject to what is being denied. If what is being denied is the person himself, **Ba** is omitted. Whereas, if the object of denial is what that person is saying, then **Ba** is used. Since they are rejecting Hellfire, **Ba** was used.

Secondly, it could be that the **Ba** is **سببية** (causal). You used to consider the messengers a lie because of this punishment. Because the messengers warned you of this punishment, you called them a liar. I go by this because this ties in with what has come before in verse 14. They used to deny justice being delivered to people for their actions because their sins and evil deeds had covered up and rusted their hearts. Now, they deny messengers because they confirm and preach this very thing they deny. So one thing leads to another. They commit evil deeds, which blacken their hearts and suck the life out of them. This leads them to deny justice being delivered to people. Now that they believe justice is false, anyone who believes justice to be true, will be deemed a liar by them because he is affirming a false thing in their opinion.

Allah is pointing out the root cause to these people, which He also highlighted in the last verse by using the genitive construction. The main cause of your wickedness are your actions. Redeem yourselves, undo the wrong that you did to

people, to restore life and strength to your hearts. Once you do this, when your hearts come back to life, you will recognize the truth of this message and of judgment day. If you don't do this, then the occasion on which you become certain of judgment day, will be when you see it for yourselves, by which time it will be too late. The fire waits for you as a just recompense for your actions if you do not repent and undo your wrongs.

كَلَّا إِنَّ كِتَابَ الْإِبْرَارِ لَفِي عِلِّيِّينَ

No! Truly, the book of the Abrār is in the ‘illiyyūn

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا عِلِّيُّونَ

And what can make you know what is ‘illiyyūn?

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

A marqūm book

يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

Those brought near witness it

Now, the subject shifts to believers and the surah's structure will change as well as will be pointed out below. We have already covered the meaning of Abrār.

‘Illiyūn at its root means elevation and loftiness. Additionally, the word itself employs a very emphatic pattern, and on top of this emphatic pattern, it is plural, and the plural pattern employed is used for living beings like humans. This plural pattern is for the sake of emphasis as well, and to hyperbolize the purity, holiness and beauty of ‘illiyyūn. This is contrasted with Sijjīn that was described as being lowly and chained off.

‘Illiyūn is so named because it is the source or means by which one reaches loftiness or because it by itself is presented in an elevated and lofty place.⁷¹ Since the passage itself says that the angels closest to Allah stand as witness to it, and also because of the multiple devices of emphasis used to magnify its loftiness, ‘illiyyūn is in the highest heaven, or in the highest level of paradise itself, below the throne of Allah.⁷² It can also mean that the closest, and the greatest angels will bear witness

⁷¹ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 383

⁷² al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 384

to its contents on judgment day. Scholars delved into different opinions on ‘ illiyyūn in addition to these but since the surah itself describes it as a marqūm book, we need not delve into them.

The question - what can make you know what is ‘ illiyyūn - is to magnify its grand nature. What can make you understand the true reality and grand nature of this book? This also serves to honor those whose names and deeds are recorded inside it.

كِتَابٌ مَرْقُومٌ

A marqūm book

We covered the meaning of marqūm earlier. Sijjīn stood out from its surroundings, down below, in a deep pit, in a closed and confined space. Whereas, ‘ illiyyūn stands out even in the seventh heaven, the most lofty heaven. Even among the presence of the greatest and most noble angels of God, ‘ illiyyūn stands out, due to its purity, nobility, greatness and honor. It is the most prominent object in the highest heaven.

Secondly, since marqūm also means being especially marked, such that it stands out, ‘ illiyyūn could be a book that is distinctly marked by a mark or symbol of nobility and good fortune on the day of resurrection.

يَشْهَدُهُ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

Those brought near witness it

This indicates that it is in the highest heaven as mentioned earlier. But there is a verse in surah al - Baqarah that needs to be brought up;

وَإِذْ قَالَ رَبُّكَ لِلْمَلٰٓئِكَةِ اِنِّىْ جَاعِلٌ فِى الْاَرْضِ خَلِيْفَةً ۚ قَالُوْۤا اَتَجْعَلُ فِیْهَا مَنْ یُّفْسِدُ فِیْهَا وَیَسْفِكُ الدِّمَآءَ وَنَحْنُ نُسَبِّحُ بِحَمْدِكَ وَنُقَدِّسُ لَكَ ۗ قَالَ اِنِّىْۤ اَعْلَمُ مَا لَا تَعْلَمُوْنَ

When your Lord said to the angels, “Indeed, I will make upon the earth a caliph.” They said, “Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your praise and sanctify You?” Allah said, “Indeed, I know that which you do not know.” (2:30)

The angels who bear witness to the ‘ illiyyūn are the same angels who objected to man’s creation. They bear witness to it because the Abrār and their righteous actions serve as a testification against their objection to man’s creation.

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ

Truly, the righteous are in comfort

The exact same words as the previous surah. We covered its linguistic meanings there.

Notice how Allah changes the structure of the surah. When He mentioned where the actions of the wicked are recorded, He followed it up by mentioning their wicked actions, and then their destination because of those actions. Whereas, when He mentions the recording of the deeds of the Abrār, He does not mention their deeds, rather directly mentions their destination. Furthermore, even after mentioning their destination of paradise, He will follow it up with mentioning the wicked deeds of the fujjār, not the believers. This is because the subject matter of this surah, are the fujjār and their actions, not the Abrār. So Allah focuses on their actions, not those of the Abrār.

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ

On comfortable couches/ enclosures, looking

Arā'ik is translated as comfortable couches and refers to curtained couches or enclosures. Because of its root meaning of remaining still and attached to something, these are couches or enclosures in which you remain comfortable and do not have to change your position because it starts hurting or becomes uncomfortable.

Secondly, what are they looking at? Nothing is mentioned. From the context, it could be going back to verse 15 and hence, they will be looking at Allah. They will look at Allah with ease and comfort, not being disturbed or made uncomfortable by His glory. This is attested to in a ḥadīth:

إِنَّكُمْ سَتَرُونَ رَبَّكُمْ كَمَا تَرُونَ هَذَا الْقَمَرَ، لَا تَضَامُونَ فِي رُؤْيَيْهِ

Indeed, you will see your Lord just as you see this moon; you will not experience any difficulty, crowding, or obstruction in seeing Him. ⁷³

⁷³ Sahih al-Bukhari 7434

But by not specifying the object, Allah generalizes the meaning, just as He did in verse 15 as explained there. First and foremost, they will be looking at Allah, and this is the greatest experience that can be experienced. Secondly, they will be gazing around at the blessings and luxuries Allah has given them. Everywhere they look, they will see blessings upon blessings. They look here, there are blessings that make them happy, they look there and there are blessings there as well. They will be looking at everything that delights their souls and fills them with joy. But there will be one more thing they will be looking at, that ties this surah together, which will be mentioned later and we will cover it there.

تَعْرِفُ فِي وُجُوهِهِمْ نَضْرَةَ النَّعِيمِ

You will recognize in their faces, radiance of pleasure.

The person being addressed is the reader - you and me. This is a common way of speech in Arabic when describing great matters. When you see their faces, you will realize that they are owners of blessings and comfort.

Radiance of pleasure is to be understood as radiance from pleasure. They looked at Allah and the bliss and serenity they experienced from it was so much that it came out. It is bliss and pleasure that does not remain hidden inside, but comes out and is visible. The bliss they feel, makes their faces shine with light, and makes them beautiful, and soft.⁷⁴

يَسْقُونَ مِنْ رَحِيقٍ مَخْتُومٍ

They are given to drink from Raḥīq Makhtūm

Raḥīq means the purest, finest and most refined essence of wine that is not adulterated in the least with anything else. Makhtūm means sealed. They are made to drink from the purest and finest wine that was never tasted before. "Sealed" here means that it was withheld before from everyone, in the worldly life as well as in the hereafter, and now they are the first ones ever to taste it.

خِتْمُهُ مِسْكٌ وَفِي ذَلِكَ فَلْيَتَنَافَسِ الْمُتَنَفِسُونَ

The last of it is musk, so in that purity alone, let the competitors compete

After they take their last sip, the last thing they experience is the smell of musk, which is the best and most luxurious scent available in those times to the Arabs,

⁷⁴ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 205

and even today. It is as if the person drinking this drink is so overcome with its perfect taste that he does not even notice the scent of musk. It is only when he finishes the drink and puts the cup away, does he notice the scent. Otherwise, the fragrance itself is not itself exclusive to the ending.⁷⁵

The words “*in that*” are foregrounded for emphasis and to create exclusivity. Hence, I added the word “only” in the translation. In that alone, not the wine and luxury of this world, let the competitors compete. The surah started with the mention of those who wrong others to gain worldly benefit. Wine is often associated with luxury and wealth. Those who cheated others in scale did so to gain wealth and luxury in this world. This by itself is a competition. I need to cheat this person, to consume his money, so that I can get more wealthy, which leads me to live a more luxurious life.

Also, the last of it being musk represents a deeper meaning in addition to the remarkable taste of the drink. The last thing they experience is purity. Musk is an extremely pure scent. The wine of this world, the last of it is impurity - intoxication, and as mentioned, wine is often associated with wealth and luxury. Do not strive for things that end with impurity, but for ones that end in purity. The person who drinks wine and gets intoxicated, bears the fruit of getting intoxicated, not of its taste, however delicious it may be. The taste goes away, but his intoxication remains as a blot on his character, as a cause of being looked down on by others, and as a cause of condemnation by Allah. He may also do things in his intoxication for which he will have to bear longstanding consequences. This is the same case with the luxury of this world, when gained through unlawful means like those who cheat others in scale, the end result of it is the fire, not the luxury of this world. Even inside this world, your wealth and property remains constantly under threat. How many people lose their wealth instantly? Strive for things that end in a good and pure outcome. The luxury of the hereafter, is all pure and good. Even the wine itself, a drink which is known to lead to evil results, leads to good consequences in the hereafter. Wine was mentioned specifically because it serves as a perfect example of the reversal of states in the hereafter. Even the most commonly known thing to lead to a bad consequence - wine - leads to a good outcome - the most pure scent known - in the hereafter.

Lastly, the words Tanāfus (compete) and Mutanāfisūn (competitors) both come from the same root (Nafs) which means the soul. These two words, when used for objects, denote one that is desired and sought after by the souls. The word Nafis comes from the same root which means purity. So the meaning is not as simple as

⁷⁵ Ibn Abbās and Ibn Jurayr. See also al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 387

in the translation though I tried to cover it by adding the word ‘purity.’ Compete with each other, race ahead of each other, in seeking purity. How do you seek this purity described in this verse? By doing good to each other, not cheating or wronging others. Rather than stealing and robbing people of their wealth, give them the full measure. Compete with this good then. Do things that are even better than this. Give in charity to the poor. Another person who sees this, let him compete and try to race ahead of this good, let him take in and bring up an orphan for example. Compete in good, in purity. When you see a person do good, compete with him by doing actions that are even better. Compete in this, not in evil, not in amassing worldly wealth. This is the competition, rooted in righteousness, selflessness and piety that the Qur’ān calls for. Not for the selfish competition where each person tries to beat the other in worldly benefits, which causes conflict and hate.

وَمِرَاجُهُ مِنْ تَسْنِيمٍ

It’s mixture is from Tasnīm

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

A spring, from which those brought close, drink

Tasnīm comes from the root sīn nūn mīm which means elevation but it has the meaning of lightness inside it as well.⁷⁶

The Arabs used to mix their wines with water to delay the intoxicating effect. Sometimes, the wine was so strong that it intoxicated them immediately. To delay this intoxicating effect, they used to mix it with water. In paradise, Raḥīq will be mixed with Tasnīm. The wine of paradise does not cause intoxication.⁷⁷ Then why mix it with Tasnīm?

Tasnīm is a spring as the next verse says so itself. It is so called because it is the best drink in paradise or that it is a spring on high, even running midair, that by itself comes down and mixes into Raḥīq as it is handed out to be drunk.⁷⁸

Tasnīm is the best drink in paradise. The Arabs used to dilute their wine with water to delay its intoxicating effect. In paradise, wine will be mixed with the best drink possible, not to remove its intoxicating effect (since it does not have any) nor to dilute its taste (as water does when mixed with wine), but to further enhance its

⁷⁶ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1087

⁷⁷ Q. 37:47

⁷⁸ *al-Ālūsī, Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 389

taste. Tasnīm is the best drink in paradise, even better than the wine they were given. When it gets mixed, it only increases its taste, not dilutes it.

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا الْمُقَرَّبُونَ

A spring, from which those brought close, drink

Ṭabarī and Qurṭubī narrate a number of scholars saying that the best of the best people in paradise, will drink Tasnīm directly from its source whereas those who were below them in righteousness, will only drink it mixed with Raḥīq; on the basis of categorization of the people of paradise into two groups in surah al-Wāqī‘ah and this runs true with what this surah says. Allah called on people to compete in righteousness. Here, He describes those who got ahead of others. The foremost among the believers in righteousness will drink Tasnīm directly from its stream while those below them in rank will only have access to it mixed with Raḥīq.

Remember that the wine itself tasted so perfect that its incredible scent of musk went unnoticed. Tasnīm surpasses even that. It refers to the pinnacle of taste in paradise. Its taste is not specified, but if a lesser drink can cause the scent of musk to be forgotten, it is better than that.

Secondly, there are a number of possible meanings of this verse as noted by al-Ālūsī:

- Tasnīm is a spring from which they drink
- A spring from which they get refreshed by drinking
- They drink while taking pleasure in it
- They drink while being satisfied with it

All of these are based on the meaning of the preposition Ba.

Worldly drinks may refresh the body or delight the palate. Tasnīm penetrates deeper and refreshes the very soul of the drinker and brings complete inward satisfaction. It is a drink whose taste is not confined to the tongue nor its refreshment and satisfaction to the body. Rather, it reaches the very depths of the soul.

Lastly, Allah described the angels with the same words - those brought close - as He does here with the Abrār. This shows that these people have reached the highest level of paradise, right below the throne of God. We often hear in folklore of the angelic realm and imagine wild possibilities of how such a world would be. These people will realize it, attain it, and be the inhabitants of it. Hence, by using the words “those brought close”, Allah is saying that they have reached the highest realm, the very peak of all creation, which, in addition to what is described above, contains

such things, that no eye has seen, nor a thought of it has occurred to anyone.⁷⁹ Instead of detailing what those things are like He does with Raḥīq and Tasnīm, He contains all of those inside “those who brought close” to convey their unimaginable nature.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ أَجْرَمُوا كَانُوا مِنَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا يَضْحَكُونَ

Truly, those who committed Jurm, used to, at those who believed, laugh

This verse seems straightforward at a hindsight but if you tie it down with the context of the surah, it conveys remarkable meanings. It shows that the disbelievers described earlier, who rejected the notion of justice being handed out to people for their actions, and ultimately denied the attribute of justice for Allah itself, deep down in their hearts, recognize the truth of it. Their hearts know and bear witness to its truthfulness.

As we move into this section, we need to remind ourselves of what has come before. The disbelievers reject judgment day not because of any legitimate reason they presume to have, but rather simply because their hearts are covered up and rusted by their sins. Jurm means a big sin and it is not used except for a sin or crime that is huge in magnitude.⁸⁰ Hence, jurm refers to their actions that have rusted their hearts, as well as to their mockery of the believers.

The context of this surah is those who wrong other people. People who wrong others do it mostly to gain worldly benefit and to get ahead of others in the race of worldly wealth. This is the case with those who cheat others in scale. This surah called on people to stop competing with each other in the race to attain worldly benefits, especially by wronging others, and rather focus on competing with each other in good deeds to attain everlasting wealth and purity.

Now their mockery of the believers seems to be devoid of any pursuit of worldly benefit at first glance. You do not gain any benefit by mocking others. It only serves as a tool to bring others down. Mockery stems out of spite, hate and jealousy. These are people who try to bring harm to others even if it doesn't benefit them, but only for the sake of bringing them harm. Like a student who fails his exams, but out of spite and jealousy, mocks those who passed it. The spite and jealousy he holds hidden inside his heart, comes out in the form of mockery. These people mock the believers because they attained something at which they failed. But in addition to all this, it represents another deeper fact.

⁷⁹ Sahih al-Bukhari 7498

⁸⁰ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 210

Remember these are people who try to surpass others in worldly benefits, regardless of the means. This is the mentality of the cheater in scales. This mentality leads us to understand what another meaning this verse represents.

The words “at those who believe” are foregrounded to show that they mocked believers simply because of their faith, nothing else. They did so for two reasons. Firstly, when they saw the believers leave off trying to surpass others in attaining worldly benefits, and instead become obedient to God and only restrict themselves to what Allah permitted them to, and leave off what He forbade on them, they mocked them as those who had foolishly withheld themselves from enjoying their lives. They are leaving off luxury and wealth because of their faith. What utter idiots to leave off these luxuries and to prefer living in even poverty if it must be so, rather than engaging in actions such as even cheating and deceiving others to get out of their poverty. We have a modern version of it as well. Modern society is centered on sexual freedom. What utter idiots to leave off enjoying sexual pleasures until marriage. Who would leave sexual intercourse until marriage, and not enjoy him/herself now and here except losers or those whom nobody would touch etc.

This all represents a guilty conscience that recognizes that the believers are on the truth. Again, keep in mind the mentality of these people which centers on racing ahead of others in wealth, pleasure and luxury. Why would they mock them? There is no benefit to mocking is there? How will mocking them increase your luxury and wealth? It is as if deep down, they recognize inside their hearts the truth of judgment day, that people will in fact be rewarded for their good deeds because when they see these believers, deep down, they realize that these people are getting ahead of them in the competition, that they are racing ahead of them in actions that will in fact be rewarded and lead to luxury. They are getting ahead of them in attaining wealth and pleasure. Deep down, they know this, their hearts bear witness to it. So to bring them down, they start mocking them. They try to divert them away from the straight path so they may lose their progress, stop getting ahead of them in the competition and hence be even with them. The Qur’ān says this in other places:

وَدُّوا لَوْ تُكْفُرُونَ كَمَا كَفَرُوا فَتَكُونُونَ سَوَاءً

They dearly desire for you to disbelieve as they have disbelieved, so that you may all be equal. (4:89)

Lastly, they do it just for the pleasure of it. It gives them pleasure and that rush of dopamine. Their rusted hearts cannot find pleasure except in evil and they have hence turned the state of their hearts upside down. Hearts originally took joy in

good, this is how Allah created us; but they changed their state to take pleasure in wronging people. This ties in well with the root meaning of jurm which means to cut something off.⁸¹ They have cut off their hearts from their original state, to a new evil state. This will be reinforced by the coming verses.

وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِهِمْ يَتَغَامَزُونَ

When they passed by them, they exchanged mocking glances

When the believers passed by them, they would exchange sneering looks with each other, nudge one another with their eyes, silently mock them through hidden gestures, and make other such facial signals. One thing to note about the word يتغامزون is that it means pressing or prodding at its root. So these gestures were hurtful to the believers who would notice them.

وَإِذَا أُنْقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمُ أُنْقَلَبُوا فَكِهِينَ

And when they returned to their families, they returned satiated

Interestingly, the verb ‘returned’ comes from the same root as the word ‘heart’ in verse 14. The root means the inner part of something. From this, it came to be used to mean flipping something to expose its inner part. From this flipping over, this root came to be used in the meaning of changing a state to its opposite, and from this idea of turning something over, Arabs used this root for returning from where someone came.⁸²

But there is wisdom in using this root instead of saying رجعوا or عادوا, both of which mean to return and have frequent uses in the Qur’ān itself. Allah is highlighting the state of their hearts that lead them to commit these actions. Their actions are being mentioned but with special focus on the root and cause of these actions - their rusted hearts. This has already been explained in detail in verse 29, but Allah keeps on focusing on their hearts to show that they mock and hurt others because of their own sins, not because of the fault of others. Secondly, since they flipped the state of their hearts, and changed it to the opposite of their original state, Allah will exact justice like for like by flipping the table on them as will come later.

⁸¹ *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 302

⁸² *Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 1828

Also, the verb ‘returned’ is mentioned twice. It would have been enough to say “When they returned to their families, they jested” or “When they returned to their families, they were joyful/ jestful.”

The repetition of the verb serves to drive the point home. To strongly establish what they did in the mind of the listener, since it is something that deserves attention. Remember that their mocking was hurtful to the believers. This action of theirs, when they returned to their families, being proud and overjoyed with mocking and hurting the believers, deserves your special attention. Why? Because now Allah will flip the table. Allah is highlighting their sin, pay attention to what they did, because what they are about to receive on judgment day is exactly what they themselves did on the earth.

Lastly, when the verb is repeated in the manner in which it is done in this verse, an accompanying explanation with a preposition is the norm in Arabic, but here the preposition is not there. Going by the norm, this would have been rendered as “when they returned to their families, they would return amusing themselves by talking about the believers.”

The preposition may be omitted because it is understood from the context⁸³ but a better explanation is that the omission is to generalize the meaning. They would return amusing themselves with what they did to the believers and by speaking ill of them, as well as being joyful and proud over what they were - of disbelieving in Allah, of their sins, being happy over the profits they made by cheating, and being joyful over the wrong they did to others by other means.⁸⁴

A man normally returns to his family after having completed his day’s work. So this does not simply denote them returning to their families, but their entire day, and hence their entire lives. This is how they live their lives day by day. This is what they do consistently, day after day. This is their way of life, of taking pride in doing wrong to others.

Lastly, earlier in the surah, the people of paradise were satiated by Tasnīm, whereas these people are satiated by their evil actions in this world.

وَإِذَا رَأَوْهُمْ قَالُوا إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ لَضَالُونَ

And when they saw them, they would say, “Indeed, those are truly lost “

⁸³ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 212

⁸⁴ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 102

Dual use of emphasis by using **إِنْ** and **Lām** together, which as explained earlier, is used when addressing someone who does not believe in what you are saying to him. This verse is not simply denoting their speech to others, but their effort in trying to convince other people, as well as the believers, that they are upon falsehood, and hence they should leave Islam, and stop prohibiting worldly pleasures and luxuries upon themselves which Islam forbids on them.

وَمَا أَرْسَلُوا عَلَيْهِمْ حَافِظِينَ

While they were not sent upon them as guardians.

To protect them from falling into error.

Secondly, the words “upon them” are advanced. Simply put, they were not made responsible over them, but over someone else, namely, their own souls and their own families.

فَالْيَوْمَ الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا مِنَ الْكُفَّارِ يَضْحَكُونَ

Therefore, this day, those who believed, will, at the Kuffār, laugh

You laughed at them, they laugh at you now. Notice the word **Kuffār** which is a hyperbole form of the word **Kāfir**. We have covered its meaning in surah ‘Abasa. Why transition from **Fujjār** to **Kuffār** all of a sudden? **Fujjār** denoted their impulsiveness into sins. How they tried to compete and get ahead of each other in doing wrong. **Kuffār** intensifies the scope and magnitude of their actions. They did not just rush into any sins, but into the worst kind of sins and disobedience.

The words “at the kuffār” are advanced and hence, a better rendition of this verse is, “Therefore this day, those who believed will laugh at the kuffār, not the kuffār at those who believed.”⁸⁵ This would then be emphasizing a reversal of states.

In the hereafter, the believer will laugh at the disbeliever now because of their way of life - of being engulfed by the fire and being constantly tormented. The believers would laugh at them because they knew that the disbelievers were upon nothing, and because they sold the permanent bliss for temporary pleasure; and because they have succeeded in attaining everlasting bliss, not the fleeting pleasure of the world. By holding on and by being patient for a short amount of time, they gained permanent comfort. So they were seated on couches, and looked at how the disbelievers were being punished inside Hell, and how they would be screaming

⁸⁵ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 28, p. 392

inside it, and calling for death and destruction upon themselves and cursing those who led them to this fate.⁸⁶

عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ يَنْظُرُونَ

On comfortable couches/ enclosures, looking

This is the other thing they would be looking at that I mentioned in verse 23. They will be redeemed. They will look at those who tormented them in this world, get tormented instead. The oppressed getting justice against his oppressor. Their redemption at the hands of Allah, will provide them additional comfort on top of the many unimaginable blessings Allah had prepared for them. The repetition of this verse is no accident because among the things believers will look at in paradise, two have been explicitly mentioned. Seeing Allah and seeing their oppressors getting punished. Seeing Allah is such a blessing in itself that it deserved a separate verse. Getting redemption from the oppressor holds great importance for the one who has been wronged and hence, it was mentioned separately.

هَلْ ثَوَّبَ الْكُفَّارُ مَا كَانُوا يَفْعَلُونَ

Have the disbelievers been returned what they were doing?

Most translations translate *Ṣawāb* as 'reward' but its root meaning is for something scattered to return and come together.⁸⁷ It is as if when someone does an action, the deed has gone forth, and something returns in exchange for it.

This is a question that will be asked to the believers who were oppressed and wronged by these disbelievers. When they see the disbelievers being punished, Allah asks them if they have been redeemed. Those who wronged you, they are in the fire burning as you watch them engulfed and wail in pain. Have you been redeemed? Has justice been delivered to you? Have they been given what they sent forth? Yes, we are redeemed. Justice has been delivered, and the truth has been exposed for all to see. We were on the truth, we were correct to prefer this world over the last, and now, we have everlasting bliss.

⁸⁶ al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 103

⁸⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʾAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 228

Lost Light

Surah 103: Al -‘Aṣr



We will break off from covering the surahs in sequence from now on. We will be covering specific surahs of the Qur’ān and at the very end, we will cover surah al-Sajdah which is a relatively large surah to show how the theme and structure flows in larger surahs too.

وَالْعَصْرِ

By ‘Aṣr

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِفِي خُسْرٍ

Truly, man is drowning in loss

This Surah carries the central theme of the Qur’ān regarding human beings, their state, their role, and their salvation.

The word ‘Aṣr comes from the root ‘ayn ṣād rā’ which was used in the following meanings:

- To squeeze grapes or anything that contains oil, juice or honey to extract what is within
- For the liquid that drips or oozes when the object is squeezed

The central meaning is to force or squeeze out what is held within by applying pressure or force such as the juice of the grapes.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ *Al-Mu ‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu ‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1474

The Arabs used this word ‘Aṣr to refer to late afternoon and the reason why they did so is quite eloquent. The light and heat of the sun is at its peak and most intense at noon. From then, the light of the sun little by little, keeps on losing its intensity and ferocity till we reach late afternoon at which time, the intensity of its light is significantly less than what it was during noon.

It is almost as if the light and heat of the sun gets squeezed out of it little by little just like the juice from the grapes.

This phenomenon is called to light to state that mankind as a whole is engulfed and engrossed in loss. We will cover the contextual meaning in the next verse.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِفِي خُسْرٍ

Truly, man is drowning in loss

It is phrased as a nominal sentence. Nominative sentences in Arabic imply a constant and unchanging state. Man is drowning inside loss and this is the constant state he is in.

The verse literally says “man is in loss.” This creates meanings of being immersed, entrapped and engulfed in loss. It is as if the human being is imprisoned inside a prison of loss or drowning inside it or is entrapped and totally immersed in loss.

The word Khusr (loss) is indefinite which implies greatness i.e, man is not just drowning in any loss. but in a loss which is great and deadly in its nature.

The verse is emphasized twofold which as explained earlier is used when the addressee is in denial of what you are saying. Man is drowning in loss left right and center but he is in denial of it. He thinks he is in profit.

The Connection

‘Aṣr means late afternoon when the light of the sun is extremely less in intensity and ferocity than it is at noon. From noon to late afternoon, the sun little by little loses its light, its light gradually loses its intensity and ferocity.

From noon to late afternoon, the sun suffers loss as its light diminishes and it loses

its intensity and ferocity. Just like the sun, the human being is suffering from loss as well.

The Sun is a metaphor for the human being. A being with dazzling brilliance and potential but one which is losing this brilliance, potential, and light - which is the very core of human essence. The light of the sun is its very essence. If the sun loses its light, what worth does it have? It becomes a worthless existence with no purpose. The human being is also losing the very light that makes him what he is. That gives him purpose, meaning and worth.

But all hope is not lost. Allah swears by ‘*Aṣr*’ and not the sunset. Even though the sun loses its light and intensity by ‘*Aṣr*’, it is not all gone. It only completely goes away at sunset. Just so, even though the human being is losing his very essence which gives him his worth, he has not lost it totally. The sun - the human being - has not yet set. There is still hope. He can still recover and reclaim his brilliance and potential.

The next verse will mention how to recover this loss. It will use the word *Ṣāliḥāt* which at its root means rectification and correction. By means of *Ṣāliḥāt*, a human being can reverse his state and recover his losses.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ وَتَوَّصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ

*But for those who believed, did **righteous deeds**, then counseled each other with Haqq and counseled each other patiently.*

The word *Ṣāliḥāt* is translated as ‘righteous deeds.’ It comes from the root ṣād lām ḥā ’ which was used for:

- Something free of defects
- For repairing something
- Reconciliation

The core meaning of this root is for something to be sound and good in itself and to restore or repair something back to its original state after damage.⁸⁹ You can clearly see how it fits with the overall theme of the surah. Man is losing his light, damage is

⁸⁹ *Al-Mu ‘jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu ‘aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur ‘ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1250

being done to him. *Ṣāliḥāt* are actions that can repair and amend this damage and restore man back to his original glory.

Lastly, there are many ways to make plurals of a word in Arabic. *Ṣāliḥāt* is plural but its pattern is one that is used for something that despite being in plural, is relatively small in number. This suggests that these deeds that can repair the damage done to us are not many, they are just a few. We do not have to go to great lengths to fix ourselves. Only a few deeds will achieve this.

The first condition Allah mentions is of faith. Without belief and affirming faith in Allah and the Qur'ān, even *ṣāliḥāt* will be in vain and incapable of undoing the damage done. Once faith and *ṣāliḥāt* are achieved, the next step is to counsel others to do the same. *Ḥaqq* is normally translated as 'truth.' Its root meaning is of something being solid and firm⁹⁰, and since truth is a solid and firm fact that does not change or alter, it came to be used for it. In this verse, *ḥaqq* means the religion of Islam as a whole because it is the firm and solid truth grounded in divine revelation. Secondly, it also refers to what has come previously in this surah because the phraseology of the last verse implies that man is in denial of the fact that he is in loss while the truth is the opposite. Hence, counselling others to *ḥaqq* means counselling others to the fact that they are in fact in loss and believing in Islam and doing *ṣāliḥāt* is the only way to get back on track.

Then patience is mentioned. Counselling others to patience is already implied by counselling others to Islam.⁹¹ Patience is being highlighted specifically. You must exert effort in emphasizing to others that patience is necessary. Believing in the truth will necessarily come with challenges and trials and one must endure them patiently.

Secondly, it could also imply being patient from disobeying Allah and on being firm on *ḥaqq*. By this meaning it would imply a constant and stable condition of believing in the truth and of doing *ṣāliḥāt*, not a one off action. They counsel each other to first believe and do *ṣāliḥāt*, then they also counsel them to be stable and constant on this, not to be on and off.⁹²

Connection to the Surahs Before and After it:

⁹⁰ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʿAlfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p.466-467

⁹¹ Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p.533

⁹² al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 29, p. 311

1. The Surah before it is surah al Takāthur which criticizes people for hoarding up wealth on top of other wealth unnecessarily while not fulfilling its due rights. When somebody hoards wealth in such a manner, he definitely increases in wealth but this surah says he is only increasing in loss. People are hoarding up wealth but actually they are only hoarding up loss over loss.
2. The Surah next to it is surah al Humazah which again criticizes people who hoard up wealth but it will also mention some other traits such as scorning, fault finding and backbiting. When people hoard up wealth unjustly they are actually hoarding up loss. This surah defines that loss. What type of loss did they hoard up? By developing other bad traits such as backbiting and becoming scorers, that the surah will mention.

The Human Soul

Surah 91: Al - Shams

وَالشَّمْسِ وَضُحَاهَا ﴿١﴾

By the Sun and by its *Duha*

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَّهَا ﴿٢﴾

By the moon as it follows it,

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّاهَا ﴿٣﴾

By the day as it gives it glory

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا ﴿٤﴾

By the night as it conceals it

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا ﴿٥﴾

By the sky and by its building/ elevation

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا ﴿٦﴾

By the earth and by its spreading

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ﴿٧﴾

By *Soul*, and by its balancing

فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ﴿٨﴾

Then he inspired it, its destruction and protection

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا ﴿٩﴾

(Impossible to translate)

وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا ﴿١٠﴾

(Impossible to translate)

This Surah is dedicated to the human soul, to our essence. This Surah will define what it is and then the next surah, Surah Layl, will tell us what purifies our soul. It is a question as old as time itself, what is the human being, what is the human essence.

وَالشَّمْسُ وَضُحَاهَا ﴿١﴾

By the Sun and by its Duha

This surah will mostly consist of two oaths in one verse like this. The first oath is by the Sun. The second oath by Duha.

Duha is the early part of the morning, after sunrise when the sun becomes easily and clearly visible in the sky. Initially after sunrise, the sun is not visible. After a couple of hours, it is right above us such that if we look above at the sky, the sun is clearly visible. This time when it becomes easily and clearly visible is *Duha*

But the word Duha can also refer to the light of the sun during this time as well. The light of the sun is soft and pleasant at this time. In the context of this surah, Duha refers to the light of the sun during this period; not the time period itself.

We will first just go through all the oaths and then bring them all together at the end In sha Allah.

وَالْقَمَرِ إِذَا تَلَّهَا ﴿٢﴾

By the moon as it *follows* it,

The word *Tala* is translated as *follows*. It is important to note that this root contains the meaning of being subservient. For example, it was used for a baby fowl when it follows its mother right after birth etc.⁹³

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا جَلَّهَا ﴿٣﴾

By the day when it gives it glory

This is *Majaz Aqli*. The use of *Majaz Aqli* keeps the focus on the sun which as we will see, forms the center of this surah.

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَاهَا ﴿٤﴾

By the night as it conceals it

Majaz Aqli again. The pronoun *it* refers back to the sun again.

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَمَا بَنَاهَا ﴿٥﴾

By the sky and by its erection/ building

Translations normally translate it as “*By the sky and he who built/ erected it.*” They translate the particle ما as *what*. But I take ما to be *Ma al Musdariyah* - which turns the verb after it into a verbal noun - because this keeps it true to the theme and context of the surah. This is also the position of al-Farrā’, al-Zajjāj, Qatādah, al-Mubarrad.⁹⁴

وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا طَحَاهَا ﴿٦﴾

By the earth and by its spreading/ flattening.

Ma al Masdaryah again.

⁹³ *Al-Mu ‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu ‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p.213

⁹⁴ See also - al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma ‘ānī*, vol. 29, p. 67

By *Soul*, and by its balancing

Notice the lack of the definite article. There was a definite article “al” with every object whose oath was taken off. Allah said - By the Sun, By the Moon, By the sky, By the earth; but here, there is no definite article, it is simply - *By Soul*.

This is for two reasons.

Firstly, to highlight that this is the main thing or subject being talked about. The lack of the definite article here suggests that every single oath that came before it, came in the context of the Soul and hence has something to do with the Soul. The Soul is the main and central subject being talked about. Every oath is in light of it. This is following the position that the definite article can be omitted to highlight the great and grand nature of a thing as is commonly understood in balāgha.

Secondly, the omission of the definite article creates plurality. It means that Allah is swearing by all souls. Every single human soul in every single human being, believer or disbeliever, man or woman alike. Every single human being has the same soul.

Collective Meaning of the Oaths

This is the order of all the oaths.

1. The Sun
2. Duha
3. Moon
4. Day
5. Night
6. Sky
7. The elevation of the sky
8. Earth
9. The flattening and spreading of the earth
10. Soul
11. The balancing of the soul

The oath by the sun is followed by an oath by the moon. The oath by the day is followed by an oath by the night. The oath by the Sky is followed by an oath by the

earth. The oath by the flatness (lowness) of the earth is followed by the erection of the sky.

Each object is followed by its opposite.

The opposite of the sun is the moon; the opposite of the day is the night; the opposite of the sky is the earth, the opposite of the lowliness of the earth is the elevation of the sky.

When two opposites come together, balance is achieved.

Hence, Allah says right next:

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا ﴿٧﴾

By Soul, and by its balancing

The human soul has been balanced by bringing together two opposites like the multiple phenomena that have been mentioned.

Now what are these two opposites? They are specified in the next verse and alluded to in the erection of the sky and the spreading of the earth. Allah says next:

فَأَلْهَمَهَا فُجُورَهَا وَتَقْوَاهَا ﴿٨﴾

Then he inspired it, its destruction and protection

Allah put inside the human being, knowledge of good and bad, of what protects his soul and destroys it. Righteousness protects the soul, its boundary, its sanctity, and its rights whereas evil destroys it. Allah balanced the human being by putting inside him these two opposites - knowledge of good and bad. He can choose either and is given free will to do so.

Secondly, the phraseology is very generic and hence it can mean additional things. Allah put inside the human being what destroys his soul and what protects it. Namely, He put inside the human being lowly, worldly desires which destroy his soul, and He also put inside him what protects his soul, namely - the desire for the divine and righteousness. Islam asks of a human being to balance these two desires within himself. Man should neither dedicate himself solely to his spiritual needs and

neglect the desires and needs of his body, nor should he live chasing bodily desires and neglect his spiritual needs. Marriage serves as a perfect example of this. The bodily desire for the other gender needs to be exercised under the oath and protection of marriage only. Hence, exercising bodily desires after fulfilling Islamic requirements harmonizes them with spiritual responsibilities and this extends to all other things. Another example is the money someone earns. Islam does not stop or put a threshold on how much money one should earn, but rather on how much effort he spends. If all he is occupied with is earning money, then this leads to neglecting his spiritual needs. Instead, he is to earn money whilst also taking care of religious duties. On the money he earns, he is to pay a fixed percentage of Zakāh annually too. This way, both the material and the spiritual needs are balanced and go hand in hand. Islam does not treat the physical and spiritual as exclusive that cannot be reconciled with each other. Rather, Islam reconciles and harmonizes them in such a way that they both go hand in hand. A perfect balance.

Now the question arises why specifically mention the sun with the moon and the day with the night? If the point was just to highlight the coming together of two opposites, Allah could have mentioned any pair of opposites such as for example; a man with a woman, an animal with an angel etc. Why specifically mention these objects?

Because these oaths are exactly what the human soul is. Sometimes it is bright and sometimes it is dark. Sometimes it is radiant, and sometimes it is dull. Just like the constant battle of the day and night, where sometimes the light takes over and then darkness gets over it right after, so is this battle going on within the human soul. Sometimes it is righteous and radiant like the day but then darkness and evil take over it like the night. Sometimes it is happy and joyful, other times, it is sad and dull.

﴿ ٩ ﴾ قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ زَكَّاهَا

Qad Aflaha mn Zakka ha

﴿ ١٠ ﴾ وَقَدْ خَابَ مَنْ دَسَّاهَا

Wa Qd Khāba Mn Dassa Ha

These two verses are impossible to translate.

Notice the first word in blue- *Aflaha*. This word was used for plowing land. A farmer is called “fallāḥ” in Arabic which comes from the same root.

The second word is *Zakka* which we have already covered in surah al- Nāzi‘ āt. It was used for a nourished and fertile land as well as for crops that produced increased yield.

The word *Khāba* comes from the root *khā’ wāw bā’* which was used for

- A land that did not receive rain. Situated between two lands that received rain
- Uncultivated land

While the root of the next word *Dassa* was used for:

- A snake that burrows deep inside the earth
- Burying
- Hiding

You can see from these four words *Aflaha*, *Zakka*, *Khāba* and *Dassa* that this is a clear imagery of a land being either cultivated or not being taken care of.

The one who works hard like a farmer, plowing his land (his soul), and then purifies it, cultivates it, helping it grow and flourish - will gain great harvest, produce and benefit from his land (soul). That farmer has been successful. Just like fertile land that is tilled, watered, and taken care of, the soul responds to care and blossoms with goodness.

The one who neglects his land (soul), buries its potential, hides its seed (potential and light) under layers of darkness (earth and desires) will have a barren soul like a land left unwatered and untouched. They miss out even when others around them (the other lands that received water) flourish.

Allah is presenting the human soul like a piece of land

1. Some lands (souls) are plowed, nurtured and purified, and so they become fruitful and successful.

2. Other lands (souls) are buried, ignored, hidden and receive no rain (divine guidance or inner effort)- and thus, they become fruitless, dry and ultimately, failures.

Allah is asking people to take care of their spiritual needs as well. We all take care of bodily desires. Just as we take care of our material needs daily, build our capital and investment salary by salary, so should we take care and try to increase in spiritual good. Just as a farmer consistently takes care of his crops to prevent them from rotting away, so should men tend to their souls daily to protect it from being wasted away.

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِطَغْوَاهَا ﴿١١﴾

*Thamud denied because of **its** Taghwa*

Allah now presents an example of what happens when this balance is broken with Thamūd serving as a case study.

The pronoun goes back to the soul. Thamūd denied (God and his prophet Ṣāliḥ) because of the *Taghwa* of the soul. Taghwa is the verbal noun of ṭāghīn which we have covered earlier. It means exceeding limits and overwhelming something. Originally, it was used for the peak of a mountain and for water to submerge and overwhelm its surroundings inside it. We have covered this earlier.

Recall the oaths. By the Day as it gives it (the sun) glory. By the night as it covers it. Look at the second oath - by the night as it covers the sun. Is that not exactly what *Taghwa* means? The night overwhelms and covers the sun. Or in other words, darkness overwhelms and engulfs the source of light.

This is exactly what thamūd did. They let the darkness inside them overwhelm the light. They were meant to maintain balance between their bodily and spiritual needs but they let their desires overwhelm and take over their hearts and hence broke the balance.

إِذْ أُنْبِثَتْ أَشْقَاهَا ﴿١٢﴾

When the most miserable of them rose up

The person who rose up to slaughter the she-camel.

فَقَالَ لَهُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ نَاقَةَ اللَّهِ وَسُقْيَاهَا ﴿١٣﴾

So a Messenger of Allah said to them, 'The she-camel of Allah and her drink!'

This is just an urgent way of speaking to convey warning which is why the word Nāqah (she-camel) is in accusative case. The messenger (Ṣāliḥ) warned them sternly to leave the she-camel alone. The reason why Allah calls him “a messenger of Allah” rather than naming him is to imply a universal principle. They disobeyed a messenger of Allah and deemed him a liar. Whosoever does this with a messenger of Allah, will deserve the same fate mentioned in the next verse. Had Allah said Ṣāliḥ instead of “a messenger of Allah” it could have been implied that it held true for Ṣāliḥ only. Hence, when Allah mentions this, this includes all those who deem Prophet Muhammad a liar too, past and present, even in our age.

This she-camel came out of a rock in front of them. This was God’s miracle to Ṣāliḥ. A normal person would believe this as an obvious sign from God and believe. If we saw a camel coming out in front of us from a rock, would we not come to believe?

But just as the night covers the sun, so did the darkness in them overwhelm and completely cover the good in them and also their intellects.

Allah is highlighting the severe consequences that follow when people violate the balance they are meant to maintain within themselves. When this balance is broken, it can make a person utterly blind and senseless to the extent that they will even reject a miracle in plain sight.

فَكَذَّبُوهُ فَعَقَرُوهَا فَدَمْدَمَ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّهُمْ بِذُنُوبِهِمْ فَحَسَّوْهَا ﴿١٤﴾

But they deemed him a liar and hamstrung her. So their Lord engulfed them under the earth for their Dhanb and levelled it.

The word *damdama* has been translated as engulfed. Much has been said about its meaning. Scholars have mentioned meanings such as a loud cry, being overtaken by punishment, as well as being swallowed up and buried inside the earth.⁹⁵ Its root meaning actually has to do with levelling and evening something out which quite well fits with the overall theme of the surah.⁹⁶

The ayah does not end there. It says just one more word

فَسَوَّاهَا

Then He levelled/ balanced it

The very same word as in verse 8

وَنَفْسٍ وَمَا سَوَّاهَا

By Soul and by its balancing

We need to know what the pronoun it is referring to.

Dhanb is normally translated as sin. Its root was used mostly to refer to an animal's tail and also to the bottom or narrow ends of a valley; as well as to low ranked people in society. This word is mostly used in the Qur'ān for disobeying Allah, and for sins and guilt. It is derived from the root meanings of being left behind, lowered status and degradation. Sins degrade a person and lower his status. This root was also used in the meaning of following someone because a tail is behind the animal's body as if it follows it wherever it goes.⁹⁷

This ayah could mean that when that person rose to kill the she-camel, *thamūd* - the entire people - approved of his act and followed him. Hence, Allah balanced out the punishment to each one of them. Though the one who killed it was only one man, *thamūd*'s assistance and approval of his action led them to have an equal and balanced share in the punishment. The majority of scholars have held this position but without mentioning the reason. They hold that *taswiyah* (balancing) means that Allah punished all of *thamūd* equally, without exception⁹⁸ and when we look at

⁹⁵ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 29, p. 75; Ibn 'Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 375; al-Rāzī, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, vol. 31, p. 196;

⁹⁶ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Ālfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 674

⁹⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Ālfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 724

⁹⁸ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmi' al-Bayān 'an Ta'wīl Āy al-Qur'ān*, vol. 24, p. 450; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 29, p. 75

the word dhanb, it becomes clear that it was due to their approval and following of the one who killed the she-camel.

Secondly, *taswiyah* could also mean that their houses and buildings collapsed over them and buried them beneath the rubble, or that the earth swallowed them up, burying them alive inside it, and then the surface got levelled as though nothing remained.⁹⁹

Now it all goes back to the *taswiyah* of the soul that is the central point of this surah. Why use the same word here when describing thamūds punishment?

When people destroy the *taswiyah* that Allah established within them, then Allah destroys them with a *taswiyah* of another kind. When that scale of justice is violated and trampled on, Allah restores that scale and justice with His punishment. Allah's punishment is rooted in justice and restoration. The one who fashioned the soul with perfect balance, is the same one who can perfectly restore this balance when it is violated, and also the one who perfectly levels and hands out punishment and justice to all those who deserve it. Think of *taswiyah* as setting things up in proper balance and order. When it is violated, Allah restores it back.

وَلَا يَخَافُ عُقْبَاهَا ﴿١٥﴾

While he does not fear its consequence

There are two possibilities as to whom the pronoun “he” refers back to. Some said it goes back to the most miserable one who rose up to kill the she-camel,¹⁰⁰ while others held that it goes back to Allah Himself.¹⁰¹ The generic nature of this verse allows for both positions to be true.

If it refers back to the person who killed the she-camel, it means that he rose to kill the she-camel while not fearing the consequences of doing so. Allah first mentions what He did with him and his people, and then mentions how that person did not expect any of this to happen as if to mock him and his stupidity. Recall how earlier Allah mentioned how breaking apart the intricate balance of the soul leads people to even become intellectually handicapped and this is a continuation of that point.

⁹⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-ʾAlfāz al-Qurʾān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 724; al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Maʿānī*, vol. 29, p. 75. This opinion is present unanimously in tafsir literature as a whole.

¹⁰⁰ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 24, p. 452-453

¹⁰¹ al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-Bayān ʿan Taʾwīl Āy al-Qurʾān*, vol. 24, p. 451

If the pronoun goes back to Allah Himself, then this verse serves as a kināyah - an allusion or an indirect expression - of the fact Allah is the overpowering One whose defeated adversary is incapable of taking revenge against Him. It could also be an analogy of their condition after being annihilated by Allah, where Allah likens them to someone who leaves behind no one who can take revenge on their behalf.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Ibn ʿĀshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 375

The Loyal Beast

Surah 100: Al-ʿĀdiyāt



وَالْعَدِيَّتِ ضَبْحًا

By the leaping horses, panting and exerting full force

Allah swears by the horses that are panting furiously and exerting their full force in running at such a fierce speed that they are covering distances in leaps or because they appear as if they are leaping from one place to another.

فَالْمُورِيَّتِ قَدْحًا

Who then ignite fire by striking firestones

This is a metaphorical analogy for their furious speed. When their hooves strike stones, they ignite sparks of fire because of the sheer speed and force.

فَالْمُغِيرَتِ صُبْحًا

Raiding at dawn

فَأَثَرُنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا

Stirred up, with it, dust clouds

This goes back to their furious speed. They are charging at such speeds that dust clouds form because of it. It could also refer to the horse-riders who raise these dust clouds by commanding their steeds to charge so furiously.

Raids are normally carried out during the night but this one is happening in plain sight - in the morning. These horses are doing things that are very attention catching and give off clear signs to the enemy that they are about to be raided. Firstly by charging furiously and at such a speed that sparks of fire are flying out. Secondly, by raiding in broad daylight and thirdly, by creating huge and visible clouds of dust. All these things are enough for the enemy to know beforehand that they are about to be raided. This is important to note in the context of this surah.

فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا

Then reached due to it, the center of the army

Because of their furious and relentless charge, they were able to penetrate the enemy lines and reach its center.

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ

Indeed, Man, from his Rabb, holds back immensely.

An abrupt change of subject. Just now it was talking about a raid carried out successfully by furiously charging horses and all of a sudden, it says that man holds back from his Lord? Let's unpack the language first.

The word *kanūd* is translated as 'holds back immensely.' It comes from the root kāf nūn dāl which was literally used for a land that produced no herbs and plants. The root meaning is to withhold what is inside so that nothing emerges.¹⁰³

There is emphasis here by use of the word *kanūd* instead of its base form *kānid*. *Kanūd* contains more emphasis and hence why I added the word "immensely" in the translation.

We have already covered what Rabb means.

Kanūd is normally translated as being ungrateful. Holding back implies not giving someone his rightful due and this is a form of ingratitude but this includes other things as well not just ingratitude. Not giving Allah the respect, the gratitude, the recognition, the love, the trust, the reverence that he deserves among other things.

¹⁰³ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 1930

How is this Related to the Galloping Horses?

Those galloping horses were led by their riders who act as their masters. The horse responds to the one riding it. Where the rider directs it, it goes. What the rider commands it, it does. The master - the Rabb - of the horse is its rider.

This raid occurred in plain daylight not at night and that too with very attention seeking things accompanying them which give a clear and early signal to the enemy that a raid is coming. Naturally, the enemy will be prepared to meet these raiders head on.

The horses being led by their riders see it for what it is. There are armed men with swords and spears ready to meet them head on and they are first in the line to be struck with them. The horses enter the enemy lines even before their riders. The enemy will naturally be looking to kill these horses so that the riders fall off and hence with them, the momentum dies. They are being led to certain death by their Rabb- the riders - yet they do not hesitate to go forward and enter enemy lines. They gallop and charge at the enemy going at such speed that their hooves give off sparks of fire when they strike the flints. They are panting and exerting their full force. All because their masters commanded them to do so. When one is hesitant, he does not exert full force. Somewhere, sometime doubt and hesitation creeps in. Yet these horses do not display any doubt and show no hesitation and fully submit to their riders. They gallop at the enemy with full force, not caring about death even. They happily lay out their lives just because their masters ordered them to do so.

These horses do not hold back when it comes to their masters, but man does. Man should learn from his horse. This is what Allah is saying.

If he does so and fully submits to his Rabb, just as the horses were able to penetrate into the enemy's heart, so will Man be victorious in his life and struggles. The horses showed no hesitation and surrendered themselves to their masters. If man does the same, victory is his.

وَأَنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ

While He truly bears witness to that

The pronoun 'He' can be referring to human beings but it can also refer to Allah. The human being himself bears witness that he is a *kanūd* with regards to Allah or it

can refer back to Allah Himself that Allah bears witness to the ingratitude of the human being. It is a form of warning to people. Allah sees this and is a witness to you withholding from Allah what is His. This is the position of Al-Hasan, Muhammad ibn ka'b, Ibn 'Abbās, and Qatādah as well.

Man withholds the rights of Allah from Him while He is watching it happen. People do not disobey a king when they are in his presence for fear of obvious punishment, but when it comes to the ultimate king - Allah - man disobeys him and holds back from giving Him what He deserves even though this king is all seeing and bears witness to what man does. This is the reason why the word *rabb* was advanced in the last verse for emphasis. Human beings are especially *kanūd* to Allah, more than anyone else.

وَأَنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ

Because he, in the love of Khayr, is a miser

Or

Because he, in pursuit of weakness only, is strong

These are the two meanings of this verse:

- Man is a *kanūd* to Allah as he is a miser because of his love of khayr
- Man is a *kanūd* to Allah because he is strong for the sake of khayr only, but otherwise weak

The particle *Inna* is commonly translated as “undoubtedly” but this is *inna for Ta' līl* or reason and hence it is translated as ‘because.’ Why is Man a *kanūd* to Allah?

The letter *lām* (for) in “*li hubb*” (in love of) can be a *lām al ta' līl* and it can also be a *lām al milk*. *Lām al ta' līl* would be translated as “because” whereas *lām al milk* is used for possession. Man is a miser because he loves khayr or because he wants to be in possession of it. Both convey the same meaning

The word Khayr comes from the root *khā' yā' rā'* which at its very root actually means weakness and abundance both. It was used for

- a camel with weak and brittle bones

- A palm tree with a lot of fruits
- A land which was soft
- Milk that was in great quantity
- A spear that was on the verge of breaking

The core meaning is weakness and abundance. Something that is in great quantity, but weak. It is like a balancing act. A thing is abundant, so to balance the scale, it is made weak.¹⁰⁴

Though not the root meaning, this root was used to mean “good” or something beneficial. Anything that is good or beneficial is a source of comfort and happiness. When it is used in this context, it refers to something beneficial that is weak, unsustainable or temporary, even though it may be in great quantity. Khayr has come in the Qur’ān to mean money. Money is a good that goes away - if not during one’s life, then after his death. There comes a time when money provides no benefit.

In this context, it can mean that man is a miser because he loves temporary comfort and happiness over happiness that is long lasting and sustainable. By not holding back from Allah His rights, man will gain long lasting and sustainable happiness but instead he prefers the temporary and fleeting happiness that goes away.

The word shadīd is translated as “miser.” In Arabic poetry - though not the root meaning - it was used to mean a miser, as seen in the poetry of Tarafah.¹⁰⁵

So the first meaning of this ayah is:

Man is a *kanūd* to Allah because he loves the temporary wealth and luxury of this life over the long lasting and sustained goodness that comes from obeying his Lord. Man is a miser and holds back from Allah what is His in its proper due because of his intense love for the wealth of this life. Unlike the horses that were willing to throw it all away at the command of their masters, man is unwilling to fully obey his Lord.

The horses did not back down from running into plain death. It is a difficult thing to obey your master at such times but the horses did so, and it was precisely because of it that they penetrated the enemy center and achieved victory. True victory is achieved by fully submitting to Allah and battling through pain and suffering that

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu’aşşal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 540

¹⁰⁵ *al-Ālūsī, Rūḥ al-Ma’ānī*, vol. 29, p. 279

may come with it. But the very thought of pain drives man away from his Lord. If man were in the place of those galloping horses, he would stop and run away at the sight of the enemy prepared to receive him with spears and shields. My master is leading me to certain death! He told me to charge in broad daylight and at such speeds that formed dust clouds, which let the enemy know I was about to attack them. This is stupid! Why not attack during the night? Why not raid them stealthily and surprise them? Why do it like this? This is stupid!

He fails to fully trust his Lord like the horses. He fails to give Him the due trust that the horses gave to their riders. Trust Allah and obey him. Set aside your personal feelings and fears while doing so, and victory is yours.

Secondly, the linguistic meaning of the word *shadīd* is strength and intensity. If we take this meaning, then the verse would be rendered as:

Man is a *kanūd* to Allah because he is strong for the sake of *khayr* only.

The words *li hubbil khayr* (in love of *khayr*) are advanced and this creates exclusivity. Man is strong only when he is pursuing *khayr*, otherwise he becomes weak and fragile.

This creates an interesting play of words. I mentioned that the word *khayr* at its root means weakness and this ties in perfectly with the word *shadīd*. (strength)

Man is strong in pursuit and love of weakness but weak in pursuit of strength.

The horses remained strong in pursuit of real victory. They did not waver, they did not hesitate. They displayed immense willpower and strength to charge head on into the enemy rows waiting to kill them. They displayed actual strength for a good that is truly deserving of all this effort, whereas man, in such a situation, would cower away. He would display weakness in such a situation.

Man displays weakness and miserliness when obeying Allah. He does not give Him His due right, but in other matters related to worldly wealth and luxury, he displays immense strength. He grinds, works hard, even endures pain and suffering just to attain it. But when he is asked to do the same when it comes to his Lord, he holds back. The word *rabb* in this regard ties in very well. He holds back from Allah, even though He takes care of him.

أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ

Does he not know when that in the graves is taken out?

The object of the verb “know” is omitted. Does he not know what? It is left for the reader to come to terms with himself based on what he has read in this surah. I will cover it later on.

وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ

When that in the chests is taken out besides everything

The root ḥā’ ṣād lām was used for silver that was extracted from mountains and separated while everything else was wasted away. The ḥāṣil (from the same root) of something referred to what remained behind of it while everything else went away.¹⁰⁶

This is an imagery. Think of a purse containing a lot of stuff but you are looking for one small pearl. You would put your hand inside it, and then throw all other things out until you find the treasure. Just so, will the graves be opened up, and the toppler throw everything out in search of what lies hidden inside the chests. People will be resurrected physically but their hearts, the intentions, the feelings, that are the seed of every action that they do, will be taken out. The very first cause of cowardice is that feeling of fear inside the chest. If someone is charging at an enemy and midway cowers and runs away, that cowardice starts from that feeling of fear and “what if” inside his chest. His body then simply follows along and obeys it. What Allah is saying is that I will go to the very depths of your being, and extract your feelings themselves. I will not simply judge you as being a kanūd to Me, but I will lay down before you, your very feelings that caused you to become one.

How is this connected to what has come before?

The horses raided and penetrated the enemy, reaching their very center - their heart. Their goal was to reach the centre of the enemy and they were successful. On

¹⁰⁶ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 446

the last day, Allah too will carry out a raid and penetrate our graves, and reach the very centre and essence of our being- our hearts.

Just as the horses openly announced their incoming charge to their enemy by forming dust clouds, Allah is also announcing beforehand of the raid that He will carry out. He will conquer you and examine you to your very breasts - to the very core of your beings. His raid will be fierce and relentless, like that of the horses.

This is the omitted object of the verb “know” in the previous verse. Does he not know that Allah too will carry out a raid like those horses but this time man himself will be the object of this raid?

Inside the chests, lie the hearts. And so;

إِنَّ رَبَّهُمْ بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَبِيرٌ

Truly, their Master, of them, on that day, has deep and intimate knowledge

The word *khābīr* is translated as “deep and intimate knowledge.” It comes from the root *khā’ bā’ rā’* which was used for a ground so soft that feet would sink in it, as well as for a round depression in which water gathered. The core meaning is to soften or weaken something to the extent that its very depth can be reached.¹⁰⁷ This root was often used in the meaning of knowledge but this is not just any knowledge. This is knowledge with which one knows the true essence and reality of something - as if penetrating it to its very core.

The whole theme of the Surah involved penetration. The horses penetrated the enemy and reached their center. Allah will topple our graves and penetrate our chests. In this verse, the knowledge of Allah penetrates our hearts. First Allah penetrates our chests to take out our hearts and now, after having gathered our hearts, he penetrates them too with his knowledge and reaches the very depth of our being. Nothing is as intimate to a person than his feelings. Nobody truly knows the feelings of another person, only he himself knows. Allah will conquer us such that our most intimate secrets and feelings are laid bare before him.

One of the meanings of verse 8 is that man displays strength only when he is pursuing weakness and not otherwise. An army needs to be strong to defend against a raid. A weak army will be defeated. The raid of Allah is coming and man

¹⁰⁷ *Al-Mu’jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu’aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 523

needs to be strong to be able to defend himself against it. If he fulfills the rights of Allah truly, he will become strong and when his heart is examined by Allah in this state, he will be saved. Man displays weakness when striving for the strength that will make him pass this test of Allah, and displays strength when striving for things that make him weak in the face of this raid and examination by Allah.

When an army is conquered by its enemy, it is held hostage by them and is at their mercy and they can do whatever they want with them. Punish them, torture them, execute them or let them go. On the last day, Allah will carry out a raid and conquer us. We will be held hostage before Him with our hearts, feelings and intimate secrets laid out before Him. If people want Allah to show them mercy when they are in this state, they must stop being a *kanūd* to Allah and stop holding back from Him His rights. Otherwise, they will be subject to His punishment.

All of this is just a detailed and graphic description of a raid. It would be enough for Allah to just have said that on the last day He will examine your hearts to their depths but instead, He mentions every little detail. First I will topple your graves. Then I will penetrate your chests and take out your hearts. Then I will penetrate your hearts and take out your secrets. Just saying that Allah will take out the secrets of hearts would have conveyed the intended meaning but this style of speech is to warn. It is similar to how we speak when giving warnings to someone. First I will do this, then this and then that to you etc. The style of speech employed in this Surah is itself a warning.

Connection to the Surahs Next to it

The Surah before it is al - Zilzāl that mentions the earthquake of judgment day which makes the earth take out the things it contains. This Surah specifies exactly what the earth takes out. Secondly, it also mentions the Earth as actually telling and reporting; and this surah mentions the hearts as being exposed and their contents taken out and their secrets being reported openly.

The surah next to it is al - Qāriʿah which mentions people and mountains becoming weightless on judgment day. What is meant by people are deeds or actions done for the sake of people; to appease them, to be accepted by them, to be looked up to by them etc; and the mountains symbolize the strongest desires pertaining to this world of an individual which differ from person to person. The name of the surah - al - Qāriʿah- means something that exposes another thing. It will expose people and mountains as worthless and weightless and as we saw in this surah, the hearts also got exposed and penetrated. The true reality and

character of a person will get exposed. How many feelings do people hide inside their breasts that they would rather die than have them exposed publicly?

Allah is Ahad

Surah 112: Al- Ikhlaṣ



If you want to know the Islamic creed regarding God, this surah suffices you.

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say, 'He is Allah, the aḥad.'

or

Say, 'Huwa, Allah is aḥad.'

Firstly, why is the verse structured as “Say - Allah is aḥad?” Why not simply say “Allah is aḥad?”

This is for two reasons. Firstly to show the importance of this statement. The Prophet is being told to announce this, to say it publicly and make effort so this may reach people. “Say” means ‘announce.’

Announce and proclaim publicly that Allah is aḥad.

Secondly, it is to demonstrate the Qur’ān is from Allah and not from the Prophet. When revelation came down to the Prophet, it would have been said to him ‘Say - Allah is aḥad.’ He is being commanded to announce it. The announcement is ‘Allah is Ahad’ not ‘Say - Allah is aḥad.’ It is a demonstration that the Prophet preaches the Qur’ān exactly as he receives it, neither taking anything from it nor adding to it and that these are not his words but rather of Allah Himself who sends it down to him and he proclaims it to people in exactly the same manner he receives them.

Next is the pronoun هو (*Huwa*). It is the masculine singular pronoun for the third person in Arabic. Above, I gave two translations of the verse. In the first version, I translated this pronoun as *He* but left it untranslated in the second translation. This is because there are two possible meanings of this pronoun in this verse.

1. It is as if a question is being asked to the Prophet which is not mentioned in the surah. Namely - *Muhammad! Who is your God?* The Prophet is being told to answer them with "*He is Allah, the aḥad.*"

2. This can be an anticipatory pronoun of rhetorical magnification (ضمير الشأن)

This is used for the purpose of magnifying the importance of the statement about to be made. When something extremely important is about to be said, this pronoun is used before it to convey that what is about to be said is extremely important, so pay attention. By using this pronoun, the verse is basically saying that the most important thing of note and importance is that *Allah is aḥad*.

Now the word *aḥad*. The word *aḥad* is either only used in contexts of negation, prohibition or in contexts of conditions by itself. Examples below:

Negative Context

فَمَا مِنْكُمْ مِنْ أَحَدٍ عَنْهُ حَاجِزِينَ

*There is not **any one** of you who can shield from Him*

[Al-Hāqqah 69:47]

لَسْتُ كَأَحَدٍ مِنَ النِّسَاءِ

*You are not like **any one** of the women.*

[Al-Aḥzāb 33:32]

Condition

وَإِنْ أَحَدٌ مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ اسْتَجَارَكَ

*If **any one** of the polytheists seeks your protection...*

[At-Tawbah 9:6]

The word *aḥad* may appear in affirmative clauses but only when it occurs in a genitive construction; in such cases, it retains an indefinite, non-specific sense (“any one of”) as can be seen in the last example. It denotes belonging to a certain group of people. So the only way we use the word *aḥad* in positive contexts is in a genitive construction like the above two examples. but we do not use the word *aḥad* by itself in affirmative contexts.

But this verse of the Qur’ān does exactly that. It uses the word *aḥad* by itself, without any genitive construction, in an affirmative context.

It says in Mu‘jam al Ishtiqaqi:

وإذا وقع في سياق إيجاب وكان مضافاً ظل معناه (أيّ واحد)، لكن من أفراد المضاف إليه. والشيوع يتحقق بعدم قصد التعيين وهو بذلك المعنى في القرآن كله في الحالتين. وإن وقع في سياق إيجاب وهو غير مضاف تحول معنى الشيوع إلى إطلاق، وعبر لفظ (أحد) عن الانفراد المطلق، كما في قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

When it occurs in an affirmative context while being in an idāfah (genitive construction), it retains the meaning of “any one”... If, however, it occurs in an affirmative context without being in idāfah, the meaning of generality shifts into absolute singularity, and the word Aḥad then expresses absolute oneness and singularity, as in:

قُلْ هُوَ اللَّهُ أَحَدٌ

Say, “Huwa, Allah is Aḥad”

So *aḥad* has been uniquely used in a way the Arabs did not usually use it. It denotes absolute singularity. A good translation of *aḥad* in my view is *one and only*. Therefore, “Allah is *aḥad*” can be translated as “Allah is the one and only.”

This verse of surah al- Ikhlās is enough by itself to understand what tawḥīd is and who Allah is. Allah is the one and only in everything. He is the one and only in all His attributes. The 99 names of Allah that we well know, they represent attributes of Allah. All of those names and attributes, in their perfect form and state, belong to Allah alone and no one else. Allah is the one and only in that He alone created everything, He alone is all hearing, all seeing, all wise, all powerful, the absolute

sovereign, the ultimate king and ruler. The list goes on. The attributes and qualities that He describes Himself with and all the attributes and qualities that He possesses, He alone and nobody else, possess them in the manner He does.

If there is a person who is known for his kindness, it does not mean there are not others who are kind too. A king may have power, but it could be that there are other kings who possess similar power. But when it comes to Allah, there is nobody with the same attributes. Nobody is as kind as Him. Nobody possesses the power that He does. Nobody can see the way He sees. Nobody can hear the way He hears. Nobody can do anything the way He does them. Nobody possesses any attribute the way He does.

This one verse is enough to understand Tawḥīd. When you hear any name of Allah, know that Allah is the one and only in that name. When you hear any attribute of Allah, know that no one possesses that attribute the way He does. Once a person realizes this, he will not bother relying on anyone other than Allah. Complete understanding of this one single verse will prevent people from the false practices that are now so common among them such as grave worship, making prayers to dead people, visiting shrines and other such false practices. Allah alone can relieve a person from his troubles and He alone and no one else, is worthy that prayers and supplications be directed to Him. He alone can help you and relieve you of your troubles. He is the one and only.

The pronoun *Huwa*, which was used to magnify the importance of the statement that Allah is *aḥad* is profound. The most important thing a human being needs to realize in his life is that Allah is *aḥad*. That Allah is the one and only. There is no success without Tawḥīd; and this verse of al-Ikhlās is the very core of tawḥīd. It is tawḥīd summarized in three words. Allah is *aḥad*. The fact that Allah is *aḥad*, is the most important thing a human being needs to understand.

Lastly, *aḥad* is the same word as *echad* used to describe God in Deuteronomy 6:4, the *Shema*. We believe in the God who is perfect and indivisible unlike the Christians who use the same word to imply a complex unity. The Qur'ān is clear. God is indivisible, unique and only one.

اللَّهُ الصَّمَدُ

Allah is al- Samad

The letters 'al' in 'al-Samad' is the definite article in Arabic. I left it untranslated rather than rendering 'Allah is al-Samad' as 'Allah is the Samad' because the definite article is not as simple in classical Arabic as it is in English. In this verse, the definite article creates a very important meaning that will be explained at the end. For now, we will focus on the word samad.

It comes from the root *ṣād mīm dāl* which was used for:

- A high and thick place of land that does not quite reach the level of a mountain and on which trees grow. This implies a piece of land which is elevated but not so high that it cannot be climbed like most mountains. It is a piece of land which is high and elevated but accessible and within reach.
- A vertical rock
- Something elevated
- A solid object with no hollowness inside it
- A man who does not get thirsty or hungry even inside a battle
- A sealed object with no cavity in it

The central meaning is for something firm and solid to be elevated.¹⁰⁸

Samad is one of the trickier words of the Qur'ān and much has been said regarding what it means. Razi alone quotes 25 opinions of what scholars said regarding its meaning. Below are a few examples of what has been said regarding its meaning based on its root meaning:

1. *Allah is samad means that Allah is utterly perfect.* This is taken from the root meaning of a solid object that has no hollowness inside it. Hollowness implies a defect or flaw. Hence, samad means that Allah is utterly perfect in all shapes and forms, free of any and all flaws.
2. *One who is independent of everyone.* When an entity has no defect, flaw or any shortcoming, it is independent and in no need of others. So Allah is the entity who has no need of anyone.
3. *The master whose authority, power and honor have reached their highest possible level.* Derived from the root meaning of elevation.
4. *The everlasting entity who has no beginning or end.* This meaning comes from the idea of firmness and stability: from land that rises solidly like a mountain, from rock that is firmly fixed in place. It is also reflected in images such as a sealed bottle, and anything that is hard, dense, and without hollowness.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1256

¹⁰⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1257

Arabic roots normally have two distinct meanings which blend together to give the complete meaning of the root. Same is the case here. When we look at the ways the root *ṣād mīm dāl* was used, two meanings stand out; firmness and elevation.

Firmness of the kind that has no defect or flaw (derived from the lack of hollowness inside the object) but elevation of the sort that it is not out of reach because the height of the piece of the land mentioned above does not reach the level of a mountain implying that it is accessible and can be climbed.

But the height of the piece of land mentioned above did not reach the level of a mountain. Is this not a defect? This seems like a flaw that this piece of land is lacking in height and elevation; but the root meaning implies that there is no defect in it. How can both be the case at the same time?

The answer becomes clear when we reflect a little and take the text in its intended context. Allah is samad. Which means that Allah, firstly, is utterly perfect with no flaws or defects; and secondly, Allah is elevated, high and lofty but within reach not because of a flaw or defect, but because of His kindness and love towards us. Allah is not out of our reach that our prayers do not reach Him or that He cannot hear us. Unlike the mountain whose summit cannot be reached, Allah is accessible to us. We can reach Him with our words, direct our prayers to Him to which He listens and answers. Our words and prayers reach Him, and He hears and responds to them.

Hence, Allah is the entity who is perfect, with no flaws or defects, who is independent and free of everyone; yet who can be reached, communicated with and talked to.

This perfection covers all aspects and all attributes of Allah. In times of need and difficulty, we only seek help from those whose help amounts to something and who are actually capable of helping us. Allah is perfect in all His attributes, His power, reach, hearing, listening, authority, capabilities etc, are all perfect. And so, it is Him whose help we need and He is accessible to us as well. We do not need an intermediary or an attorney to talk on our behalf to Him. We can reach Him directly by ourselves.

This is why many scholars of language have defined al-samad as the entity towards whom people turn to fulfill their needs.

لا خِلافَ بَيْنَ أَهْلِ اللُّغَةِ أَنَّهُ السَّيِّدُ الَّذِي لَيْسَ فَوْقَهُ أَحَدٌ الَّذِي يَصْمَدُ إِلَيْهِ النَّاسُ فِي حَوَائِجِهِمْ وَأُمُورِهِمْ
There is no difference of opinion among the scholars of language that Samad means the Master above whom there is no one. The one to whom people turn to concerning their needs and all other matters. (Ibn al Anbāri)

هُوَ الَّذِي يَنْتَهِي إِلَيْهِ السُّودُّ وَيَصْمَدُ إِلَيْهِ؛ أَيُّ: يَقْصِدُهُ كُلُّ شَيْءٍ

He is the one in whom all sovereignty culminates, and towards whom all things are directed. All things direct themselves to Him. (al Zujāj)¹¹⁰

This meaning is derived from the root and is correct. The primary meaning of Samad, however, as explained above, is the perfect entity, free of any flaw or defect, that can be reached and communicated to.

The pattern of the word samad is in the form of a *صفة مشبهة* - an adjective of permanent quality. This pattern is used to imply a permanent, constant and stable quality or state. Allah is al- samad; always. Forever and ever. This quality of His does not change, fluctuate or go up and down. Suppose a person is in trouble and needs help. He knows of a person who is capable and has the power to free him of his trouble. The question that then naturally comes to the mind is if that person is available right now or not. Is he ready and available for me to reach out to him and seek his help? Also, he was capable before when I met him and had the power at that time to help me, but does he still possess that same power right now or has he lost it?

With Allah, this question never arises. He is always present, always accessible, always there with absolute power and capability. This is the profound meaning contained in the structure of the word samad being a *صفة مشبهة* (adjective of permanent quality)

Zamakhsharī and others have said that the word samad, even though it follows the pattern of a *صفة مشبهة* (adjective that implies a permanent and constant quality), actually carries a passive meaning i.e samad means the one who is intended and to whom everything is directed. This is partially correct. Samad does indeed mean the

¹¹⁰ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 29, p. 443

entity who is intended and to whom things are directed, but this is not the entire meaning of the word as we saw earlier. Once the complete root meaning is taken into account, the opinion that the word samad here is used to mean only its passive meaning (maṣmūd) does not remain legitimate.

Next we come to the definite article that I mentioned at the very beginning. What meaning does the definite article create here?

1. Exclusivity and singularity. Allah alone and no one else, is samad. The first verse lacked the definite article because there was no need for it. Aḥad means One and only and you do not need the definite article or any other device to create meanings of exclusivity with aḥad. Aḥad by itself implies exclusivity.
2. As explained in the first verse, the word aḥad was not generally used in an affirmative context by itself. This by itself implies uniqueness and singularity because no Arab used the word aḥad to refer to their gods - ever. So there was no need to emphasize that Allah alone is aḥad and that your supposed gods are not. But they did use the word samad for their false gods. Therefore, Allah uses the definite article here to convey to them that Allah alone is samad and no one else, including your supposed gods.

Next, the normal flow of speech from the first verse should have been like this:

قل هو الله أحد والحمد

Allah is aḥad and al samad.

or

قل هو الله أحد وهو الصمد

Allah is aḥad and He is al samad.

Just as we normally say:

Ahmed is hardworking and intelligent or Ahmed is hardworking and he is intelligent.

We do not say

Ahmed is hardworking. Ahmed is intelligent.

But this is exactly how the surah is;

Allah is aḥad. Allah is al samad.

Why the repetition?

Tafsir al kabīr states that it is simply because the word al-samad has the definite article inside it while the word aḥad does not. Grammatically, it might indeed not be correct to pair them together with nothing between the two words; but this is not a problem here. The problem is that the normal usage was to use a pronoun or a conjunction rather than name of God again.

In Arabic, when we use the definite article with an adjective that is describing a definite noun, it implies necessity. For example, if we say السلطان العادل, (the ruler is the just one) what this means is that a ruler can only be a ruler if he is just. No ruler who is unjust, is fit to be called a ruler. Similarly in this verse of al- Ikhlās, it implies that no entity can claim to be divine unless it is al- samad. If Allah was not al samad, He would not fit to be called God. He would lose His divine essence. Hence, for an entity to be considered divine, it has to be al-samad.

Samad primarily implies perfection, elevation and being ever present and accessible. Perfection is one of the primary qualities that sets Allah apart. Nothing we see or know of is perfect except Allah. There is a defect and flaw in everything. Being born is a defect which implies you were dependent on others to come into existence, that you had a beginning, that you are bound by time - an outside entity and hence, there was a time you were not present. Death is an imperfection because it implies an end and the fact that you are powerless and helpless against other factors. We hear and see but our hearing and seeing have limits. We cannot hear or see every single thing; but not with Allah. When it comes to Allah, everything is perfect. Perfection solely belongs to Allah. This is what is being emphasized here. Since perfection only belongs to Allah, Allah is al- samad. *This is why Allah is Ahad - the one and only - because perfection belongs only and only to Him and no one else.* The pattern of the word samad implies constant, unchanging and constant state. Everlasting, constant perfection. Perfection that never fluctuates. Another root meaning of samad was being accessible and within reach. Not being available or being inaccessible is a form of imperfection too. It implies being barred from the one who wants to reach out. It is one thing to reject the one who reaches out to you, it is another when you are inaccessible. Allah is always present, always there, always listening, you can stand up in prayer and reach out to Him anytime you want. Constant, unchanging and permanent presence which is

not subject to anything other than Him. Unless an entity is al samad - the only one who is perfect, invincible, with no flaws or defects, and is ever present and available - it cannot be divine.

There is only one entity who is al samad - Allah; and this is why Allah is Ahad - the one and only. Perfection is what sets Allah apart and He is the one and only - Ahad - in that regards.

This meaning would be lost had the name of God - Allah - been replaced by a pronoun or a conjunction. It is to convey this point that the name of God appears again rather than being replaced by a conjunction or a pronoun. Alusi summarizes this beautifully:

وتَكَرَّرُ الْإِسْمُ الْجَلِيلُ دُونَ الْإِثْنَيْنِ بِالضَّمِيرِ قِيلَ لِلْإِشْعَارِ بِأَنَّ مَنْ لَمْ يَتَّصِفْ بِالصَّمَدِيَّةِ لَمْ يَسْتَحِقَّ الْأُلُوهِيَّةَ

*The repetition of the Divine Name—rather than using a pronoun—has been explained as a way of indicating that **whoever does not possess samadiyah (the attributes of being al Samad) does not deserve divinity.***

He goes on to say:

وَقِيلَ ذَلِكَ لِأَنَّ تَعْلِيْقَ الصَّمَدِ بِاللَّهِ يُشْعِرُ بِعِلِّيَّةِ الْأُلُوهِيَّةِ بِنَاءً عَلَى أَنَّهُ فِي الْأَصْلِ صِفَةٌ وَإِذَا كَانَتِ الصَّمَدِيَّةُ نَتِيجَةً لِلْأُلُوهِيَّةِ لَمْ يَسْتَحِقَّ الْأُلُوهِيَّةَ مَنْ لَمْ يَتَّصِفْ بِهَا

It has also been said that linking al Samad directly to the name of Allah suggests al Samad is causally linked to divinity because the term (Samad) is originally an attribute. If being al Samad is a necessary consequence of divinity, then whoever lacks it, cannot be divine.¹¹¹

When an idol worshipper in Makkah realizes this, will he not see the blatant flaws in the statues he worshipped? The idol which he made with his own hands with dirt, which is bound and subject to him taking care of it; which can be broken if one

¹¹¹ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma‘ānī*, vol. 29, p. 446

throws it to the ground; which is physically bound, which can neither hear, nor see or speak. Flaw after flaw. When the concept of perfection is realized, all false notions of God collapse. From idol worship, to the Christian and Jewish Bible as well as the Kabbalistic and Talmudic Jewish forgeries; the statement Allah is al-samad collapses all false notions of God. The Qur'ān restores, after centuries of innovations and forgeries, monotheism back to its purest form as originally revealed by God.

Lastly, the Qur'ān normally uses conjunctions between verses but that is not the case here. There is no conjunction at the start of this verse. This is because the second sentence 'Allah is al Samad' is proof that the first sentence is true, part of which we have already covered above.

Allah is Ahad. The proof that Allah is Ahad is that He is al samad.

Alusi says:

وَتَرِكَ الْعَاطِفُ فِي الْجُمْلَةِ الْمَذْكُورَةِ لِأَنَّهَا كَالدَّلِيلِ عَلَيْهِ؛ فَإِنَّ مَنْ كَانَ غَنِيًّا لِدَاتِهِ مُحْتَاجًا إِلَيْهِ جَمِيعُ مَا سِوَاهُ لَا يَكُونُ إِلَّا وَاحِدًا أَوْ مَا سِوَاهُ لَا يَكُونُ إِلَّا مُمَكَّنًا مُحْتَاجًا إِلَيْهِ، أَوْ لِأَنَّهَا كَالنَّاتِجَةِ لِذَلِكَ بِنَاءً عَلَى أَنَّ الْأَحَدِيَّةَ تَسْتَلْزِمُ الصَّمَدِيَّةَ وَالْغِنَى الْمَطْلَقَ.

The conjunction was omitted because it functions as a proof of what came before, because an entity who is self sufficient and perfect in His very essence, upon whom everything else besides Him depends and upon whom their existence is contingent and dependent, can only be one. (Ahad) It can also be a necessary consequence of the previous statement (Allah is Ahad) because being ahad necessitates being al samad and being absolutely and completely self sufficient.¹¹²

Allah is ahad - one and only - because He is the only entity who is al samad. Samadiyah sets Allah apart. He is the one and only - ahad - when it comes to it. This perfect and completely self sufficient entity is not out of your reach. You can talk to him, pray to Him and He will listen to you. This is why the next two Surahs of the Qur'ān - al Falaq and al Nās - are prayers directed to Allah.

¹¹² al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 29, p. 447

لَمْ يَلِدْ وَلَمْ يُولَدْ

He did not beget nor is He born

There are two possibilities.

1. The sentence (He did not beget) is a second predicate and the sentence (nor is He born) is the third predicate of the subject “Allah” from the previous verse where the first predicate was “al-samad.” So the sentence reads - Allah is al samad and He did not beget and neither is He born. This presents three attributes of Allah because “al samad”, “He did not beget” and “nor is He born” are on the same grammatical level. This structure is declarative and categorical and presents a list of divine attributes.
2. The sentence (He did not beget nor is He born) is a badal Ishtimāl which means that the second statement does not restate the first statement, but rather mentions something that is inherently contained in its meaning. The resulting meaning is that one of the intrinsic implications of Allah being al samad is that He did not beget nor is He born. Being al samad necessarily implies that Allah did not beget nor was He born. It clarifies what truly being al samad implies. Al- samad means the perfect, flawless entity. Being born is a flaw because it entails non existence before being born. Another condition of being al- samad is being eternal. A being that is not eternal, which had a beginning in time and which will have an end; which is brought into existence - which also means that it was dependent on others to bring Him into existence - cannot be al samad. Just as one cannot be ahad if he is not al samad, one cannot be al Samad if he begets or was born.

This is summarized by al- Razi

فَالْأَحَدِيَّةُ وَالصَّمَدِيَّةُ يُوجِبَانِ نَفْيَ الْوَلَدِيَّةِ وَالْمَوْلُودِيَّةِ

*Being Ahad and al Samad necessarily imply that begetting and being born is impossible.*¹¹³

There are a number of questions that come up regarding the structure of this verse and its wording pointed out by al Razi

¹¹³ al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, vol. 32, p. 184

1. Why does “*He did not beget*” come before “*He is not born*” when the natural order is to say “*He was not born nor did He beget?*” The answer is that the major false creeds regarding God stem from attributing sons or daughters to Allah. The Jews and Christians attributed a son to Allah while the polytheists of Arabia attributed daughters to Him but they did not attribute a father to Allah. So he followed the sentence ‘*He did not beget*’ with ‘*nor is He born*’ as evidence for it to say that the proof that Allah did not beget is that He is not born from anyone. To beget a child, one must be in a parent child relationship. The fact that Allah was never born shows that this parent child relationship does not exist with Allah. This also refutes the Christian belief of eternal generation of the persons inside the trinity.
2. Why does it say ‘*He did not beget*’ in the past tense rather than saying it as ‘*He does not beget?*’ This is to show the falsehood of their creeds which had them believe that certain individuals such as Jesus and angels were sons and daughters of Allah. The past tense is to refute them to say that such a thing never happened.
3. Why does He say ‘*He did not beget*’ while in other places of the Qur’ān such as 17:111 He says ‘*He did not take a son.*’ ‘*He did not beget*’ means nothing is born from Him. “*He did not take a son*” is in the meaning of adoption. It is to negate the claim that He called a person His son. A human being can either have his own son or he could adopt a son because of certain benefits that come from it. Both of these things are rejected for Allah.¹¹⁴

We can see that one attribute necessarily leads to another. Being *ahad* necessarily implies being *al- samad*; which necessarily implies the impossibility of begetting and being born.

The core point of the surah remains that Allah is *ahad*. Every other quality naturally follows the quality of being *ahad*. Everything we know has a beginning and an end. Allah being *ahad* - the one and only - implies that Allah is the exception. So Allah not begetting nor being born is already contained inside the word *ahad*.

وَلَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ كُفُوًا أَحَدٌ

To Him, no equal is there!

The word *kufuw* is translated as equal. It comes from the root *kāf fā’ wāw/hamza* which was used for

¹¹⁴ al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, vol. 32, p. 183

- A screen covering the rear of the house from the top to bottom
- Inverting or turning something over

The central meaning is to overlap or fit something precisely to its measure like the screen covering the rear of the house from the top to bottom. When you cover something top to bottom, you basically invert or change its appearance because from the outside, it's appearance is the same as of the cover that covers it. In doing so, you changed or inverted the way it looked.¹¹⁵

The word *kufuw* has been universally understood to mean an equal because the screen was perfectly equal in length to the rear of the house i.e, like for like; but this is not its whole meaning. Covering something top to bottom implies overshadowing it as well. It implies the ability to overpower and overshadow something. Therefore, *kufuw* does mean an equal, but its primary meaning also includes overshadowing and overpowering something.

But firstly, we need to look at the way this verse is structured which is quite complex. I will transcribe it below to show the structure in play. The standard way this sentence is to be said is:

ولم يكن أحد كفوا له

Wa lum yakun ahad kufuwan lahu

But the ayah is structured as

ولم يكن له كفوا أحد

Wa lum yakun lahu kufuwan ahad

Before anything else, *ahad* in this verse, is used in a negative context. We covered at the beginning that this is quite normal.

Now, you can see that the words *lahu* (to Him) and *ahad* are not in their standard places. *Lahu* is advanced while *ahad* is delayed to the end. This is because the central point of the surah is the oneness and singularity of Allah in all aspects. *Lahu* (to Him) is advanced as it is the most important and central point. Allah has no equal. *Lahu* emphasizes that. Therefore, it is brought first because most important things are given precedence. Al- Razi says:

¹¹⁵ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 1905

السؤال الأول: الكلام العربي الفصيح أن يؤخر الظرف الذي هو لغو غير مستقر ولا يقدم، وقد نص سيبويه على ذلك في كتابه، فما باله ورد مقدماً في أفصح الكلام؟ والجواب: هذا الكلام إنما سيق لنفي المكافأة عن ذات الله، واللفظ الدال على هذا المعنى هو هذا الظرف، وتقديم الأهم أولى، فلهذا السبب كان هذا الظرف مستحقاً للتقديم.

The first question is: in eloquent Arabic, a non essential adverbial phrase is delayed, not placed first as Sibawayh writes in his book, then how come it is placed first in the most eloquent of all speeches? (the Qur'ān) The answer: it was structured specifically to negate any equal to Allah and the word that carries this essential meaning is the adverbial phrase (lahu) itself. The correct thing to do is to place the most important part of the speech first. For this reason, the adverbial phrase deserved to be placed first.¹¹⁶

What Sibawayh said only holds true for non essential adverbial phrases, not for those that are an essential part of the sentence or speech. Lahu (to Him) in this verse, is an essential part of speech as al- Alusi points out:

إِنَّ الظَّرْفَ هُنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ يَكُنْ خَيْرًا مُبْطِلٌ سُقُوطُهُ مَعْنَى الْكَلَامِ؛ لِأَنَّكَ لَوْ قُلْتَ: لَمْ يَكُنْ كُفُؤًا أَحَدًا. لَمْ يَكُنْ لَهُ مَعْنَى، فَلَمَّا احْتِيجَ إِلَيْهِ صَارَ بِمَنْزِلَةِ الْخَبَرِ فَحُسِّنَ ذَلِكَ

Had the adverbial phrase (lahu) in this verse not been there, the text would have no meaning because if you said “There is no equal - anyone”, it would be meaningless. Since it is an integral part of the sentence, it takes the role of a khabar (predicate) and thus, it is permissible to advance it.¹¹⁷

Hence, by advancing the adverbial phrase, Allah is emphasizing His oneness and singularity. A simple way to understand this emphasis is by means of these two sentences:

There is no equal to Him.

TO HIM, there is no equal

The first sentence is just a normal statement of fact. The second sentence is emphatic. *TO ALLAH*, there is no equal. A better way to read this sentence is to raise

¹¹⁶ al-Rāzī, *Mafātih al-Ghayb*, vol. 32, p. 184

¹¹⁷ al-Ālūsī, *Rūḥ al-Ma'ānī*, vol. 29, p. 452

your voice when you read “TO HIM” but say the rest of the sentence “*there is no equal*” in a normal tone. This captures the emphasis being placed.

Now, if you go back up, you will see that I translated this last verse as:

To Him, no equal is there.

Not as:

To Him, there is no equal

Only a slight difference but I wanted to capture another aspect and meaning present inside the verse. The sentence “*to Him, there is no equal*” only covers one aspect. The word *ahad* is delayed beyond its standard place which creates another layer of emphasis. I tried to reflect this in English without having to resort to explaining complex Arabic structures.

If you want to emphasize the sentence ‘*There is no equal to Allah*’ onefold, you’d say

To Allah, there is no equal.

If you want to emphasize it twofold, you’d say

To Him, no equal is there!

With this explained, we will come back to the word *kufuw* which means an equal and an entity that can overshadow or overpower. The first verse describes Allah as *ahad* - the one and only. Then it describes Allah as *al samad* and states that being *ahad* necessarily entails that Allah is *al samad* by repeating the name of God instead of a conjunction or a pronoun. Then it stated that Allah does not beget, negating the existence of a parent child relationship for Allah which entails that Allah is not born either. These qualities are not found in anyone except Allah. Everything we know of, is not perfect, has a beginning in time, and an end. Since this is not the case with Allah, there is no equal to Allah. Everything besides Him lacks these attributes. Since Allah alone possesses these qualities, there is no one like Him; which takes us back full circle to the first verse - Allah is *ahad*. The first and the last verse of this Surah mean exactly the same thing. The fact that Allah is *ahad* means that there is no equal to Him. If there is an equal or an entity like Allah, Allah cannot be the one and only. This last verse of this surah, is just another way of stating that Allah is *ahad*. The two verses between the first and the last verse, prove that this is the case. It is as if the surah is saying

Allah is ahad because Allah is al- samad. Allah is al- samad because He did not beget nor is He born; and this all proves the first point that Allah is Ahad.

Now the question is if the intention was to say the same thing as the first verse, why not repeat it with the same wording? Why not simply repeat “*Allah is ahad*” rather than saying “*To Him, no equal is there!*”

This is because rephrasing it this way refutes any likeness to Allah in the attributes mentioned inside the Surah as well as with regards to attributes that are not mentioned inside it because the wording is more generic as Ibn Ashur points out:

فِي مَعْنَى التَّذْلِيلِ لِلْجَمَلِ الَّتِي قَبْلَهَا لِأَنَّهَا أَعَمُّ مِنْ مَضْمُونِهَا؛ لِأَنَّ تِلْكَ الصِّفَاتِ الْمُتَقَدِّمَةِ صَرِيحُهَا وَكِنَايَتُهَا وَضَمْنُهَا لَا يُشَبِّهُهُ فِيهَا غَيْرُهُ، مَعَ إِفَادَةِ هَذِهِ انْتِفَاءً شَبِيهِ لَهُ فِيمَا عَدَاهَا مِثْلَ صِفَاتِ الْأَفْعَالِ

This verse is a concluding statement to what came before in this surah because it is more generic and vast than them in its meaning. This is because the attributes mentioned previously, whether expressed explicitly, allusively or implicitly belong to no one other than Allah; whereas this sentence conveys additionally the negation of any likeness to Him in matters beyond those attributes such as the attributes of action (creating, providing etc) ¹¹⁸

Kufuw can also be in the meaning of overshadowing and overpowering. The first verse has already stated that Allah is one and only; which necessarily implies that He has no equal. After stating that Allah does not have any equal in His essence, attributes, and qualities; the only question that remains is if there is an entity that can strip Allah of some or all of His capabilities, powers or attributes. This verse negates the existence of any such entity. Allah is perfect, His attributes, qualities and powers reach the ultimate degree of perfection, and there is no one that can overshadow or overpower Him or any of His powers, capabilities or attributes. If Allah has decreed a matter, no power can overshadow or override His decree. If Allah has decided to do something, nothing can stop Him. Allah is all hearing, all seeing, all powerful, all loving, all just etc... and there is no power that can affect Him or any of His attributes in any way. It is perfect and constant perfection that cannot be affected in any shape or form, small or big, by anyone or anything. His will alone rules.

Next, the sentences ‘*He did not beget*’, ‘*Nor is He born*’, and ‘*To Him, No equal is there!*’ are connected with each other with the conjunction waw. This is because that which is similar to Allah can only be a child or a parent, or a counterpart other

¹¹⁸ Ibn ‘Āshūr, *al-Taḥrīr wa al-Tanwīr*, vol. 30, p. 619

than these two. Since these categories are distinct from each other yet fall under the same general heading, it became necessary to join them with the conjunction *waw*.

The Surah started by calling Allah *ahad*. It now ends with the same word *ahad*, but now, *ahad* is used in a negative context and means anyone other than Allah. In the first verse, it used *ahad* in an affirmative context because of which it meant one and only. So first it uses *Ahad* in an affirmative context to describe the absolute singularity of Allah; then it uses it in a negative context to negate the existence of any equal to Allah.

The central point of this surah revolves around the word *ahad*. I explained above that this verse means the same thing as the first verse, but since its wording is more generic, it negates any likeness to Allah in attributes not mentioned inside this surah.

This also means that special emphasis has been placed on Allah being *al-samad*, not begetting and not being born. Why? Why are these attributes mentioned and highlighted specifically and not other attributes? Because these attributes form the bedrock of the correct creed regarding Allah. Once you understand these attributes of Allah, correct understanding of other attributes of Allah naturally follows. When you hear or read any attribute of Allah, you will now know that Allah is firstly *ahad* - the one and only in that attribute. Secondly, because Allah is *al-samad*, He is perfect and flawless in that attribute. Then because Allah is neither born nor gives birth, Allah has always had and will always have that attribute, with no beginning or end. Then there is no one who can subjugate or overpower Allah or take away this attribute from Him.

Hence, you now have a complete understanding of the God of the Qur'ān and His attributes. The one and only in all His attributes, perfect in every way, with no beginning nor end; and no one who can equal or overpower Him. I ask you, is this better, or the trinity, paganism, or the Hebrew Bible with constant anthropomorphic descriptions of God? This is monotheism in its purest, unadulterated form that is recognized by sound human nature too. The innate human knowledge of good and bad, refuses to accept any notion of God, but the one presented in this surah.

Connection to the Surahs Before and After it

We need to start from surah *al-Kāfirūn* which was a declaration of separation from all religions and supposed gods other than Allah. Once one does this, accepts Islam

and rejects other religions, victory and help from Allah will come to him. Hence, the next surah is al- naṣr which describes the help and victory of Allah with the words

“When God’s help and victory comes”

When this victory comes, what happens to the disbelievers? That is shown in the next surah - al-Masad - which presents Abu Lahab as a case study. Abu Lahab embodies enmity to Allah and His messenger. Anyone who opposes Allah, His Messenger and His religion, will suffer defeat and Abu Lahab is presented as an example of it. Then comes this surah - al- Ikhlās

Victory has come and disbelievers have been defeated. What was the defining cause of victory? Why did the Muslims win and the disbelievers lose? Because they accepted Islam and rejected other religions in surah al- kāfirūn. Now this religion of the Muslims, that they accepted in surah al Kāfirūn, and which led to their victory in surah al-Naṣr, and to the defeat of the disbelievers in surah al-Masad, is defined in surah al-Ikhlās. Their religion is believing in the only true God, who is the one and only in all His attributes. Hence, al-Ikhlās represents the very core and essence of the Qur’ān.

The next two surahs, surah al-Falaq and surah al-Nās, are both prayers directed to Allah, seeking His protection from various forms of evil and harm. Their placement after Surah al-Ikhlās is deeply meaningful.

The name al-Samad in surah al-Ikhlās conveys that Allah is the One to whom all creation turns in need. He is accessible to His servants; we call upon Him, and He hears and responds to our prayers. It is therefore fitting that the Qur’ān concludes with two supplications directed to Him.

Surah al-Falaq begins by seeking Allah’s protection from the evil of all that He has created. It then highlights specific forms of evil that stand among the most dangerous and destructive dangers a person may face. Thus, its meaning is broad and comprehensive, while also drawing attention to certain especially harmful dangers.

Surah al-Nās focuses on an even greater threat: the devils who seek to distance people from the truth contained in surah al-Ikhlās. Through whispers, doubts, temptations, and false ideas, they try to turn people away from pure monotheism and sincere devotion to Allah mentioned in al-Ikhlās. Since the message of surah al-Ikhlās is the foundation of salvation, the devils strive to corrupt it. They wish to lead people astray so that they perish, just like Abu Lahab. Therefore, we seek Allah’s protection from their whispers and deception.

The Qur'ān began with a prayer in surah al-Fātihah: *"Guide us the straight path."* Everything that follows in the Qur'ān is an answer to that prayer, culminating in the profound declaration of Allah's oneness in surah al-Ikhlās. Once the truth has been made clear and guidance has been shown, the final step is to ask Allah to preserve us upon it.

Thus, after learning the essence of guidance in surah al-Ikhlās, we conclude by asking Allah to protect us from every force that seeks to pull us away from that guidance. We ask Him to guard us from external evils in surah al-Falaq and from the internal and spiritual danger of satanic whispers in Surah al-Nās

We have Seen

Surah 32: Al - Sajdah



The surahs that we have so far covered are all short in length. I wanted to cover one which is relatively larger, to show how context, theme and structure flows inside the Qur'ān.

Verse 1

الم

Alif Lām Mīm

This surah will present signs and proofs for the truthfulness of the Qur'ān, the Prophet, and the Qur'ānic message of the final reckoning of deeds on Judgment Day. It will do so by appealing to real life phenomena such as the barren earth becoming fertile again by means of rain. These letters symbolize that. Just as these signs are present inside real-life phenomena that you yourself can see, so is this book composed of the same letters that you are familiar with. Just as life around you, which you can visibly see is a sign for you, so is this book, made up of the same letters that you know, a sign for you.

Many surahs of the Qur'ān start with letters like these. One of the purposes of it is to challenge us. This book consists of the very same letters that you speak day to day in your life. Yet you are incapable of producing anything like it. This is a position held by many scholars.

These letters that Allah uses at the beginning of a surah sometimes carry its entire theme. For example, every surah of the Qur'ān that begins with the letter ط has the story of Moses inside it. Sometimes a surah will begin with two letters *Tua* and *Sīn*; and sometimes it will begin with three *Tua Sīn Mīm*. When it is three letters, the story of Moses will be mentioned in much more detail than the surah that starts with two letters.

Verse 2

تَنْزِيلِ الْكِتَابِ لَا رَيْبَ فِيهِ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Descent of the Book while there is no doubt in it being from the Rabb of 'Ālamīn.

There are two opinions on the words *-no doubt in it*. One is that these words act as a *ḥāl* and the second that these words are an interjectory sentence. A *Ḥāl* describes the state of something and the way I translated the verse above is considering it as a *ḥāl* because this reading seems to me to be consistent with what comes next.

An interjectory sentence is one that is interjected in the middle of an already complete sentence. In this reading, the actual sentence would be “*Descent of the Book from the Rabb of 'Ālamīn*” with the words *-no doubt in it-* interjected between and inside it.

The verse does not mention the name Allah, rather it mentions the word *Rabb* whose meaning we have already covered. *'Ālamīn* comes from the root *'ayn lām mīm* which at its root means knowledge and indication. Zamakhsharī pointed out, the Qur'ān calls mankind and Jinn *'Ālamīn* because they serve as a sign of Allah. They indicate that Allah exists.

The reason why Allah uses the word *Rabb* instead of mentioning his name *Allah* is to make a significant point. Since Allah is the Rabb, the caretaker, sustainer and the nurturer of mankind and Jinn, it necessitates that He sends down a book that serves to guide them, help them, rectify them, and lead them to the correct path.

Lastly the word *raib* is translated as doubt. *Raib* is somewhat different from a doubt. Arabic and Qur'ān have another word for doubt - *shakk*. *Raib* is doubt mixed with uneasiness and tension. A doubt that constricts your chest and causes you discomfort. For example, if I told you that I did not drive to my school but walked to it, you can be doubtful about it but it is not something that will disturb you because it's a minor thing. But consider - God forbid - a spouse has doubts regarding the loyalty of her husband, then this is a doubt that disturbs and constricts the chest. This is *Raib*.

You cannot have doubts regarding the Qur'ān from being God in a way that they disturb and constrict your chest. People can have passing thoughts that come and go like the wind; but if you study it deeply, no valid doubt- no *Raib*- will be left.

Verse 3

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ افْتَرَاهُ ۚ بَلْ هُوَ الْحَقُّ مِنْ رَبِّكَ لَتُنذِرَ قَوْمًا مَأْتَهُمْ مِنْ نَذِيرٍ مِمَّنْ قَبْلِكَ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ

Yet they say he invented it to cause corruption. Rather, it is the absolute truth from your Rabb; so you may warn a people of binding consequences to whom no warner came before you, so they may seek to become guided.

Despite what came before in the last verse, these people accuse Muhammad of inventing the Qur'ān to cause corruption. The word used here is *iftirā'* which at its root was used for crafting or forming something with the specific intention of causing harm.¹¹⁹ How can the one who is your *Rabb*; who wants to take care of you, guide you and rectify your lives for good, want to cause corruption and harm? Is this not a necessary action on part of Allah that He sends down a book for your benefit? Yet you accuse Muhammad of inventing it?

Ḥaqq is translated as *truth*. At its root, it means something that is solid, strong and upright. Truth is something that stands tall and remains firm regardless of what is said and transpires. It is not affected by the opinions of people or even by their rejection of it. Truth stands tall. It remains firm, solid and independent.

Allah uses the definite article with the word *ḥaqq* which creates two meanings.

1. It is the only and sole truth. There is nothing truthful or correct besides it.
2. It is the absolute truth. It is absolutely and perfectly strong, firm and solid. It is firmness of the kind that has no weakness or softness. It stands tall in a way nothing else can. It is firm and solid in a way that nothing else is. Given these qualities, it also means that it will also stand any test, any accusation and challenge thrown at it since it is absolutely firm and solid.

Notice how the surah transitions from *Rabb* of 'Ālamīn to *Your Rabb* in this verse. When Allah mentions the guidance of the entire nation, he says He is *rabb* of the

¹¹⁹ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1648

‘*ālamīn* and when Allah is defending His prophet from accusations thrown at him, He says *Your rabb* to the Prophet.

I translated *li tunzira* as ‘*so you may warn of binding consequences.*’ I kept true to the root meaning which was used for blood money or oaths that one binds himself to. The blood money becomes a binding consequence for committing a crime that necessitates it and when you make an oath, you are bound to it and if you break it, there will be consequences.¹²⁰

Simply put, *li tunzira* means that actions have consequences. You cannot just have your way in life. What you do will have consequences, good and bad. Allah describes this as the purpose of His prophet’s mission. His mission is to convey to people that actions have consequences. If you do good, you will receive good and if you do evil, you shall pay the price. The prophet serves as a warner to people who do evil that your actions will bear bad consequences for you.

No warner came before you- The word *nadhīr* is translated as *warner*. The Qur’ān uses two forms of this word; *nadhīr* and *mundhir*. *Nadhīr* is stronger than *mundhir* and this is the word Allah uses in this verse. The Arabs did not need a *mundhir*, but rather a *nadhīr*, who would strongly, firmly and patiently warn them of the consequences of their actions. The pattern of the word *nadhīr* implies something that remains constant and stable. The prophet’s role is to constantly and consistently warn people. He is to remain a constant source of guidance and warning. His mission is not to simply give a sermon and be done with it. Rather, his mission is to act as a warner; constantly and consistently, at all times and places. A heavy burden indeed.

So they may seek to become guided - So they may desire to do those actions that have good consequences for them; not bad and so they may desire to take the path to their *Rabb* who wants to be kind and loving to them. Who wants to rectify and correct their lives.

Verse 4

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ مَا لَكُم مِّنْ دُونِهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ
وَلَا شَفِيعٍ ۚ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ

¹²⁰ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu’aşşal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2172

Allah alone created the heavens, the earth and what is between them in six days then established Himself over the throne. You have, besides him, no Wali nor a Shaft'. Will you not strongly consider?

After mentioning that the purpose of the Qur'ān is to guide people, Allah mentions the central pillar of guidance; monotheism; as if to say that this is what the center, core and heart of guidance is - that Allah alone created everything and He alone is the ruler.

Six days - There are three possibilities. One is that these are days like our days, second that these are six days where each day equals a thousand years; and the third that these are six stages as opposed to days.

The Qur'ān has stated that one day with God is as a thousand years with us. So six days here could mean six days as in how we experience them or it can refer to six thousand years where each day equals a thousand years. The third opinion is based on the fact that the word *yum* in Arabic, can linguistically mean any period of time, not necessarily a day. This has attestations in the Qur'ān as well such as in surah 8:16. In this reading, it would mean that Allah created the universe in six stages, one after the other; stage after stage, realm after realm, level after level, creation after creation. I hold this third position. The Qur'ān has not mentioned how long each stage took and we do not indulge in it either. Each of the six stages could have taken billions of years.

Allah has set a pattern of cause and effect in this world. Allah created the universe with this chain of cause and effect, stage after stage. One stage completes, then another starts and so on. One stage serves as the root and cause of the next stage.

This is profound. The previous verse described that the main role of the Prophet was to be a *nadhīr*. To warn people of this cycle of action and consequence. What we do, good or bad, has consequences. This is a chain of cause and effect. In the same manner, based on this same principle of cause and effect, was this universe created. One stage was the cause of the next stage and so on until six stages were completed. Islam is merely warning you that the same principle with which the universe exists, must also exist inside the Earth and our lives since we are a part of this universe. You are here, you can see the universe, it came into existence under this principle, which applies to you and your actions as well. Since the earth is part of the universe, this principle necessarily extends to this earth and to you. You cannot escape it.

Established Himself Over the Throne - This means what it does. Allah is above the throne. Those who denied this, did so on the basis of philosophical concepts alien to the Qur'ān. We cannot understand the Qur'ān through an outside lens, be it Aristotelian metaphysics or anything else; but rather through its own text.

When reading the Qur'ān, we need to take into account two things. The literal meaning of the words and the text, and its contextual meaning. Why does it say these words, in this context?

When Allah has mentioned the creation of the universe in six stages in the Qur'ān, He has mentioned the fact that He is established above the throne because this is an indirect expression (kināyah) of kingship. The throne belongs to the king. The kingdom of the entire universe and all creation, belongs to Allah. This is its contextual meaning and does not override the literal meaning of these words; which is precisely where many mutakallimūn went astray.

You have, besides Him, no Wali nor Shafi' - These two words, *Wali* and *Shafi'*, are closely related to each other in their meanings. The root of the word *Wali* means closeness, adherence and taking charge whereas the root of the word *Shafi'* means pairing, mediating and intervening. *Wali* is direct, continuous, and binding allegiance while *Shafi'* is occasional and intermediary support. You do not have any true *Wali*- a continuous and unwavering source of support- nor any *Shafi'*: even an occasional supporter or helper. If you don't have a *Wali*, you could have a *Shafi'* because *Wali* implies constant unwavering allegiance and support. If such support does not exist, it is possible for an occasional, intermediary support to be available; but Allah negates even that. There is simply no way out. This will be referred back to in verse 20 where the disbelievers will not find anyone to help them inside Hell-fire.

Will you not strongly consider- This is phrased as a question because what is being said is "After knowing all of this, will you STILL not deeply think and ponder over the truth of this book?" Will you not strongly consider this fact and hence, rectify your actions knowing that they will bear consequences for you? Hence, you will see later that the conversation shifts to Judgment day itself.

Lastly, the word تذكرون - translated as - '*strongly consider*' - has the emphatic form. There are two ways to say it, *tazakkarun* with one *ta* and *tatazakkarun* with two *ta*. Here it has two *ta*, which implies repetition and consistency. The call is to consider

and reflect on this strongly and consistently; not just one moment of reflection.

Verse 5

يُدِيرُ الْأَمْرَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ ثُمَّ يَعْرُجُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ مِمَّا تَعُدُّونَ

He does tadbīr of the Amr from the sky to the earth; Thumma it ascends to Him in a span one day of which is thousand years of what you count.

The argument continues. *Tadbīr* comes from the root *dāl bā' rā'* which means the back or extreme point of something.¹²¹

Tadbīr means that Allah determines and ordains something from start to its extreme end; not leaving any loophole or anything left out in its planning, wisdom, its carrying out, and its result. For example, Allah sent down the Qur'ān. He had determined and ordained the sending down of the Qur'ān, from its start to its last verse completely, the stages in which it was revealed, how it was revealed, when each verse would be revealed, down to its completion, leaving nothing unplanned or left out. Everything was preordained and set, from start to finish and everything happened according to His decree. Allah determines a matter by perfect planning, start to finish, by determining it's every single point in the best manner possible.

Amr comes from the root *hamza mīm rā'* which at its root means an elevated structure whose top is thick and pointed while its bottom is spread out like a pyramid.¹²² In this context, *amr* means something that comes from Allah directly, be it a command, decree or whatever. You can create the image in your head. At the top and above the pyramid is Allah and from Him comes the *amr* that spreads out below to creation. *Amr* is different from creation. Creation happens in stages, like the universe that was created in six stages. Whereas *amr* happens instantly. It is something that breaks the norms and laws of nature. The she-camel that came into existence from a rock, the creation of the human spirit, the miracles that are given to the Prophets, and the birth of Jesus, all serve as examples of *amr*.

The Qur'ān clearly draws a distinction between the *Khalq* (creation) and the *amr*:

¹²¹ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 628

¹²² *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2057

أَلَا لَهُ الْخَلْقُ وَالْأَمْرُ تَبَارَكَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ

Listen! To Him belongs the creation (Khalq) and the Amr. Blessed be Allah, Rabb of ‘Ālamīn.
(17:54)

Allah does *tadbīr* of the *Amr*- Allah dictates and governs the *Amr* from start to its very extreme end. For example, the spirit inside of us, the *rūḥ*, is an *Amr* of Allah as the Qur’ān itself says:

وَيَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ الرُّوحِ قُلِ الرُّوحُ مِنْ أَمْرِ رَبِّي وَمَا أُوتِيتُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

They ask you about the spirit (the Rūḥ), Say; The spirit is an Amr of my Rabb and you have been given but little knowledge. (17:85)

Allah first created man, then breathed into him the spirit. This spirit gives us life and our purpose with which we live. Allah has done *tadbīr* of this. The spirit inside of us, the moment it was breathed into us, to the moment it will leave our bodies, to the moment it will come back to join our bodies again on Judgment day, all of this, has been perfectly calculated, set in stone, pre ordained, and pre determined by Allah with precise, perfect and infallible calculation and wisdom. This also includes whatever happens between these stages.

In the next verses, this surah will zero in on man’s creation itself to explain the difference between *khalq* and *amr*. Just as Allah created this universe in stages, where each stage led to the other, so did He create us in the same, exact manner. As a case study of creation and the sending down of *amr* - as Allah did with the entire universe - the surah will explain the creation of man in the coming verses.

Thumma - I left it untranslated. It is normally understood to simply mean ‘then’, indicating an order in time but this is incorrect. This *thumma* is for التراخي *al-tarākhī* which indicates the higher status of something. Allah does *tadbīr* of *amr*, and even greater is the fact that it ascends to Him in a span one day of which is thousand years of what you count - Regarding what Allah says of thousand years being equal to one day, I follow the position of Ibn ‘Āshūr:

ومعنى تقديره بألف سنة : أنه تحصل فيه من تصرفات الله في كائنات السماء والأرض ما لو كان من عمل الناس لكان حصول مثله في ألف سنة ، فلك أن تقدر ذلك بكثرة التصرفات ، أو بقطع المسافات ، وقد فرضت في ذلك عدة احتمالات

The meaning of its being measured as a thousand years is that, within it, there occur acts of Allah's governance and management concerning the affairs of the heavens and the earth which, if they were the work of human beings, would require a thousand years to accomplish something similar. You may understand this either in terms of the vast number of actions carried out, or in terms of the distances traversed. Several possible interpretations have been presented regarding this.

The question then comes up regarding the word *ascend*. The ayah says that 'it ascends to Him (Allah). What does this mean? What ascends? Many have said that it means that when Allah decrees something, He decrees it a thousand years before it happens. When it finally comes to pass, the angels ascend with its record and what happened towards Allah. I find this plausible but not convincing.

The next two verses will explain this themselves. One of the features of the Qur' ān is that it explains itself. Many times, when things are not clear initially, the Qur' ān will explain them itself. Allah will now immediately shift to mention the creation of the human being and in doing so, Allah will explain this verse itself.

Verse 6

ذَٰلِكَ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ الْعَزِيزِ الرَّحِيمِ

Only He, who did all this, knows the unseen and the seen. The 'Azīz, the Raḥīm.

The demonstrative pronoun in Arabic has the ability to contain qualities inside of it and hence how I translated it above. Most translations will normally translate it as "That is the knower of the unseen and the seen...." but this is incomplete.

Secondly, when two components of a sentence come together and both are defined and definite, it creates exclusivity. Therefore, I added the word "only" in the translation.

‘Azīz comes from the root ‘ayn zāy zāy which means something solid and unbreakable.¹²³ ‘Azīz is one of the names of Allah it means the entity who is utterly and completely strong and invincible; who overpowers and cannot be overpowered. Only His will dictates and rules. None can overwrite or stand against Him.

Raḥīm comes from the root rā’ ḥā’ mīm which means the womb of a mother and we have covered its meaning earlier when we understood the word raḥmān. The main difference between raḥīm and raḥmān is that raḥīm denotes constant, stable and eternal mercy, care and love whereas raḥmān denotes Allah’s *rahmah* in this world, which is temporary.

The verse says that the one who did all this; created the heavens, the earth and whatever is between them in six days or stages, established Himself above the throne; sent down His *Amr* into the universe which He perfectly pre determined and pre ordained from the very start to its very end, only Him - only this entity - can know what can be seen by us and what cannot be seen. Only such an entity can be all- knowing.

The fact that Allah is able to do *tadbīr* means that He possesses all knowledge since He is able to determine something from the very start down to its very last extreme. One must possess all knowledge, from the beginning to the extreme end to do this. Next, one must be ‘Azīz to do this. He must have the power to do it, set things in motion and then bring them to completion with no other entity able to step in and disrupt it. So these two meanings are already indirectly implied by what has come before. Then Allah describes Himself with another quality - *raḥīm* - which comes from the root that denotes the strongest form of love in Arabic language.

Raḥīm answers the question *why*. Allah created the universe in six stages, then does *tadbīr of the Amr*. Everything that Allah did and does, from the creation of the universe in six days or stages, to the *tadbīr* of the *Amr*, is rooted in love. Creation is an act of love and kindness as Allah says in surah Hūd:

إِلَّا مَنْ رَحِمَ رَبُّكَ ۚ وَلِذَلِكَ خَلَقَهُمْ

Except the one to whom Allah showed Rahmah (the same root as raḥīm); and for that did He create them.

¹²³ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu’aşşal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1453

All of what has been described and as we will see in the next verse, our creation itself, is rooted in love and kindness. *Tadbīr* is a continuous ongoing process. The previous verse used the word *tadbīr* in the present tense. In Arabic, the present tense not only implies an action being done in the present, but also being done continuously, again and again. Why does Allah do all of this? Because He is kind and loving, more loving than a mother to her child. *Raḥīm* has the definite article *al* with it which implies perfection and the highest and perfect form of this love.

This all is coming in response to the accusation of the disbelievers - that we still hear to this day - that the Prophet forged the Qur'ān to cause corruption. The Qur'ān is not here to cause corruption. Rather it is sent down from the one who is the most loving of all. This book is an act of love and kindness, not corruption and evil intention. But there is also a warning to these disbelievers. Yes Allah is *raḥīm*, but He is also *al 'azīz*, the one who overpowers and cannot be overpowered. I am loving and kind and this book is an act of love from Me towards you all, but if you reject it, then I am the invincible, the all powerful who overpowers and cannot be overpowered. I have decided to send down this book (verse 2) and I have done *tadbīr* of it. I have preordained its start and completion from its very start to its very last letter to be sent down and you cannot overpower Me in that nor do anything about it. Your plots against the prophet and the Qur'ān will fail.

Verse 7

الَّذِي أَحْسَنَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ۖ وَبَدَأَ خَلْقَ الْإِنسَانِ مِن طِينٍ

The one who did Iḥsān of everything He created. He began the creation of man from wet clay.

Iḥsān comes from the root *ḥā' sīn nūn* which means to purify something by removing anything impure from it. From this root comes the word *Husn* which means beauty. It is a beauty achieved because of intense purity, and it being free from anything impure.

Allah created the universe in six stages, then sent down His *Amr* with *tadbīr* - with purpose and direction, preordaining its start and end, setting a path that it takes to achieve that end and then making it follow that path with His wisdom. This is *Iḥsān* in creation. When He created things, He sent down His *Amr* which gave these created beings life and purpose like how our spirit gives our bodies life. Creation is a hollow body and *Amr is what gives life and purpose to these bodies*. Then He did *tadbīr* of

His *Amr*, i.e; He also set the purpose of the creation, decreed their end, and their path towards this end. Each creation has a purpose rooted in perfect divine wisdom and Allah decrees this for each creation at the time of its creation. It is all planned, it is all accounted for, it is all pre ordained and pre-decreed. The beginning, the end and the path it will take towards that end, to achieve the purpose for which it was created. Every single thing, accounted for. This is the purity implied by the word *iḥsān*. His creations are absolutely pure of all shortcomings such as leaving out details, not accounting for the end, creating without purpose, creating imperfectly, creating things not meant for their purpose, creating things that are inadequate to achieve their purpose, creating things without taking into account their end goal, creating things that are not protected from being altered by anyone other than Him, all of these are examples of impurities - of shortcomings.

Next, the subject shifts to the creation of man. First, Allah described the creation of the universe, then His *tadbīr* that runs this universe, and now He zeros in on man himself; as if to say that man is the very center of it all. Everything that came before, leads to man, the very center and core of this universe. Allah did *Iḥsān* of everything He created, and that includes man. The audience of all this is man himself, and hence it is only appropriate to zero in on his creation itself.

He began man's creation from wet clay- it does not say Allah created man from wet clay but rather He *began* man's creation from it. Just as Allah created the universe in stages, so did He create man, in stages. The first step is his creation from wet clay. Why wet clay? Because it can be fashioned and molded in any shape you desire without breaking the soil apart. Allah molded us into an entity of His desires. What He wanted us to do, what He set our purpose for, He molded and shaped us according to it.

Lastly as we will see, *iḥsān* also implies - especially in the context of this surah - the fact that Allah has created perfect systems. If you believe that death is the end and there is no reckoning of deeds after death, then this implies that Allah created an imperfect system because then this would be an inherently unjust system. Allah has done *iḥsān* of everything He has created and this includes the fact that His creations are not void of justice.

Verse 8

ثُمَّ جَعَلَ نَسْلَهُمْ مِنْ صَلَٰلَةٍ مِّنْ مَّاءٍ مَّهِينٍ

Then he made his progeny from an extract taken from disdained water

The meaning is clear. Creation of man began with clay, then his progeny continued through the worthless water - semen. Notice the word *sulalah* which is translated as extract. It comes from the root *sīn lām lām* which means something that is extracted from something else.¹²⁴ The pattern this word *sulalah* follows in this verse -فعالة- is also used to describe a small substance that is extracted or taken out from a large substance like how we extract the thickest and strongest part of date juice from its thinner version. Allah created all human progeny from a substance that was extracted from disdained water- from semen. The overall theme is to display the humble roots of man. Allah did not even make you from this worthless and disdained water, but from a small part of it. We know that it is the sperm inside semen that fertilizes the egg and only 2-5% of semen is composed of sperm and even among this small amount, a tiny fraction is capable of reaching and fertilizing the egg; but the theme of this verse is to display the humble roots of man and the incredible divine power that can turn this small extract taken from worthless water, into human beings.

Verse 9

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ ۖ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَرَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

Thumma, He balanced him by breathing into him from His spirit. He made for you, hearing, perception and emotions. How little are you grateful!

At the end of the surah, Allah will connect this verse with verse 27 that mentions dead earth coming to life. You will see there how Allah connects not only these two verses, but also the whole surah to present a holistic, uniform and complete picture.

We covered earlier that everything Allah creates has two parts. Creation (*khalq*) and *amr*. When describing the creation of man, Allah described his creation from dirt and then from semen. This is *khalq*. Now, Allah will describe the *amr*. The creation of man is presented as a case study of how Allah does *Ihsān* of everything He creates. The way He creates, *khalq* and *amr*, makes it perfect as mentioned in his words

¹²⁴ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 1044

الذي أحسن كل شيء خلقه

The one who did ihsān of everything that He created

First, you have the human body, created from dust, then Allah breathed into him His spirit - the *rūḥ*.

Thumma here is التراقي الرتي again which is used to indicate something even more important. So, it is better translated as - *Even greater; He balanced him by breathing into him....*

What is meant by balancing was explained in surah al Shams. After this balancing, Allah says He made FOR YOU, the hearing, sights and emotions. I highlighted FOR YOU since it is emphasized in the verse itself because of being advanced. Allah made them for you. For your sake, and benefit.

There is one thing to note here. Hearing is singular, while sights and hearts are plural. The Qur'ān is primarily meant to be recited and hence the primary mode of how it was originally preached was through being heard by others. Even today, people often hear about it from others rather than opening it themselves and reading it. Secondly, the word أبصار is different from رأى. Both mean to see but بصر, the word used in this verse, is much deeper. It is better translated as perception and understanding. You can look at something, but when you truly understand it and grasp its nature, this word is used. In other places, this word can simply be used in the meaning of understanding and perception. The Qur'ān itself has used this root in those meanings.

Lastly, there are two words for hearts in the Qur'ān, قلوب and قواد.

قلب is the standard word for heart. Its root meaning is to flip or turn over. The heart is so called because of its nature to flip and change its state and feelings. So, the standard word for heart is قلب but when a heart is overcome with emotions, it is called قواد - the word used in this ayah.

So, the word 'hearing' is singular, but the words 'sights' and 'hearts' are plural. As mentioned above, 'hearing' here means the Qur'ān. It is the primary subject as in verse 2 you have the disbelievers accusing the Prophet of concocting the Qur'ān to

cause corruption, which was followed by a divine response to their arguments. When people listen to the Qur'ān, different people perceive it differently, which leads to different emotions in the heart of each person, and which mainly drives how people act. This is why hearing is singular and sights and hearts are plural.

A person may hear the Qur'ān and be affected by it deeply and fall in love with it. Others may listen and be somewhat drawn yet skeptical. While others may hear it and outright deny it. While still others may hear it and not only deny it but speak out in hate against it. Different people will perceive it differently. Each of these perceptions will lead to different emotions inside the heart. The one who accepts it will feel peace, the skeptical one will feel doubtful, while the deniers will feel uneasy and some, even hate.

As will come later, the disbeliever demands to see things visibly to believe in them. For something to be true, it must be visible. What passed described khalq and amr. They believe in khalq - the visible part - but deny the amr, which is invisible. The Qur'ān promises them things that are not visible - heaven and hell, so they deny them. By believing in this false notion that for something to be true, it has to be visible, they reject the truth. And by doing so, *how little grateful have you become*.

This is why the ayah shifts from third to second person. It used the third person in the last verse *"Then he made his progeny from an extract taken from disdained water"* as well as at the start of this verse *"He balanced him by breathing into him from His spirit"*. But now it transitions to the second person *"He made for you, hearing, perception and emotions. How little are you grateful"* because it is now addressing those who accused the prophet of forging the Qur'ān directly.

You will see verses 15 and 16 directly referencing back to this verse.

Verse 10

وَقَالُوا أَإِذَا ضَلَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ أَإِنَّا لَفِي خَلْقٍ جَدِيدٍ ۚ بَلْ هُمْ بِلِقَاءِ رَبِّهِمْ كُفِرُونَ

They said, "When we have disappeared into the earth, are we to be in a new creation?" Rather, they are disbelievers in the meeting of their Master.

Now it again shifts back to the third person. *They* said, not *You* said. The natural flow after the words *"How little grateful you are"* in the previous verse should have been to

use the second person. This is *Ilṭifāt*. Because they have been ungrateful to Allah, they are not worthy to be addressed directly by God and have distanced themselves from Him. This is why they are addressed to in the third person, as if they are far away from Him.

To the believers and others, the disbelievers say “*When we have disappeared into the earth, are we to be in a new creation?*” but in actuality, they are just in denial of meeting Allah in the hereafter. The root problem is denial of meeting Allah, not these and other petty arguments they make. It is clear what they are trying to say. How can a person who has died, gets decomposed and vanishes be brought back to life again? This is a stupid argument because the all powerful God is indeed capable of doing it. If God is capable of creating from nothing, then how can He not do it again with the dead?

Their actual problem is that they simply deny meeting Allah in the hereafter. They just come up with simple, stupid and worthless arguments to cover it up. Now what does denying the meeting with Allah imply? We covered earlier in the surah that Allah establishes the rule of this universe that actions have consequences. Just as one stage of the universe leads to another, so do actions lead to their consequences. The Prophet’s role was described as being a *nadhīr* which linguistically means warning of consequences that are inherently tied to actions.

When do people get repaid for their actions? Judgment day; the day they meet Allah; and this is what this verses again mentions. They are disbelievers in the meeting of their Master. They are disbelievers in the fundamental fact that they will be repaid for what they do.

We can ourselves see in our daily lives that the people most averse to the notion of justice are the criminals themselves. Most criminals deny they deserve to be punished. You will mostly find them trying to justify their crimes. The people most averse to justice are the guilty, those against whom justice stands, who are on the other side of justice. Same is the case here. As mentioned in verse 7, these people denied the Qur’ān not because of a flaw inside it, but because of their crime of neglecting the *amr* - *the rūḥ* - inside of them. We normally see, when justice is against someone, you either deny it or make stupid arguments to justify your actions, and this is exactly what they did above.

The disbelievers only believe in the visible aspect (*khalq*) but deny the invisible *Amr*. You will see how this surah will revolve around this subject that we so often hear to this day - if I cannot see it, then it is not true.

Verse 11

قُلْ يَتُوفِّكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

Say, 'The angel of death, entrusted over you, will take you. Then to your Rabb, will you be returned.

Again, Allah does not address them directly. He orders His prophet to respond to their useless claims.

He does not simply say *You will die and then be returned to your Master*; rather, He brings to attention the angel of death.

Allah defines what death is. Death is not simply the stoppage of existence. Death is the angel of death taking your spirits out of your bodies. Allah mentioned the *rūḥ* in the previous verses and now He defines death as the removal of this *rūḥ* from our bodies. Which means that it is the *rūḥ* that gives us life. Take it out and our bodies stop functioning. After the angel of death removes the spirit from our bodies they go to Allah. We covered earlier how it is the *amr*, that gives life to *khalq*.

Allah is correcting the notion of death that the disbelievers have. Death is not the cessation of existence and you being buried and forgotten forever. It is the removal of the spirits inside your bodies (the very spirits that you reject) to be returned to Allah. Upon death, it goes to Allah to be judged as righteous or evil. Then it is returned back to the grave. Then on judgment day, the body is recreated, joined with the spirit and taken out of the grave. What this means is that we do not remain unconscious when dead. Even inside the grave, our spirit is inside the body. We just live in a different state of existence. This Ḥadīth describes the whole process.

حَدَّثَنَا أَبُو بَكْرِ بْنُ أَبِي شَيْبَةَ، حَدَّثَنَا شَبَابَةُ، عَنْ ابْنِ أَبِي ذَيْبٍ، عَنْ مُحَمَّدِ بْنِ عَمْرٍو بْنِ عَطَاءٍ، عَنْ سَعِيدِ بْنِ يَسَارٍ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ، عَنِ النَّبِيِّ - صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ - قَالَ: " الْمَيِّتُ تَحْضُرُهُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ فَإِذَا كَانَ الرَّجُلُ صَاحِحًا قَالُوا: اخْرِجِي أَيُّهَا النَّفْسُ الطَّيِّبَةُ كَانَتْ فِي الْجَسَدِ الطَّيِّبِ اخْرِجِي حَمِيدَةً وَأَبْشِرِي بِرَوْحٍ وَرِيحَانٍ وَرَبِّ غَيْرِ غَضَبَانٍ فَلَا يُزَالُ يُقَالُ لَهَا ذَلِكَ حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ ثُمَّ يَعْرَجُ بِهَا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَيُفْتَحُ لَهَا فَيُقَالُ: مَنْ هَذَا فَيَقُولُونَ: فُلَانٌ. فَيُقَالُ: مَرْحَبًا بِالنَّفْسِ الطَّيِّبَةِ، كَانَتْ فِي الْجَسَدِ الطَّيِّبِ ادْخُلِي حَمِيدَةً، وَأَبْشِرِي بِرَوْحٍ وَرِيحَانٍ وَرَبِّ

غَيْرِ غَضَبَانَ . فَلَا يَزَالُ يُقَالُ لَهَا ذَلِكَ حَتَّى يَنْتَهَى بِهَا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الَّتِي فِيهَا اللَّهُ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ وَإِذَا كَانَ الرَّجُلُ السُّوءُ قَالَ اخْرُجِي أَيَّتَاهَا النَّفْسُ الْخَبِيثَةُ كَانَتْ فِي الْجَسَدِ الْخَبِيثِ اخْرُجِي ذَمِيمَةً وَأَبْشِرِي بِحِمِيمٍ وَغَسَّاقٍ . وَآخِرَ مَنْ شَكَلَهُ أَزْوَاجٌ . فَلَا يَزَالُ يُقَالُ لَهَا ذَلِكَ حَتَّى تَخْرُجَ ثُمَّ يَعْرَجُ بِهَا إِلَى السَّمَاءِ فَلَا يَفْتَحُ لَهَا فَيَقَالُ : مَنْ هَذَا فَيَقَالُ : فُلَانٌ . فَيَقَالُ : لَا مَرْحَبًا بِالنَّفْسِ الْخَبِيثَةِ كَانَتْ فِي الْجَسَدِ الْخَبِيثِ ارْجِعِي ذَمِيمَةً فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَفْتَحُ لَكَ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ فَيُرْسَلُ بِهَا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ ثُمَّ تُصِيرُ إِلَى الْقَبْرِ ”

Angels come to the dying person, and if the man was righteous, they say: ‘Come out, O good soul that was in a good body, come out praiseworthy and receive glad tidings of mercy and fragrance and a Lord Who is not angry.’ And this is repeated until it comes out, then it is taken up to heaven, and it is opened for it, and it is asked: ‘Who is this?’ They say: ‘So-and-so.’ It is said: ‘Welcome to the good soul that was in a good body. Enter praiseworthy and receive the glad tidings of mercy and fragrance and a Lord Who is not angry.’ And this is repeated until it is brought to the heaven above which is Allah. But if the man was evil, they say: ‘Come out O evil soul that was in an evil body. Come out blameworthy, and receive the tidings of boiling water and the discharge of dirty wounds,’ and other torments of similar kind, all together. And this is repeated until it comes out, then it is taken up to heaven and it is not opened for it. And it is asked: ‘Who is this?’ It is said: ‘So-and-so.’ And it is said: ‘No welcome to the evil soul that was in an evil body. Go back blameworthy, for the gates of heaven will not be opened to you.’ So it is sent back down from heaven, then it goes to the grave.” (Ibn Majah 4262)

Therefore, death is not being buried and to be forgotten. No, you will pay for what you did. The spirit is returned to your grave, where it experiences a new form of life. The body may decompose but the spirit does not. Then on judgment day, Allah will recreate the physical body and the spirit will be put inside the body again as in this world, and brought before Allah for the ultimate judgment. As it happened inside the womb of our mother, so shall it happen again inside the womb of the earth - the grave. Just as our mothers acted as our womb in this life, the earth will act as our second womb for the next life.

This also shows that it is the spirit that experiences life. Because when the spirit is removed from the body, it stops functioning and dies. Inside the grave the bodies will rot and decompose but the spirit inside the grave will experience a new life. The prophet said:

“...There is nothing of the human body that does not decay except one bone; that is the little bone at the end of the coccyx from which the human body will be recreated on the Day of Resurrection.” (Narrated by al-Bukhārī, 4651; Muslim, 2955).

Therefore, the body is not life. It is the *rūḥ* that experiences it. The disbelievers need to understand this.

Now this is perfectly tied to what has come before. We mentioned that the main role of the prophet was to be a constant source of warning to people that their actions have binding consequences attached to them. What you do so shall you receive. If death is the end and there is nothing after death, then this falls on its head because people get away with what they do in this life many times. The Qur’ān itself maintains that people will be repaid *in full* to what they did. Notice the words ‘in full’, they are critical to understand. You may get some parts of what you earned here in this world, not everything. On judgment day, you will receive in full due, the exact recompense of what you did as Allah says

يَوْمَ تَأْتِي كُلُّ نَفْسٍ تُجَادِلُ عَنْ نَفْسِهَا وَتُوْفَىٰ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ مَّا عَمِلَتْ وَهُمْ لَا يُظْلَمُونَ

A day each soul comes disputing for itself. Every soul was given in full what it willingly committed. Hence, they shall not be wronged.

Therefore, death cannot be the end. If actions have binding consequences attached to them, then death cannot be the end. There must be a final reckoning after death if this is true.

The disbelievers deny the *amr* of Allah, which in this case refers to the spirit inside us, yet it is this very spirit that gives us life. Remove it and death occurs. There is simply no denying the *amr* of Allah. If death is the end of it all, then *amr* really has no bearing. This is not a small fact. The Jews have wrestled with it just as they continue to do so. Judaism does not have a concept of a final reckoning except for vague texts that are expounded on by the rabbis. What even is the point of life if death is the end? If there is no hereafter, and this world is all there is, then why do the righteous suffer? If this world is all there is, then should the righteous not be rewarded for their righteousness and the wicked punished in this world? Yet does this happen? The righteous suffer more than anyone. The book of Job wrestles with this question. David wrestles with this question in the book of Psalms. Without the concept of hereafter, righteousness has no merit and evil, no condemnation.

Verse 12

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُوا رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

If you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads before their Rabb. Our Rabb! we have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain.

You will see the surah coming together from here on out.

We discussed in ayah 10 that the disbelievers were criminals for rejecting the *amr* of Allah, which in the case of man, is the *rūḥ* inside us, and so this verse calls them out plainly for it by calling them *criminals*.

The one being addressed is the Prophet himself since he was the one who faced these words regarding the Qur'ān and was being called a liar. It is also for us, especially those involved in the dawah work, who often have to deal with violent and insolent remarks from others regarding the Qur'ān and the Prophet.

Hanging their heads -The word نَكَسَ is translated as *hanging*. It comes from the root *nūn kāf sīn* which was used for an arrow whose feathered ends broke so its top is turned downwards, for a newborn delivered feet first instead of head first, as well as for a sick person who recovers, but then becomes sick again with the same disease.

*The central meaning is for something to reverse or turn back from its normal course.*¹²⁵ In this verse, it does not simply mean the criminals lowered their heads, it means a head that is forced downwards in humiliation, contrary to their former state of pride. It is a collapse of their former state of arrogance. In this world, they were argumentative, prideful, arrogant, but now, they are silent, humble and lowly. Before they were deniers and disbelievers; now, they submit and have become believers.

Now pay attention to what they say. First, they call Allah their *rabb* - their caretaker, nourisher, sustainer and the kind Master, the same word as in verse 2. Now, they recognize that the Qur'ān was not an act of corruption, but of love, kindness and goodwill from Allah, and that Allah meant good for them, not bad.

We saw and we heard -In the 9th verse, Allah had said, *He made for you, hearing, sight and emotions.*

¹²⁵ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2258

This verse uses the same words. Except that here sight is mentioned before hearing while the 9th ayah mentioned hearing before sight. On judgment day, the disbelievers will actually visibly see what they had only heard in this world regarding judgment day and its events. They will actually visibly see the consequences of their actions in front of them. Therefore, they put emphasis on seeing reality not hearing it. *We have seen what we used to hear.*

But this is their problem. They only believed after they had seen. Hearing about it and being reminded of it in the previous life did not make them believe in it. I will only believe when I see it - we hear it today as well. For something to be true, it does not have to be visible.

Now that we have seen with our own eyes what we used to hear in the worldly life -*return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain.* We have now verified what we used to hear. We see that actions do have consequences, we see that you actually meant good for us, that you wanted to guide us, that the Qur'ān was an act of love from you, not of corruption.

Lastly, the answer to the condition presented is omitted. *If you could but see*, but what then? What would happen if we could see it? Its answer is omitted so that our imagination can consider all possibilities which itself is the rhetoric here. The actual answer to the condition is; if you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads in front of their Master, *you would see something that is beyond what your imagination can encompass.* When you understand something, your imagination does not need to wander left and right to consider all sorts of possibilities. It knows the answer, it does not even need to consider other options. But by omitting the answer in this verse, Allah deliberately lets our imagination wander to consider all sorts of possibilities to say that just as your imagination is running wild and not arriving at a definite answer right now, similarly will your imagination fail to grasp the gravity of what the disbelievers will find themselves in, upon seeing the criminals hanging their heads in front of Allah on judgment day.

Verse 13

وَلَوْ شِئْنَا لَآتَيْنَا كُلَّ نَفْسٍ هُدًى وَلَكِنْ حَقَّ الْقَوْلُ مِنِّي لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنَ الْجِنَّةِ وَالنَّاسِ أَجْمَعِينَ

Had We willed, We would have given each soul its guidance. But the great word from Me came true, 'I will truly fill Hell with such disbelievers among the Jinn and mankind, in great numbers.'

My translation is extremely different from how this verse is normally translated and even how many exegetes explain it. I will explain in detail below.

Guidance here means visibly seeing the things the Qur'ān promises regarding judgment day and its events. In the last verse, the disbelievers became certain that what they used to hear in this world of the Qur'ān was the truth after seeing it with their own eyes. So when Allah says "*Had We willed, We would have given each soul its guidance*" He is saying that had Allah so willed, He would have made each and every single person see what the Qur'ān promises with their own eyes and then, they would have surely believed in it like the disbelievers in the last verse.

But the saying from Me came to truth, 'I will truly fill Hell with the Jinn and mankind, all together- Before explaining this, let us first look at a similar passage in surah Ṣād:

قَالَ فَبِعِزَّتِكَ لَأُغْوِيَنَّهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

Iblīs said, By Your might! I will tempt them all to harm!

إِلَّا عِبَادَكَ مِنْهُمْ الْمُخْلِصِينَ

Except your honored servants from them. The chosen ones.

قَالَ فَالْحَقُّ وَالْحَقَّ أَقُولُ

Allah said, This is the truth - and the truth I speak -

لَأَمْلَأَنَّ جَهَنَّمَ مِنْكَ وَمِمَّنْ تَتَّبِعُكَ مِنْهُمْ أَجْمَعِينَ

I will fill hell with you and with such of them who follow you, together.

(Sad: 82-85)

Had Allah wanted, He would have forced you to obey the correct path. But He wanted to give you free will for you to prove yourselves to Him, that you will indeed choose guidance even when faced with the choice to not do so. Because this free will exists, there will be a party that follows Iblīs and chooses error over guidance, and hence, my word that I said to *Iblīs* that *I will fill Hell with you and whoever follows you*, has come to pass.

So when Allah says *-But the saying from Me came to truth, 'I will truly fill Hell with the Jinn and mankind, all together* -He is saying that had returning them to the worldly life again so that they could perform righteous deeds was in accordance with divine wisdom, then We would have created them naturally guided in their worldly life, so that they would perform righteous deeds by compulsion and force with no will or desire towards evil. But I did not want that. I wanted to create mankind with free will to choose between two paths of following Satan or of following Me so that they can be repaid in accordance with what they did; due to which, the party who was misled and trapped by Satan will end up filling Hell and becoming its fuel. I wanted to test mankind and Jinn. Will they believe in my promises and choose the path of righteousness by hearing my word rather than seeing it with their own eyes? Otherwise, I could have shown them with their own eyes what they were promised in the worldly life itself.

Now a few grammatical nuances. Notice how the pronoun shifts from *We* to *I* inside the ayah.

Allah does not say *But My great word came to truth*, rather He says *the great word from Me came to truth*. He said it this way to indicate the greatness and grandeur of this word. The preposition *من* here is for the purpose of magnification and hence why I added the word *great* in the translation.

Secondly, the definite article before the words Jinn and mankind is *ال* *العهد* which refers to something that is already known or mentioned previously. In this verse, it refers to the disbelievers mentioned in the previous verses, who accused the prophet of inventing the Qur'ān by himself to cause corruption, who were unaware of the true nature of death, who denied the meeting with Allah in the hereafter. So it is better rendered as *"But a great word from Me came to truth, that I will fill Hell with such disbelievers of the Jinn and mankind, in great numbers."*

Another possibility is that there is an omitted مضاف which would then mean *that I will fill Hell with the disbelievers of the Jinn and mankind, in great numbers*” but this, though true, is not contextually consistent.

Now the words Jinn and mankind. The Qur’ān uses two words for Jinn - جن and جنة. The pattern of the word used in this ayah, contains meanings of generality and of lowliness. It means the great multitudes of Jinn that are lowly, disgraced and humiliated. Same is the case with the word Mankind. The Qur’ān uses two words إنس and الناس. The word used in this verse - الناس - is for the sake of generality and lowliness as well. A great number of people disgraced, lowly and humiliated. Allah is saying that a great majority of mankind will act in the same manner as these disbelievers opposing the prophet.

Verse 14

فَذُوقُوا بِمَا نَسِيتُمْ لِقَاءَ يَوْمِكُمْ هَٰذَا إِنَّا نَسِينَكُمُ^ط وَذُوقُوا عَذَابَ الْخُلْدِ بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

So taste because you forgot the meeting of this day of yours; We forgot you. Taste the punishment of eternity for what you used to do.

This verse is a direct continuation from verse 12. Verse 13 is actually جملة معترضة - an interjected sentence - between these two verses. The normal flow is as such

If you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads before their Rabb. Our Rabb! we have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain. (13)

So taste because you forgot the meeting of this day of yours; We forgot you. Taste the punishment of eternity for what you used to do. (14)

When the disbelievers admitted their faults and disbelief, Allah replied - *Then taste.....* Because you used to deny this meeting, which now you admit by saying “*We have seen and heard*”, taste the eternal punishment.

Verse 13 is interjected between this by Allah. Allah does not say those words to the disbelievers on Judgment day. They are interjected. A rather simple example from our daily lives would be:

I ate a burger - and it was delicious by the way - at this restaurant. The sentence is actually I ate a burger at this restaurant. You added “and it was delicious by the way” inside a sentence that would have been complete without these words.

In Arabic, this is done to state a fact that needs to be known. If you are telling something to people, but in the middle you realize there is something extremely important that you need to say, even if it is not a part of the topic you’re covering, then this is what an interjected sentence does in Arabic.

Verse 13 was an important fact that Allah needed to remind people of. It basically contains a central pillar of our faith in God and His justice. It actually answers major philosophical questions people have long struggled with.

The word “*taste*” comes two times. In the first sentence, “*So taste, because you forgot the meeting of this day of yours, we forgot you*” it is a complete sentence by itself and is left open ended. Taste what? Taste the consequences of your actions. It is left open ended because it is implied by the context. Secondly, these people had hung their heads in shame and disgrace in verse 12 which represented a reversal of their prideful state to that of a humble, humiliated servant. So taste also this disgrace and humiliation.

Because you forgot the meeting of this day of yours; We forgot you- it is obvious that they rejected the hereafter, they did not forget it. These people accused the prophet of inventing the Qur’ān, denied resurrection, and had a faulty concept of death that centered on death being the final end. They rejected it, they did not forget it so to speak. As a matter of fact, verse 10 itself says “*Rather, they are disbelievers in the meeting of their Rabb.*”

The answer lies in digging deeper into language itself. The word *kufṛ* is normally translated as “*disbelief*” in the Qur’ān. At its root, *kufṛ* means to cover something. We covered this earlier in surah ‘Abasa. A *kāfir*- a disbeliever - is someone who buries the seed of faith and good inside him. When something is covered up, it naturally gets forgotten.

This implies that the seed was in fact present inside them. The surah mentioned the *rūḥ* previously and said that since they neglected their *rūḥ*, they deny the Qur’ān and the meeting with God. The *rūḥ* is already there, present inside them, they can feel it, they can testify to its existence yet they have buried it deep within them; and left it forgotten and neglected. This neglect led them to disbelieve in not only God,

but also in the fact that actions have consequences; which is the very central point of this surah. The person who follows his desires and lust, he has no concern for repercussions. Lust, by definition, is the state where desires overpower logic. A person may know that the action leads to bad consequences, yet he still does it under the sheer power and grip of his lust. He is unable to stop himself and does whatever his lust commands him to. Lust does not concern itself with what comes after, but only with what happens then and there; with only the pleasure that it wants to experience in that very moment; and not with what it leads to in the future. Hence, lust by definition, is rejection of the fact that actions bear consequences. Therefore, acting blindly on lust is a rejection of the meeting of God, where all actions are repaid in full with their results.

So because you neglected the spirit of God inside you and buried it under the mud of lust, leaving it forgotten and neglected, you rejected and disbelieved in meeting your God and in receiving the dues of what you earned. Therefore, *We forgot you*; and left you buried under the mud of shame, guilt, disgrace and humiliation; We neglected your prayer of returning to the world when you said *Our Master, we have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain* and did not return you.

Therefore -*taste the punishment of eternity for what you used to do* -You shall not be returned to the world. Rather, you will taste God's punishment for eternity. Not only shall you be neglected, and buried under disgrace, humiliation and shame in this meeting, you shall be left buried under the fire and boiling water for eternity. You shall be forgotten - you shall be neglected.

What you used to do- Denying the meeting with Allah; and denying the fact that people will be repaid for their actions in the hereafter led them to commit such actions that led them to the fire. Their actions were a natural consequence of their lack of belief in the final meeting with Allah. If a criminal knows he will get away with his crime without paying any price, will he stop? He will commit it gleefully. If he knows he will get away with them, he will only commit more crimes, which is exactly what happened with these people.

Verse 15

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهَا خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

The only ones who believe in our verses are those who, when reminded of them, fall down in prostration, and declare His perfection accompanied with His praise. They alone do not seek greatness.

The people described earlier did not believe in Allah nor in His signs. So who believes in them? *The only ones who believe in our signs are those who, when reminded of them, fall down in prostration, and declare His perfection accompanied with His praise.*

First, the word “reminded” has the *shaddah* on it which means being constantly reminded, not just one single reminder. It means - *whenever they are reminded.....*

Secondly, it is in the passive voice. Reminded by whom? That is not specified to create generality. *Whenever they are reminded by anyone.....*

But we need to understand the word *dhikr* (reminded) as well. At its root, it was used for something strong and sturdy. The male gender is called *zakar* (from the same root) because men are physically stronger than women. *Dhikr* does not mean any reminder. It means a strong and effective reminder. You can teach the Qur’ān to people, but when you do it in a way that has a strong impact on people, you have done *dhikr*. This is important because the manner of teaching matters and the Qur’ān recognizes it. The Qur’ān itself uses this word here to imply that whenever *dhikr* of the Qur’ān is done *in front* of them i.e; *whenever they are reminded of the Qur’ān in an appropriate and effective manner by anyone, it changes them*. It is not a random mention or reminder of the Qur’ān.

Thirdly, the phrase *the only ones who believe*, is in the present tense because it conveys that their faith is renewed and that its strength keeps increasing moment after moment because they are already believers.

Fall down in prostration -The word *kharra*, translated as *fall down* at its root means a complete reversal of the state of something. It is normally used in the Qur’ān for falling over such as when Allah destroyed the habitations of some people causing their roofs - the highest part - to crash on them. Here, it does not simply mean falling down in prostration, it means a reversal and a change. When they are reminded of Allah’s verses, it produces a change in them. What kind of change? Prostration does not simply mean prostrating on the earth as we do in our prayers. It also implies submitting, obeying and humility. Whenever they are reminded of Allah’s verses, it affects them and changes them to become more submissive and

humble before Allah. This ties in perfectly with the previous ayah. Remember the word نكس conveyed the reversal of the disbelievers pride and arrogance into disgrace and humility. The believer is he who turns his pride and arrogance into humility and submission to God INSIDE this world while the disbelievers are those who do it on judgment day. The disbeliever of today will be a believer on judgment day but by that time, it will be too late.

*Declare His tasbīḥ accompanied with His hamd - Tasbīḥ comes from the root sīn bā' ḥā' which was used for a loose garment that hangs away from the body, for swimming above the surface of water, as well as for a horse that gracefully stretches its legs while running etc. The central meaning is to remain in contact with something that could engulf while remaining above its surface and not getting engulfed.*¹²⁶

A swimmer for example swims above the surface of the water without getting engulfed by it, and the loose garment described above does not cling to the body. It hangs down.

From this concept comes the meaning of transcendence. For something to be above something else. *Tasbīḥ of Allah means that Allah is far above everything else. He is transcendent and above anything unworthy of Him. This goes back to verse 4 where Allah mentioned the istiḥā' above the throne. Allah is transcendent and above all creation. Creation by definition is defective and flawed because being created implies a beginning in time, with no prior existence. Allah is transcendent and free of all defects and flaws. He is above the throne, distinct and separate from all creation. Everything besides Him is created.*

Hamd comes from the root ḥā' mīm dāl which at its very root was used for healthy and nutritious food that gives you energy, strength and contentment.¹²⁷ This root came to be used in the meanings of praise and gratitude because when someone helps or lends strength to another person, the natural reaction is praise and thank him.

Tasbīḥ is declaring Allah to be free of all faults and shortcomings and above all things. The core points of this surah so far have been refuting the disbelievers regarding resurrection and the fact that actions have binding consequences to them. In addition, it also answers their claim that the prophet forged this Qur'ān by himself to cause corruption. As explained before, if there is no final reckoning after

¹²⁶ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 2, p. 947

¹²⁷ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 1, p. 492

death where people are repaid for their actions, then there really is no justice. This would imply that Allah is unjust and He created a system which is inherently unjust, imperfect and flawed. So these believers, they do *tasbīḥ* of Allah - they declare and believe Allah to be free of injustice and declare Him to be perfectly just. How do they do that? By believing in the last day when people will face the consequences that come binding to their actions. Also, the disbelievers accused the prophet of forging the Qur'ān to cause corruption. The believers declare *tasbīḥ* of Allah by declaring and believing Him free of this attribute. Since Allah is the *rabb*, it necessitates that He sends down a book that serves to guide and rectify people, not to cause corruption. Believers believe that Allah does not cause corruption, rather He only does good, and hence, by believing this and by believing the Qur'ān to be sent down by Allah, not forged by Muhammad, they do *Tasbīḥ* of Allah.

With the hamd of their Rabb- They do *tasbīḥ* of Allah accompanied with His *hamd*. *Tasbīḥ* is the negation of everything unworthy of Allah while *hamd* is the affirmation of everything worthy of Him. Together, they complete faith and belief in God. Allah is free from every defect and He possesses every single perfection and blessing. Without *tasbīḥ*, someone might praise Allah while imagining human-like flaws while without *hamd*, someone might deny flaws without recognizing His blessings.

They alone, do not seek greatness -Most translations render it as *They are not arrogant*. The word مستكبر means someone who *desires or seeks greatness*. Secondly, there is an extra pronoun here which is why I added the word "*alone*" in the translation. It creates a meaning of exclusivity. Only these people do not seek greatness. Which means that others do seek it. These people, as opposed to the disbelievers mentioned before who entered Hell, do not seek greatness. Rather, they do *tasbīḥ* of Allah combined with His *hamd*. They recognize that Allah is not only free of all defects but also that all blessings and goodness only comes from Him. They fall down in prostration - they humble and submit themselves before God when reminded of His signs and when the Qur'ān is recited on them. They obey Him, and become humble before Him; the exact opposite of being arrogant and seeking greatness. The Qur'ān calls us to obey Allah and submit to Him. Therefore, when someone denies the Qur'ān and disobeys this command, he is seeking greatness and displaying arrogance. He is rejecting the command to serve and be humble before God, which necessarily equates to seeking greatness.

This verse summarizes Islamic belief in God. To do *tasbīḥ* of Him combined with His *hamd*. Without *tasbīḥ*, someone might praise Allah while imagining human-like flaws while without *Hamd*, someone might deny flaws without recognizing His blessings. Obeying God necessarily implies becoming humble and lowly before Him and to deny any and all desire for greatness. When we say all *Hamd* belongs to Allah, it means just that. It belongs to Him, not to us. When we do *tasbīḥ* of Allah it means that He alone is free from all defects, we are not. Since we do not deserve *hamd* nor *tasbīḥ*, we do not deserve to be great, lofty and elevated. The believer in Allah believes in these facts and hence, he is neither arrogant, nor does he desire to be great. He recognizes his reality and submits humbly to Allah. Therefore, denying Allah and the Qur'ān, necessarily implies the opposite; that you deny these facts. Hence, disbelief in Islam is defined as seeking greatness and being arrogant. This is attested to in the famous Ḥadīth:

وعن أبي هريرة قال: قال رسول الله ﷺ: قال الله عز وجل: العزُّ إزاري، والكبرياءُ ردائي، فمن ينازعني في واحدٍ منهما فقد عذَّبته رواه مسلم

On the authority of Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him), who said that the Messenger of Allah (ﷺ) said: Allah (mighty and sublime be He) said: Pride is my cloak and greatness My robe, and he who competes with Me in respect of either of them I shall cast into Hell.

It was related by Abu Dāwūd (also by Ibn Majah and Ahmad) with sound chains of authority. This Ḥadīth also appears in Muslim in another version.

Verse 16

تَتَجَافَى جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

“Their sides pull away from their beds, supplicating their Rabb in fear and aspiration, and from what We have provided them, they spend.”

There is an interesting word play here. The word تتجافى is translated as “pull away” while the word مضاجع is translated as “beds”. At their roots, تتجافى means for something to pull

away from where it would normally be while مضاجع means for something to come down or collapse with weight as if being pulled down towards it. It is an image of something pulling away from something it is being drawn to, like a magnet trying to pull away from another magnet despite being attracted to it.

This is a symbol of letting go of desires. Desires are by nature things we are attracted to, which draw us, which pull us towards them yet despite this pressure, force and attraction, a person pulls away from them. This is what it represents in this verse and them forsaking their beds to pray to God in the hours of the night is an example of this. It not only represents them leaving their beds to pray to God during the night, but also them leaving and pulling away from all prohibited desires. Beds are places where we lie down and rest. Similarly, desires are something in whom we find pleasure. We are naturally pulled towards them due to the pleasure they offer.

Next, why does Allah say *"their sides pull away from their beds"* rather than simply saying *"they pull away from their beds?"* Because this creates imagery. Imagine a person is standing perfectly straight and looking straight ahead while one of his sides is being pulled towards something. Yet he stands his ground without even flinching or even leaning to one of his sides. He remains perfectly straight. It is not that his body does not move towards it; his sides do not. He is facing straight ahead and remains still, perfectly straight despite the strong force of attraction trying to pull him away to one of his sides.

The question now arises, why present this example specifically forsaking their beds? If the intention was to simply convey their forsaking of desires, other examples could have been presented as well.

The answer is that this is perfectly consistent with the theme and context of this surah. This surah earlier placed emphasis on the *rūḥ*- the spirit inside us. Here, Allah describes the believers as forsaking their sleep to call on Him. What is sleep? It is the sister of death. What is death? It is the removal of the spirit from the body as described earlier in this surah. The Qur'ān has stated that our spirits depart our body when we sleep, and Allah returns them to our bodies when we wake up.¹²⁸ This is a representation of death itself. When we sleep, our spirits leave our bodies and when we wake up, they return to our bodies. Similarly, when a person dies, his spirit leaves his body and this spirit will return to his recreated body, when he wakes up on judgment day.

¹²⁸ Q. 39:42

The believers recognize the *amr* of Allah inside them and elsewhere. If you look at it another way, they prefer the state in which the *rūḥ* remains inside the body over the state in which it leaves them. *They prefer comfort that is attained by having the rūḥ remain inside them, over the comfort that is attained while it is not inside their bodies, unlike the disbelievers who entered Hell.*

This not only describes their literal action, but also serves as an indirect expression of their recognition and belief in the *amr* of Allah inside them, in the form of the *rūḥ*. Allah singles out standing up and waking the nights in His worship, as an act that perfectly captures their belief in it.

Supplicating their Lord in fear and aspiration - طمع is slightly different from رجو both of which mean hope or expectation. طمع is a feeling created when something you hope for is within grasp.¹²⁹ For example, let's say someone really wants to get a job but he has been unsuccessful. Suppose this person gives an interview and it went really well and he sees many signs that the company will accept him. He now feels as if his desire is within his reach and now eagerly anticipates the company to get back to him. This is طمع. He sees his desire getting closer and closer to him in such a way that he starts preparing himself to receive it. This is why this word was classically used to mean preparation.

Supplicating stands for not only calling to Allah but all forms of worship such as the five daily prayers because ultimately all forms of worship are us calling on Allah.

Now the verse does not specify what exactly they fear and desire. From the context, it is apparent that it is in fear of meeting the same fate as the disbelievers whose fate was described earlier and it is in hope of getting close to Allah. They call on Allah - worship Him - in hopes of getting close to Allah. When you are accepted by Allah and recognize Him and who He is, you will naturally want to meet Him. Hence, this is how they prepare themselves to meet Allah. By coming close to Him.

From what We have provided them, they spend. -The word نفق is translated as *spend*. At its root, it was actually used for a desert lizard that would dig two holes in the ground far away from each other. When a predator would come after it, it would enter the ground from one hole and exit from the other to escape.¹³⁰ The Qur'ān calls a hypocrite a *munaḥḥiq* which comes from the same root. They are so called because

¹²⁹ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1355

¹³⁰ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaq al-Mu aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2241

when being a believer is beneficial, they believe, but when being a disbeliever comes with worldly perks, they join the disbelievers just like the lizard which enters from one hole and comes out of the other. Now why does the Qur'ān use the same root for spending? To create an imagery. It is as if the one who spends for God, sends it forth via one hole, only to receive it back from the other. Or that he sends it down one hole - this life - and it comes back from the other - hereafter. Whatever they spend in this life, is repaid back to them in one shape or the other as the Qur'ān itself says:

وَمَا تُنْفِقُوا مِنْ شَيْءٍ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ يُوَفَّ إِلَيْكُمْ وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تُظْلَمُونَ

Whatever you spend (same root) in Allah's path will be repaid to you in full. You will not be wronged (You will receive in full, you will not receive it less than what you spent)

(Al - Anfal: 60)

This remains consistent with the theme of actions having binding consequences. The disbelievers faced the dreaded consequences of their evil actions, while the believers received the good and joyful rewards for their actions.

When you spend for Allah, you are basically sacrificing your wealth. For the one who does not believe, this is all a waste. He does not believe in the hereafter, he does not believe you will get it back from God. Only the believer, who believes that Allah will in fact reward Him, and that his good actions will bear good fruit for him, will in fact sacrifice for Allah. Allah is singling out those actions that perfectly capture their belief in the hereafter and in the invisible *amr*.

"*Spending*" here does not just relate to money. It relates to everything. Your money, time, energy, effort. Your youth, the rest that you sacrificed, the sleep you gave up. This is why it uses ما (Whatever) instead of الذي which is more constrained and specific. From whatever Allah has given them, be it their money, time, effort or anything; they use it to get close to Allah; and whatever they do for Allah, whatever they have to sacrifice for Allah, from the smallest of things such as even a few minutes of sleep or rest; to the biggest such as even losing their own lives, will be repaid back in full. The good consequence of their good actions. Actions have consequences. This fact proved to be a curse for the disbelievers, but for the believers, it became a blessing.

Verse 17

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Therefore, no soul knows what was kept hidden for them, of what is the coolness of eyes; as a reward of what they consistently used to do

They stayed up late at night and preferred standing in prayer over resting their eyes. Their eyes hurt because of lack of sleep, and to compensate, Allah will cool their eyes in the hereafter with things they have never seen. This also applies metaphorically to other aspects as we discussed in the last verse. They left the comfort of their bodies - their desires, and therefore they shall be compensated by Allah with things and in a manner they have never seen or experienced before.

Some grammatical nuances:

Therefore -The letter *fa* is translated as *therefore* but it can also be *fa al faṣīḥa* which exposes or reveals a hidden sentence that is understood from the context. If we take this to be a *fa al faṣīḥa*, then the verse would be rendered as -*They were rewarded in a manner above their hopes and expectations and hence, no soul knows what was kept hidden for them, of what is the coolness of the eyes.*

They had hopes and expectations from Allah on how He will reward them, but the way Allah rewarded them on judgment not only surpassed their hopes and expectations, it was something they had never even known. They did not even think that the things Allah rewarded them with could even exist. This is why it says “*what was hidden from them.*” It means something whose existence was withheld from them such that they did not even know about it. This famous ḥadīth perfectly describes this verse:

حَدَّثَنَا مُعَاذُ بْنُ أَسَدٍ، أَخْبَرَنَا عَبْدُ اللَّهِ، أَخْبَرَنَا مَعْمَرٌ، عَنْ هَمَّامِ بْنِ مُنَبِّهٍ، عَنْ أَبِي هُرَيْرَةَ - رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُ - عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ ” قَالَ اللَّهُ أَعَدَدْتُ لِعِبَادِي الصَّالِحِينَ مَا لَا عَيْنٌ رَأَتْ، وَلَا أُذُنٌ سَمِعَتْ، وَلَا خَطَرَ عَلَى قَلْبِ بَشَرٍ

The Prophet (ﷺ) said, “Allah said, “I have prepared for My righteous slaves (such excellent things) as no eye has ever seen, nor an ear has ever heard nor a human heart can ever think of.”
(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī 7498)

Soul- The word **نفس**- translated as *soul*- is indefinite which creates meaning of generality. Any soul that was righteous, not just the prophets or the people especially chosen by Allah; but every single person. Anyone who does any good, will be rewarded for that with such excellent things that he has never seen, nor heard and which have never crossed his mind.

Of what is the coolness of eyes -The normal expected way of speech would have been- *so no soul knows what is kept hidden for the coolness of their eyes* -instead of the way it is phrased in this verse. This creates an *Idafah* which denotes the meaning of perfection and completeness. For example, if I say; *their project will be perfectly completed versus the perfect project will be completed*; there is a difference. In the first sentence, perfection is relative to their plans while the second sentence denotes completeness and perfection in totality. It is the perfect project. There is no other project that surpasses it. Same is the meaning in this verse. The coolness and comforting of the eyes is not relative to each person; rather it is perfect and complete by itself. There is nothing that surpasses such comfort.

A reward of what they consistently used to do -The present tense here denotes repetition of action. These were consistent actions, almost habitual. Recall that in verse 15, Allah described the believers as those who submitted and became humble inside this world as opposed to the disbelievers who only did so on judgment day. Just as the disbelief in judgment and justice led the disbelievers to commit grave crimes whose consequences they faced on judgment day, so did the humility and submission to Allah, while alive in this world, led the believers to do such excellent deeds that led them to obtain the perfect and everlasting comfort.

Verse 18

أَفَن كَانَ مُؤْمِنًا كَمَن كَانَ فَاسِقًا ۚ لَا يَسْتَوُونَ

Then is one who was a believer like one who was a Fāsiq? They are not equal.

This verse bears remarkable truths if reflected on. It is enough by itself to demolish any belief system that does not believe in a hereafter and in the reckoning of deeds.

It is obvious that the believer and the disbeliever are not alike. So why ask this question to begin with?

To start off, we need to look at the word *fāsiq*. At its root, it was used for a date which slipped out of its skin. The central meaning of this root is for something to emerge out of its boundaries or for it to exceed its limits.¹³¹

Instead of calling them disbelievers as He does earlier in this surah, Allah calls them *fāsiq*. They are people who transgressed and exceeded the boundaries and limits set by Allah, just as a date breaks out of its skin. This is perfectly consistent with the theme of this surah. Recall that in verse 14, Allah stated that denial of the Hereafter and of the meeting with Allah led the disbelievers to commit such actions that landed them in the Fire — just as a criminal who, if he knows he will not be caught, will only commit more crimes.

The word *mu'min* -translated as *believer* -is beautiful when paired with the word *fāsiq*. *Mu'min* at its very root means *peace* and *security*.¹³² A *Mu'min* is a person who remains secured inside God's covenant and boundaries unlike the *fāsiq* who escapes and breaks out of them. This parallel will be alluded to in the next two verses so it is important to keep in mind.

To understand this verse, we need to remember that this surah is directed to the disbelievers. Allah is addressing the disbelievers who accuse the prophet of forging the Qur'ān, who deny the hereafter and hence believe that death is the end of it all and they will not be repaid for their actions.

This verse is actually condensing this whole surah and what has been stated thus far in it in one sentence.

The disbelievers believe that death is the end of everything and that people are not recompensed for their actions, as mentioned in verse 10. If this were true, would there really be any difference between a believer and a *fāsiq*? Both would die, be buried, and disappear into the same earth forever. They would have the same outcome, go to the same place, and thus be equal. It would not matter what one did in this life—whether as a *mu'min* or a *fāsiq*—since death would end it all. Actions would be irrelevant, as both would end up in the same place with the same fate. If

¹³¹ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1673

¹³² *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 4, p. 2125

there is no judgment Day, if there is no resurrection after death, then indeed there is no difference between a believer and a disbeliever.

When Allah asks whether a believer can be equal to a *fāsiq*, He is simply stating the disbelievers' belief in the form of a question. They believe death is the ultimate end, so the believer and the disbeliever will have the same outcome and destination, making them equal. Thus Allah asks, "*Then is one who was a believer like one who was a fasiq?*"

The disbelievers believe they are equal. What did Allah do in this surah? He refuted them. He showed that death is not the end, that there is indeed a meeting with Allah after death where every person will be repaid for their deeds. He said that disbelievers will enter Hell while believers will be comforted by Allah. Their outcomes will be exact opposite, and thus the believer and disbeliever are not equal.

لَا يَسْتَوُونَ

They are not equal

The very notion that good and evil will bear the same consequences is enough by itself to demonstrate the false nature of such a belief system. Good and evil, two opposite things, cannot bear the same result. But when you deny resurrection, this is exactly what you believe. Without an afterlife, there would really be no difference between good and bad. They would both lead to the same outcome. How absurd is it to believe that they are the same? How absurd hence, it is to believe that there will be no reckoning of deeds after death.

Verse 19

أَمَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ جَنَّاتُ الْمَأْوَىٰ نُزُلًا بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Because those who believed and did righteous deeds, will have gardens, the perfect refuge; as an initial accommodation for what they used to do.

This verse continues from the words "*They are not equal*" in the last verse.

Because those who believed - a believer was contrasted with a *fāsiq* because unlike the *fāsiq* who breaks out of God's limits, boundaries and commandments, a believer remains secured inside them. The same word is used here. آمَنَ - translated as *believed*- and مؤمن (*believer*) come from the same root.

Did righteous deeds - the word عمل was used in classical Arabic to refer to hard labor. When referring to actions, it refers to actions done deliberately and willingly.

The word *ṣāliḥat* is translated as "*righteous deeds*" but at its root, it means correction, restoration and rectification as we covered in surah al- 'Aṣr. *Ṣāliḥat* are actions that rectify and mend our souls.

Will have Gardens; the perfect refuge- The word *ma'wā* is translated as *refuge*. It comes from the root أوى which means to join and cling to something for protection. Here it means the gardens that grant eternal safety and protection from all harms, grief and anything undesirable.

Translations normally render it as "*gardens of refuge*" and translate it literally but doing so misses the whole reason why it is phrased as such. The genitive construction, combined with the definite article with the word *ma'wā* creates the meaning of perfection and completeness. We saw this in verse 17 when instead of saying "*for the coolness of their eyes*", Allah used the genitive construction in "*what is the coolness of the eyes*" to denote the perfection and the highest degree of comfort obtained in paradise. Same is the case here and hence, it is better rendered as "*the gardens of perfect refuge and protection*." This perfection is in all forms; whether related to time or quality because being temporal is a flaw while being eternal is perfection related to time.

Gardens; not garden- Multiple gardens, not just one. This denotes freedom. A believer - a *mu'min*- is someone who secures himself inside God's limits and boundaries unlike the *fāsiq* who breaks out of them. The believers remained confined within God's boundaries in this world and restricted their freedom to act on their desires and as a result, they gained utmost freedom in the hereafter. They did not gain only one garden to which they are confined, rather multiple gardens and Allah does not even number them. They could be in thousands, perhaps even more. The consequence

of remaining restricted inside Allah's limits in the world is absolute freedom in the hereafter.

As a first hospitality - nuzūl is the first hospitality shown to a guest. At its root, *nuzūl* means to *descend*. In Arabic culture and even today, when a guest arrives he is given his first greetings and salutations when he descends his ride or gets out of his car. Hence, this word came to be used in the meanings of the very first and initial greetings and hospitality shown to a guest. Allah says that these gardens that offer them perfect and eternal protection from all harms, are just the beginning. They will only be their first greetings and even greater things await them beyond. Now what are these greater things that await them beyond these gardens? Allah keeps them hidden as He says so in verse 17

فَلَا تَعْلَمُ نَفْسٌ مَّا أُخْفِيَ لَهُم مِّن قُرَّةِ أَعْيُنٍ جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

Therefore, no soul knows what was kept hidden for them, of what is the coolness of eyes; as a reward of what they consistently used to do

Both verses end with the same words بما كانوا يعملون - *because of what they consistently used to do*.

Verse 20

وَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ فَسَقُوا فَمَأْوَاهُمُ النَّارُ ۖ كُلَّمَا أَرَادُوا أَن يَخْرُجُوا مِنْهَا أُعِيدُوا فِيهَا وَقِيلَ لَهُمْ ذُوقُوا عَذَابَ النَّارِ الَّتِي كُنْتُمْ بِهِ تُكَذِّبُونَ

“While those who did fisq, then their refuge is only the fire. Every time they wanted to exit it, they were returned in it with these words said to them, “Taste the punishment of the fire which you used to deny.”

Fisq is the verbal noun of the word *fāsiq*. Because the *mu'min* restricted himself in this world to stay within the limits ordained by Allah, they were recompensed with absolute freedom by being granted not one, but multiple gardens. Whereas the *fāsiq* broke out of the limits set by Allah and roamed freely and acted with utmost freedom in this world and did whatever they wanted. Hence, they were recompensed by having their freedoms taken away by being contained inside the

fire where they have no freedom to even move out of it; let alone do anything they want. Hence, *every time they wanted to exit it, they were returned in it.*

Notice how it says here "*their refuge is the fire*" while in the last verse it said "*They will have Gardens, the perfect refuge.*"

When Allah said "*they will have gardens*" He used the *lām al milkiyyah* which is used for ownership. For example, If I say to someone "*stay in this house*" this does not imply ownership, but if I say, "*this house is for you*", it does. Allah is the owner of the Gardens which the believers enter but He uses the *lām al milkiyyah* to show that the believers will be the owners and masters of these gardens which implies security. These gardens will not be taken away from them. They will be their property.

With regards to the disbelievers, fire is neither a refuge nor a source of protection from anything. It itself is something from which protection is sought. The use of the genitive construction as in the previous verse would be inappropriate because it would denote the meanings of completion and perfection. Since the fire is mockingly called a refuge for them, it is not suitable to use the same language with it.

Now the question arises, why even mockingly call the fire a *refuge*? Look at the next words. *Every time they wanted to exit it, they were returned in it.* A *ma'wā* is a place where you take refuge from a danger you are fearful of but the fire by itself is a danger you want to seek protection from. The disbelievers will do exactly that. They will seek to get out of the fire and try to seek protection from it. They will try to find a *ma'wā* from it. But they will be returned inside it again. They sought a *ma'wā* and where did they land? Inside the fire itself. This is how the fire is their *ma'wā*. Whenever they try to seek protection from the fire, they are made to cling to it even more.

Whenever they wanted to exit it -Notice the word "*wanted*" which ties in perfectly with their description of being *fāsiq*. In this life, they broke out of Allah's limits and did whatever they *wanted*. In the hereafter, they get recompensed by not having anything they want fulfilled.

They were returned in it -It does not say that they will be returned *to* it, but rather *in* (في) it. This is because they never get out of it. They decide to go towards the exit, and the moment they move towards the exit, they are forced back *into* its center.

With these words said to them, "Taste the punishment of the fire which you used to deny." This paints a scene that we can picture in our mind. When they try to get out, they experience an overwhelming force that pushes them back into the very center. They look around dumbfounded asking, "What just happened?" Then they hear a voice say, *"Taste the punishment of the Fire which you used to deny."* This is why the sentence *"they were returned in it"* is in passive voice instead of specifying who or what returned them into the fire. They themselves will not know who or what did it. One moment they were approaching its exit, and the next moment - all of a sudden - they are in its midst again.

To make it even worse, *"with these words said to them"* is in passive voice as well instead of specifying the speaker. They won't even know who the speaker is, who is speaking to them. The only thing they hear is *"taste the punishment of the fire which you used to deny"* and from a speaker they can't even see. Helplessly alone and deserted. No one to take pity on them nor anyone to help them. This goes back to verse 4 - *"You have, besides him, no Wali nor a Shaft'."* You have no *Wali* or *Shaft'* to protect you from the decree and punishment of Allah. This also goes back to the words *"We forgot you"* in verse 14. We disregarded you completely, such that we are not even near you, you cannot even see us, nor talk to us. The only words you hear from us are *"taste the punishment of the greatest Fire which you used to deny."*

Which you used to deny- You used to deny that actions have consequences. You used to deny that you will meet Allah who will repay you for your actions. This fire is the very consequence of your actions. The notion that you had that the worldly life is all there is, with no consequences for their actions, led you to become *fāsiq*. This fire is the very consequences of your actions that you committed; of the *fisq* you committed, which you would not have done, had you believed your actions - your *fisq* -will have consequences.

This is why the preposition ب is used with the word *tukadhdhibūn* (you used to deny) in the present tense; because this entails *repetition*. You used to deny it again and again, not just once. Recall that in verse 15, Allah mentioned how the believers, whenever they were effectively reminded of the Qur'ān would submit and humble themselves before Allah. It implied being repeatedly reminded, not just a single, stand alone reminder. This was the same with these people. They were reminded constantly of these verses, but they denied them.

Secondly, whenever a person commits a crime, or *fisq*; he feels guilt inside of him. Where does that guilt come from? In surah al- Qiyamah, Allah tells us that guilt is our soul berating and admonishing us for committing that crime because it knows it will have to pay the price for it on judgment day. That guilt is our soul pleading with us to stop because it does not want to face the consequences of that crime. But these disbelievers used to deny it again and again, crime after crime, *fisq* after *fisq*, even when their own souls testified to its truth. Guilt is not a feeling one can bury. It is a testament to our wrongdoing. Yet, they used to commit *fisq* after *fisq*, denying what their own souls were repeatedly testifying to them.

Verse 21

وَلَنَذِيقَنَّهُم مِّنَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَدْنَىٰ دُونَ الْعَذَابِ الْأَكْبَرِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ

We will surely let such people taste the nearer punishment short of the greater punishment so they may return.

Allah will go on to explain what this nearer punishment actually is. He will create a like by like description of what has come before in this surah, of what happens with the disbelievers on Judgment Day, with the nearer and smaller punishment that they will experience in this world. He will describe it in exactly the same manner from verse 23 onwards. What has been described thus far is the greatest punishment of Allah. Next, He will describe the lesser - the nearer punishment - inside this earth by mirroring the exact sequence as before.

The sentence “*We will surely let them taste*” has threefold emphasis; first via the letter *lām* then by two *nūn*. In Arabic, this type of emphasis is placed when addressing someone who denies what you are saying.

This is addressed to the *fāsiq*. I explained earlier how blindly acting on lust is a rejection of the hereafter, by definition. The obvious incentive to break out of Allah’s limits is to gain immediate pleasure and worldly gain in front of you. People steal to gain the pleasure of money, they lie to gain a certain benefit or avert a harm that may come to them, they fornicate because of bodily pleasure etc. When one is caught up in such pleasures, that is all they can think of as we see around us. They get lost in the world of their pleasures.

Hence, Allah emphasizes to these people that He will take away this pleasure, and punish them as they sit intoxicated under it. *‘Adhāb*- translated as *punishment*- at its root means *sweetness*. This root was used in its exact opposite meaning of punishment as it denotes the *removal of this sweetness* and comfort.

The pleasures they are indulging in, the sweetness that they feel, the comfort they have received by disobeying Allah; Allah will take it away and replace it with regret and emptiness. We see this in our lives. One may be wealthy and well off, have access to everything he wants, but feel miserable and empty inside. This has led some to even commit suicide as we have seen. What appears to the eyes is different from what is hidden inside the chests. A person may display money and happiness, but deep inside he may feel terrible and worthless.

So they may return - so they may realize the folly of these pleasures and desires, and return to the path they were actually meant to follow to obtain the perfect comfort described in verse 19, not this temporary fleeting pleasure that transforms into guilt.

Notice how Allah calls it the *nearer punishment* with respect to the *greatest punishment*. Naturally, when coupling these two, we would say the smaller punishment and the greater punishment. Allah did it for two reasons. One, when you say “*the smaller punishment*”, it gives the impression that this punishment is small, meager and hence, it is possible to overcome it. Secondly, it is a threat that it is near and not far.

This punishment will be severe in itself, but an even greater punishment awaits you if you do not return. When a person tastes this punishment, which is immense and severe in itself, he will naturally become afraid of the punishment that is even greater than the one he is experiencing, and hence this will open the door of repentance for him.

Also notice how Allah refers to these people in third person rather than directly addressing them. Third person pronouns are used for people far away, not present with you. Currently, lost in their desires, they are far away from Allah such that they have to be addressed in third person. Allah makes them taste the nearer punishment so that they may return and become close to Allah, such that Allah can address them directly, just as we address the person present with us, in the second person.

Verse 22

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنتَقِمُونَ

Who is more in darkness than the one who, after the verses of his Rabb were strongly recounted to him, turned away from them? Indeed We, from such criminals, will take revenge.

The verses here, refer to the verses of this surah thus far. This verse directly explains verse 12:

وَلَوْ تَرَىٰ إِذِ الْمُجْرِمُونَ نَاكِسُوا رُءُوسِهِمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

If you could but see when the criminals are hanging their heads before their Rabb. Our Rabb! We have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain.

Zukkira is the same word used in verse 15 which means being effectively reminded. Allah is saying that what has been mentioned in this surah thus far, is strong, effective and has the potential to change people and their views. These are not just ordinary words, they pack a punch. They carry a strong impact. If someone believes that their actions do not have consequences, then this surah is strong enough to make them change their beliefs.

Yet if despite these extraordinary words, someone turns away from them, who can be more lost in darkness than him? Darkness is a state in which we cannot see.

Darkness here implies a person blind of what is ahead, blind of the consequences of his actions, blind of where he is going, blind of what his actions will lead him to, blind of what is right and wrong.

The central theme of this surah thus far has been to establish that actions do indeed have consequences. If someone denies this fact and considers death to be the end of it all, then they will indeed be inconsiderate of the consequences of their actions. A criminal will not stop from his crimes if he knows he will get away with it. A person who denies judgment day, will be heedless of the consequences of his actions and hence be in darkness and blind of what they will lead him to.

We, from such criminals, will take revenge -The normal way to say it is -*We will take revenge from such criminals*. The unusual sequence of words is to magnify the gravity of their crimes. What has come in this surah are no ordinary words and denying them is no ordinary crime.

This verse concludes the discussion on the first part of this surah, and it fittingly ends with these words. You deny actions have consequences and consider death to be the end. This surah shows you the opposite and that death is not the end. If you still disbelieve, then you will actually receive the consequence of denying this surah. The next time, Allah will not prove to you that actions do bear consequences in the form of words, but by actually having you face these very consequences. Hence, the first thing you will say on judgment day when you face these consequences will be:

رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

Our Rabb! We have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain.

We are now certain that actions do indeed have consequences. Now that we are certain of it, we will live our lives knowing this and hence be mindful of our actions, not blind to their consequences. This is why Allah uses the same word to describe these people both in this verse and in verse 12. He calls them *mujrim*- criminals committing grave crimes.

Verse 23

وَلَقَدْ ءَاتَيْنَا مُوسَى الْكِتَابَ فَلَا تَكُنْ فِي مِرْيَةٍ مِّنْ لِّقَائِهِ ۚ وَجَعَلْنَاهُ هُدًى لِّبَنِي إِسْرَءِيلَ

Yes, we certainly gave Mūsā the Book - so do not indulge in any dispute over His meeting - and We made it guidance for the children of Israel.

A complete change of subject at first glance but it is not. From here on, Allah will describe the nearer punishment He promised the disbelievers in verse 21 and He will liken it to the greater punishment awaiting them on judgment Day described earlier.

Notice the words *do not indulge in any doubt over His meeting*. Since this word can also mean to receive, scholars have interpreted it in many ways such as Mūsā receiving the book from Allah, the prophet himself receiving the book from Allah, among others. I disagree with all of these because if you look at what has come in this surah itself, then the answer lies right there.

The “meeting” described in this surah is the meeting of the hereafter. Verses 10 and 14 are explicit. The overarching theme of the surah too makes it clear that this is the meeting of Allah on judgment day.

It is clear to me that the words *-then do not be in any doubt concerning His meeting*, refer to meeting Allah on judgment day since this is textually and contextually consistent. I am compelled to highlight this because I could not find any notable work inside tafsir literature that holds the same position.

Now how is Allah giving Mūsā the Torah connected to not having any doubts on meeting Allah on judgment day? If you read the Torah, there is almost zero mention of judgment day. In fact, in the whole Hebrew Bible, even outside of the Torah, there are only a few verses that indirectly refer to final judgment. This is why the Jews have historically struggled regarding the final judgment. In Judaism, it is tied to the era of the Messiah who will transform this world and make it perfect. But the notion of a final judgment of deeds, is not mentioned in the five books of Moses - the Torah - at all. It is derived by the rabbis from other vague texts inside the Tanakh as an interpretation such as passages from the books of Daniel, Isaiah and Ezekiel. Later Rabbinical developments on these passages lead to the notion of judgment in the days of the Messiah who will fill the earth with peace and justice, but that is not the final judgment on judgment day. The Torah is completely empty of this notion of final judgment. This is the reason why Jews have struggled with the problem of suffering. What is the point of suffering and why do the righteous suffer? Unless you believe in a final judgment you will continue to struggle with this question. If you say it refers to the era of the Messiah, then what about those who have died before his arrival?

In Islam, we believe in almost the same thing regarding the Messiah. When he comes, he will fill this earth with justice and peace and transform it into a utopia. But the final judgment of deeds is with Allah on judgment day. In this verse, Allah says that just as He gave the prophet the Qur’ān, He gave Mūsā the Torah. The Torah of today lacks any mention of Judgment day but do not be in any doubt regarding judgment day still, because this is a result of corruption and changes at the hands of men, not because Allah did not mention judgment day in it.

Now the sentence, *so do not be in any doubt over His meeting* is actually an interjected sentence. The actual sentence is *-Yes, we certainly gave Mūsā the Book and made it a guidance for the children of Israel*. In Arabic, it is used to highlight something important that the listener must know. We gave Mūsā the Book, which served as a guidance for the Jews, but do not let the current version of the Torah lead you to have any

doubt over the meeting of Allah on judgment day that has been established in this surah because the same God who sent down the Torah, sent down this surah and the Qur'ān as a whole. The reason why you do not find any mention of judgment day in the Torah is not because Allah did not mention it, but rather because men corrupted the text.

The main subject of this verse has now changed to mentioning Mūsā, the Torah and what Allah did with them and hence what He will do to the Muslims, but this was interjected in between this to highlight its importance.

The purpose of mentioning Mūsā and the Torah and not any other Prophet is to create a similarity between him and the prophet. Just as Mūsā was a lawgiver, who formed a nation, so is the prophet a lawgiver who will form a nation. The Qur'ān has repeatedly likened our prophet to Mūsā, calling him a second Mūsā, who will have his life and legacy shaped in the same manner as him. We find this is in surah 75 : 13 explicitly as well as in other places of the Qur'ān. This is the reason why the Qur'ān will repeatedly comfort the prophet in times of distress with stories of Mūsā such as surah Tāhā to tell him that what happened with Mūsā will happen with him. He is the second Mūsā. This is also why Mūsā is the most mentioned prophet in the Qur'ān.

This is why Allah uses the word *book* rather than *Torah*. He uses it to create a similarity. Just as He gave Mūsā a book so has He given the prophet a book. The definite article is to denote perfection. We gave Mūsā a perfect and flawless book just as We have given it to you.

We made it a guidance for the children of Israel- It was by the means of the book of Allah that the children of Israel became a united and guided nation. The same will be the case with the Muslims. By having the Torah as their constitution, they became a great nation. So, will the Qur'ān be completed, and serve as the constitution for the Muslims. The next verse will now mention not only Allah's promises to the Muslims, but will also draw an explicit connection with what has come previously in this surah.

Verse 24

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنْهُمْ أُمَّةً يَهْدُونَ بِأَمْرِنَا لَمَّا صَبَرُوا وَكَانُوا بِآيَاتِنَا يُوقِنُونَ

When they displayed patience, we made leaders from them, guiding with Our amr. They remained firm in being certain of our verses/signs.

This surah was revealed in Makkah when the Muslims were under severe persecution. Allah is telling the Muslims to endure and be patient. Just as He made leaders from the children of Israel because of their patience, He will do the same with the Muslims if they do display patience as well.

The sentence *"They remained firm in being certain of our signs"* explains *"When they displayed patience."* Even in tough times, they remained firm in being certain of our signs, of our promises, of what Allah revealed. How did they display patience? By firmly believing that Allah's promises will come true even in tough times., by firmly believing that what Allah has revealed is the truth, and that Allah will give them victory. Allah has promised the Muslims in Makkah victory and comfort. If they firmly believe in His promise, they will of course remain steadfast and patient in face of the persecution they are facing. They will endure knowing that one day, this will come to an end and God's help will come. This is what the children of Israel did and Allah not only rescued them from Pharaoh, but He made leaders out of them, who would guide and lead men to Allah.

Just as the believers in verses 15 and 16 endured temporary discomfort by sacrificing their sleep and desires to obtain a greater and perfect form of comfort on judgment day, so will the Muslims achieve a greater form of comfort after enduring this temporary persecution and oppression at the hands of the disbelievers.

They remained firm in being certain of our signs - In verse 12, when the criminals are hanging their head in shame in front of Allah, they said

رَبَّنَا أَبْصَرْنَا وَسَمِعْنَا فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

Our Master, we have seen and heard, so return us; we will work righteousness for we are certain.

They had to visibly see what they were promised by Allah to become certain. Allah is telling Muslims to be their opposite. Do not be like those who only believe in the promise of Allah when they see it. Rather be certain in His promise of victory and comfort right now, before His help and victory actually come to you. This is what sets the believer apart from the disbeliever.

The disbeliever submitted to Allah on judgment day after visibly seeing the promises fulfilled in verse 12, whereas the believer submitted to Allah while alive in this world in verse 15, before he actually got to see God's promises on judgment day. Believers, be like the children of Israel who believed in Allah's promises without even seeing them, by merely hearing them through His prophet Mūsā just as you are hearing right now through your prophet Muhammad. Do not be like the criminals who will believe only when they see the things they are promised with their eyes on judgment day, by which time their faith and belief will not bring them any fruit. If you believe and become certain right now, during these tough times, and endure patiently and hold steadfast, you will not only be rescued, but Allah will make you leaders.

With Our amr -This goes back to verse 4.

اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ مَا لَكُم مِّن دُونِهِ مِن وَلِيٍّ
وَلَا شَفِيعٍ أَفَلَا تَتَذَكَّرُونَ

He does tadbīr of the amr from heaven to the earth;thumma, it ascends to Him in a span one day of which is thousand years of what you count.

Amr is what gives life and purpose. The human body is the *khalq* while the spirit inside it is an *amr* of Allah. Allah deliberately said “*Guiding with Our amr*” instead of “*Guiding with Our book or signs*” to draw connection to the fourth verse. *Amr* here refers to the words of Allah, His book and His promises, which too are invisible.

The disbelievers only believed in the *khalq*, but not the *amr* since *khalq* is visible to the eyes while *amr* is not. The Muslims will become leaders as well - which came true. The very fact that the children of Israel became leaders and guided men to Allah, similar to how the Muslims will become leaders and guide the world to Islam, is proof that *amr* exists beyond *khalq* because if you only believe in the visible part and believe that death is the ultimate end, wouldn't your main goal be restricted to this life to avoid suffering while maximizing pleasure as much as you can? Your goals would remain confined within this world. Yet, these believers willingly chose suffering and bore persecution. Patience stands in opposition to pleasure. If this world is all there is, your goals would remain confined to maximizing pleasures inside this world. Hence, anything that goes against it, would be shunned immediately. Yet, by being patient, you endure the suffering, and choose to let go of these pleasures because you realize there exists a bigger reality than this world.

There is a beautiful correlation here. You believed in the promise of Allah only when you saw it. You also only believe in *khalq* because it is visible. Anything that is invisible to your eyes, you deny. If you want to see a proof of the fact that something does not have to be visible for it to be true, if you want to see the proof that the *amr* of Allah, and the meeting of judgment day is true, look at the fact that the children of Israel became leaders when they endured and remained steadfast against Pharaoh's oppression. Now naturally, the response to this is, what happened with the children of Israel and the Pharaoh is invisible as well! So the response Allah gave them is that you will see it happen again with your own eyes. The Muslims will endure your oppression and persecution, they will go against their desires and hence not only be victorious, but become leaders, all because of the *amr* of Allah.

To the Muslims, Allah is simply saying to be patient. Allah has promised you relief, victory and leadership. Become certain that the promise of Allah is true and that victory, relief and leadership will come *BEFORE* they actually arrive. Believe in the unseen. Do not be like the disbelievers who only believe when they see it on judgment day because just as it will be too late for them to believe on that day, so it might be too late for you when the victory and help of Allah come.

Verse 25

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ يَفْصِلُ بَيْنَهُمْ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ فِيمَا كَانُوا فِيهِ يَخْتَلِفُونَ

“Indeed, your Rabb, He alone will separate between them on the day of resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ.

The reason He uses the word Rabb is tied to the previous verse where Allah promised the Muslims victory and leadership if they remain steadfast. He follows that promise by calling Himself the Rabb of the prophet to say that He will indeed take care of you, give you victory, be your helper, and protect you from the disbelievers until His promise comes.

He alone- The extra pronoun هو creates the meaning of exclusivity. Allah alone, and no one else will judge between them. The God who has promised to help you and give you victory, He alone will judge between them. They will be at the mercy of the one who loves you. Therefore, anyone who opposes you, or tries to harm you, will meet his punishment with Him.

The disbelievers will become believers on judgment day, but Allah will separate them from those who believed while they were alive on the earth. Those who believe while in this world, will not be treated the same as those who believe only when they see it in reality on judgment day. Allah will divide them, He will treat them as two separate groups, not as one.

Concerning that over which they used to differ - the differences between the believers and the disbelievers that have come in this surah.

Verse 26

أَوَلَمْ يَهْدِ لَهُمْ كَمْ أَهْلَكْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِهِمْ مِنَ الْقُرُونِ يَمْشُونَ فِي مَسْكِنِهِمْ إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَآيَاتٍ أَفَلَا يَسْمَعُونَ

Does it not guide them that We destroyed many generations before them, they walk in whose dwellings? Surely in that are signs. Will they not then listen?

This refers to the ruins of the destroyed nations that lay on the trade routes of Makkans such as:

1. Thamūd - located on the northern trade route of Makkah to Syria.
2. Sodom and Gomorrah - located near the dead sea, also along the trade routes towards the Levant
3. Possibly ‘Ād as well but since they were located in the southern Peninsula near Eastern Yemen and Western Oman.

Now these ruins are seen with the eyes. The reason why Allah says “*Will they not then listen*” instead of *seeing*, is because these ruins were located near trade routes that only the members of caravans would see and they would tell their people back in Makkah about them. So the majority of people did not actually see them with their eyes, they only heard them from the select few merchants who would be a part of the caravans.

They have seen the ruins of the people with their eyes regarding whom they hear in the Qur’ān. We destroyed those nations - and you can see their destroyed ruins - when they did what you are doing right now.

The demonstrative pronoun *that*, is for the sake of **تعظيم** (magnification). *In that great fact, are things that serve as signs that can guide you.*

Secondly, there is a twofold emphasis placed inside the sentence “*Surely in that are signs*” which is a way of speech utilized in Arabic to address someone who denies what you are saying. There are great signs in those ruins, though you deny it.

But the demonstrative pronoun *that* can also be going back to the words “*while they walk among their dwellings*” and this is what I prefer. There are signs for you in the fact that you are walking in their dwellings, that can bring you to the truth, though you deny it. In verse 15, Allah describes the believers as

وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

They do not seek greatness.

These Makkans used to hear about these destroyed nations in the Qur’ān as it describes them as being arrogant, oppressive, and *fāsiq* (the same word Allah uses for these disbelievers). They were the same as you in that they sought greatness and were arrogant. Yet here they are destroyed and desolate beneath your feet. Their homes empty, their memories wiped out, and their dwellings destroyed. Their pride led them to become lowly and worthless. They were arrogant and haughty yet they are now disgraced and cursed. You can see what became of their pride. This is a sign - a warning - to you. Pride begets disgrace. Arrogance leads to humiliation. Display arrogance and you will be humiliated. Submit humbly to Allah and you will be honored.

We see this now with the Makkans who persecuted our prophet. Abu Jahl and all his associates are now disgraced, and their graves at Badr have now become a desolate, worthless well. Not a day passes by since the past 1400 years, but they are disgraced and cursed at the tongues of the Muslims. While the prophet and his companions, who submitted humbly to Allah, their mention and remembrance has been exalted for eternity.

Verse 27

أَوَلَمْ يَرَوْا أَنَّا نَسُوقُ الْمَاءَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ الْجُرُزِ فَنُخْرِجُ بِهِ زَرْعًا تَأْكُلُ مِنْهُ أَنْعَامُهُمْ وَأَنْفُسُهُمْ أَفَلَا يُبْصِرُونَ

Have they not seen that We drive water to barren land and from it, bring forth crops from which their livestock eat just as they themselves? Then do they not see?

This is the verse that ties this whole surah together.

The previous verse mentioned how Allah gave death to the alive. This verse mentions how Allah gives life to the dead. This first part of this verse goes back to verse 9 while the second part goes back to verses 15 and 16.

You can see the dead nations, you pass by their ruins, you see their pride turned to disgrace beneath your own feet. Now the other side of Allah giving life to the dead, if you want to see that with your own eyes, then look at the barren, dry land which produces crops after rain gives it life.

Why earth though? Why not present any other example? Because it stands for the human being. This does not mean that it is not literally true. Allah does give life to the dead earth by means of the rain. This is a phenomenon that is real and is a sign and example of Allah bringing the dead to life. But notice the words “*from which their livestock eat just as they themselves?*”

As mentioned above, the first part of this verse,

Have they not seen that We drive water to barren land

goes back to verse 9

ثُمَّ سَوَّاهُ وَنَفَخَ فِيهِ مِنْ رُوحِهِ ۖ وَجَعَلَ لَكُمُ السَّمْعَ وَالْأَبْصَارَ وَالْأَفْئِدَةَ ۚ قَلِيلًا مَّا تَشْكُرُونَ

Thumma, He balanced him by breathing into him from His spirit. He made for you, hearing, perception and emotions. How little are you grateful!

The earth stands for human beings because that is what we are created from. Allah created Adam from the earth. Just as Allah gave life to the physical body of the human being by means of His spirit, so does He give life to the dead earth by means of water. Just as this water comes down from the sky, so does the spirit come from the sky - from Allah.

The disbelievers want to visibly see what Allah tells them. We never saw Allah breathing His spirit into us but Allah gives a real-life example that works on the same phenomenon that we can visibly see with our eyes. Just as the earth comes to life and brings forth vegetation by means of rain sent down from the sky, so did the

human being come to life by means of the spirit breathed inside him from the sky - from Allah.

What happens to the earth if it receives no rain? The same happens to you if your bodies receive no spirit. It is the *amr* of Allah itself, that you deny because it is invisible, that gives you life in the first place. How absurd of you to deny it.

You can visibly see the dead earth coming to life and producing edible vegetation. You cannot deny this. Yet, you deny the *amr* of Allah; you deny the spirit of Allah inside you. Denying it is as preposterous as denying life itself for without the spirit you would be dead like the barren land.

This covers the first of the verse of the dead earth or the human being coming back to life. The next part

and from it, bring forth crops from which their livestock eat just as they themselves.

goes back to verses 15 and 16

إِنَّمَا يُؤْمِنُ بِآيَاتِنَا الَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِهَا خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَسَبَّحُوا بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ وَهُمْ لَا يَسْتَكْبِرُونَ

The only ones who believe in our signs are those who, when reminded of them, fall down in prostration, and declare His perfection accompanied with His praise. They alone do not seek greatness.

تَتَجَافَىٰ جُنُوبُهُمْ عَنِ الْمَضَاجِعِ يَدْعُونَ رَبَّهُمْ خَوْفًا وَطَمَعًا وَمِمَّا رَزَقْنَاهُمْ يُنفِقُونَ

“Their sides pull away from their beds, supplicating their Rabb in fear and aspiration, and from what We have provided them, they spend.”

These verses describe the fruit of the spirit. Just as the earth produces its fruit by means of rain, so does the human being produce his good fruit by means of the spirit. The fruit of the Earth is its vegetation, the plants, the food and crops it produces that is eaten and which sustains life. Without this, there would be no life. The food chain starts from the earth, takes it out and all life disappears. No life would exist if the earth does not produce any food. *Similarly, without the spirit, no life would exist for when the spirit leaves the body, death occurs.*

Now this life given to the earth by means of the water, brings out vegetation that give life and benefit to others. Similarly, these enlightened people, mentioned in verses 15 and 16, give life and benefit to others. Firstly, they themselves are alive and enlightened because they recognize that life goes beyond the part that is visible. But they also preach to others to come to this truth, and to submit to God. They are actually calling people to life, to something that benefits them, that gives them eternal life of the hereafter. This is what the Prophet is doing and why he is called a *nadhīr*. Yet they call him a liar and a fabricator in verse 2.

This also goes back to verse 24 where Allah promised to make leaders from the Muslims. Their hearts, made alive by the *amr* of Allah, will bring benefit to others just as the earth produces vegetation which benefits men and livestock. Since these people will be a source of benefit to others, they deserve to be appointed to leadership roles.

Just as they themselves -You yourself eat from the produce of the earth. Your own lives are dependent on it. You would die without it. You cannot deny this, yet you deny the spirit inside you which does the same thing? You would not even be alive had the earth remained dead - you would not even be alive had the spirit not been inside you, yet you - of all people - deny this?

This is why the words ‘*with it*’ in, “*with it, bring forth crops*” and the words “*from which*” in “*from which their livestock eat just as they themselves*” are advanced for emphasis. This all happens by means of the water - by means of the spirit.

Do they then not see- Same as what the disbelievers said in verse 12. We have now seen. Can you not see this? Is this not a sign in front of your own eyes? Life itself is proof. You only believe when you see it with your own eyes, then here is a sign right in front of your eyes. Will you then not accept it?

It is interesting that the Qur’ān uses two words for seeing. رأى and بصر. The word used here - بصر - also means deep understanding. This is a sign right in front of your own eyes. Will you not understand that this is in fact, a sign enough to guide you?

Lastly, Allah promised the Muslims victory and leadership. These Arabs, who are currently living in a desert - a barren land - and whose hearts are similarly barren, will be made the flag bearers of God’s religion and hence, expand and propagate this religion into other regions. Just as people and animals benefit from earth’s vegetation, so will other people benefit from these Arabs. Allah will make the dead hearts of the people of Arabia alive and fertile, and they will preach out the Qur’ān

and benefit others. This is exactly what happened when the early Muslims expanded and conquered the lands God promised to Abraham, fulfilling the centuries old prophecy that the Jews and Christians were incapable of for thousands of years.

Verse 28

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَىٰ هَٰذَا الْفَتْحُ ۖ إِن كُنتُمْ صَادِقِينَ

They mockingly say, ‘When shall be this Victory, if you are truthful?’

The victory promised in verse 24 where Allah promised the believers the same as what He did with the children of Israel, but it also goes back to verse 22 where Allah said:

وَمَنْ أَظْلَمُ مِمَّنْ ذُكِّرَ بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِ ثُمَّ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهَا ۚ إِنَّا مِنَ الْمُجْرِمِينَ مُنتَقِمُونَ

Who is more in darkness than the one who, after the signs of his Rabb were strongly recounted to him, turned away from them? Indeed We, from such criminals, will take revenge.

They have turned away from the signs Allah mentioned to them of the destroyed generations and the dead earth or humans coming back to life. Hence, Allah will take revenge from them. This shows that Allah will take revenge from them at the hands of the Muslims and this is exactly what happened. The use of the third person pronoun “*they*” for them also indicates that they have rejected these signs, because it denotes being far away and distant from Allah.

So now they mockingly say, when will this day of revenge and victory be? Based on what has already come in this surah, specifically verse 24, you can already figure out bringing faith on the day when Muslims are given victory, will not bring any benefit. It will be too late then, and this is exactly what Allah says up next.

Verse 29

قُلْ يَوْمَ الْفَتْحِ لَا يَنْفَعُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا إِيمَانُهُمْ وَلَا هُمْ يُنظَرُونَ

Say: On the Day of victory their faith shall not profit the disbelievers, nor shall they be respited.

It was not a genuine question they brought up. Firstly, they did it mockingly. Secondly, they asked for it after rejecting clear signs presented to them. Hence, Allah gave them an answer that befits them. Mock now, reject My signs all you want, you will wish to go back in time on the day I give Muslims victory over you.

nor shall they be respited - this goes back to verse 12 where they said on judgment day:

فَارْجِعْنَا نَعْمَلْ صَالِحًا إِنَّا مُوقِنُونَ

So, return us to act righteously, for we have become certain

Just as you will wish to be returned back and given respite on judgment Day when you meet Me, you will desire to be given respite on the day of victory - on the day of Badr or the conquest of Makkah, but I have already told you what will happen. Just as I did not give you respite on judgment day, so will I not give you respite on the day of victory.

You will meet your end then and there. It is interesting that the word *نظر* (translated as *respite*) at its root actually means to look intently with anticipation. Sometimes, a person expresses his wishes by means of his eyes. Like when someone makes a wish that he deeply desires, his eyes express his anticipation and desire for his wish with him. You will look longingly with pitiful eyes to be returned back.

In verse 12, the disbelievers denied what the Qur'ān promises regarding judgment day and only became certain of Allah's promises after they actually saw them with their own eyes. In verse 28, the disbelievers denied the signs of the destroyed generations and the dead earth coming to life, hence, they will only become certain of Allah's promise when they actually see the victory promised by Allah. Just as they wished to be given respite and returned back in time on judgment day, they will wish to be returned back and given respite on the day of victory, but just as bringing faith on Judgment Day did not bring them benefit, so will it not benefit them on the day of victory. Just as Allah did not give them respite on judgment day, He will not do it on the victory day either.

Verse 30

فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْهُمْ وَانْتَظِرْ إِنَّهُمْ مُنْتَظَرُونَ

So turn away from them and wait. Indeed, they are waiting.

They turned away from these signs, hence, turn away from them and wait - be patient and endure - going back to verse 24 - until help and victory come.

They are waiting - They have refused to believe and will only believe when they see it. So they are waiting to see it, by which time, it will be too late.

It is important to note that the victory promised by Allah can refer to multiple things because the surah does not specify it. It can refer to Badr as well as to the conquest of Makkah among other events. I think it refers to the conquest of Makkah because the Qur'ān uses the same word (فتح) for it.

When Grief Overwhelms

A Thematic Overview of Surah Ṭāhā



Background

The background of this surah is important to know. Surah Ṭāhā was revealed in Makkah, before the migration to Madinah. The 10 years that the Prophet spent in Makkah were the harshest and most brutal of his life. He, along with Muslims, underwent severe persecution. Many were tortured, even brutally killed. The makkans imposed a harsh boycott on the Muslims, cutting them off from trade, food supplies and social interactions. Shortly after this boycott ended, the Prophet lost his beloved wife and his uncle as well.

This surah consoles the Prophet and gives him the remedy and cure to his pain. This is also a message to us. In any difficulty, hardship and grief, you can turn to the cure Allah gives in this surah and be satisfied just like the Prophet.

Throughout this surah you will notice the word *dhikr* come up again and again. We have already covered its meaning in surah al-Sajdah. Pay close attention to it as that word is the key that unlocks the message of this surah.

The surah, like many others in the Qur'ān, is extremely melodious, poetic and rhythmic. This rhythm and style is lost in translations.



Tua Ha

Every Qur'ānic surah that begins with the letter *tua* such as this one has the story of prophet Mūsā and his miracle of turning his staff into a snake without exception. If you look at the letter *tua*, it looks like a snake coiled around a rod.

So from the letter *tua* we can deduce that this surah will contain the mention of prophet Mūsā and his miracle. Secondly, it will have the word *dhikr* as its central theme. If I were to give the letters *Tua Ha* a meaning, it would be “remember Mūsā.”

مَا أَنزَلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ لِتَشْقَىٰ

We did not send the Qur’ān on you to make you suffer

This verse plainly shows the context of revelation. We need to remember one thing though as we move forward. The word *shaqiyy* (suffering) does not mean any suffering, but rather a type of suffering that drives someone to his utmost limits. For example, this root was used for a camel that had reached its limits by walking constantly under the harsh heat of the desert. This will be referred to at the end of the passage.

إِلَّا تَذَكُّرَ لِمَن يَخْشَىٰ

Only as a Tazkirah for him who has Khashiya

Tazkirah comes from the same root as *dhikr* which means strength. *Khashyah*, at its root, was used for:

- Low quality dates
- Dry plants
- Crops blackened by frost ¹³³

It came to be used to mean fear because fear is something that dries you up from the inside. But again, we need to respect the context which is of consoling the grieved and suffering.

The original usages of *khashyah* were for plants that had withered and become dry. Dates that were once healthy became dry. Plants that were healthy withered. Crops that were once lush became black. The Prophet who used to be happy and joyful, has become sad and grieved.

The root meaning of the word *tazkirah* is strength. This Qur’ān was not sent to cause you suffering but it was only sent as a source of strength and comfort for the grieved, overwhelmed and for the suffering like the prophet.

¹³³ Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm, vol. 1, p. 559 - 560

This is the central point of this surah and it will now live up to this and provide the remedy to grief.

تَنْزِيلًا مِّنْ خَلْقِ الْأَرْضِ وَالسَّمَوَاتِ الْعُلَى

A revelation from the one who created the Earth and the highest heavens

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ اسْتَوَى

Raḥmān! Above the throne He established Himself!

We have covered what Raḥmān means.

Allah could have said “*Allah! Upon the throne He established Himself!*” but instead he uses the word *Raḥmān*; the strongest possible word in Arabic to denote love, care and mercy.

First, Allah says that he created everything. Now He says that He is *Raḥmān*, the most loving and caring. More loving than a mother to her child. Just as a mother does not like to see her child in pain, let alone be the cause of its pain, so did Allah not create the heavens and the earth to cause suffering or pain. Rather, it is all an act of love. Allah created everything out of love, not to cause grief.

Above the throne He rose. The meaning of this is well known and clear and we will not go into different discussions on this topic as this is not our goal. We have covered its meaning in the previous surah. Allah is above the throne and above the seven heavens. Looking at it contextually, we may ask why Allah mentions this here? Because this acts as a declaration of kingship and kingdom. The throne belongs to the king. Allah is the king. The throne is His and He is above it. Everything is under his dominion. He has power over everything. He is above all.

Imagine yourself in a dilemma. Someone is sympathetic towards you, cares for you and wants you to come out of your trouble but as with most people, they do not have the power to get you out of it. The problem is not that people are not sympathetic to you, it is just that they lack the power to get you out. Allah deeply loves and cares about you and He has the power to get you out of your pain as well.

لَهُ مَا فِي السَّمَوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا وَمَا تَحْتَ الثَّرَىٰ

He alone owns what is in the heavens, in the earth, what is between them, and what is beneath the moist soil

This is again a declaration of his power and kingship but notice Allah mentions moist soil. Why say moist earth? Why not just say soil?

When the soil is moist, it means it has been watered. What is beneath the moist soil? The seed. If the soil has been watered, the water will seep through and make its way to the seed as well. When that happens, a new plant will eventually grow. Above in verse 3, we mentioned the root meaning of the word *khashyah* had to do with dried up and wasted plants and vegetation. This plant has dried up and is no more but the seed of a new plant is already being watered. He will replace the withered plant with a new one. He will replace your sorrow with happiness. He will replace the dry plant with a new lush green plant; the broken heart with a joyful one. And very soon too; because the soil beneath which the seed of this new plant rests, is already moist. He is already watering it. The soil was mentioned as being moist to tell him that comfort is near.

وَإِنْ تَجَهَّرَ بِالْقَوْلِ فَإِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ السِّرَّ وَأَخْفَىٰ

Though you may announce your word, He still knows the deepest secret and the akhfā

When someone is in pain, he sometimes expresses his pain in words but there are some things he is not comfortable bringing to his lips. To Allah, both are the same. If you express your pain He knows it, and if you hide it within you, He still knows it. He fully understands your pain, all aspects of it, what you make apparent and what you hide both. When someone is in deep sorrow, the first thing he desires is for others to understand him and how he feels. By saying that Allah knows both the visible and hidden aspects of your pain, He is saying that he fully understands you; and you do not even have to verbally express your feelings.

But there is more. We would naturally divide such feelings into two parts, one which we announce and one which we keep to ourselves; but Allah by Himself, will introduce a third type, as an act of profound love and care.

The verse says - *Though you may announce a word, He still knows the deepest secret and*

the akhfā. The word *sirr* is translated as ‘*deepest secret*’. It comes from the root *sīn rā’ rā’* which was used for the deepest point of a pool or a basin, fine rootlets of truffles that stretch deep underground, and for the crescent moon that vanishes at the end of the month etc. The central meaning revolves around depth and concealment, and something hidden or concealed deep within is of course a secret.¹³⁴

So the word *sirr* means a deep and intimate secret, hidden and concealed from others. But the word *akhfā* also means a secret! There is only just a subtle difference between the two words:

Akhfā comes from the root *khā’ fā’ yā’* which was used for

- Dim flashes of lightning, appearing weakly and intermittently inside the clouds
- The feathers under the wing of a bird.
- A garment worn by a bride over her dress to conceal it.

This root refers to something that becomes hidden or concealed but not entirely. Something weakly hidden, partially veiled and subtly perceptible; like the dim flashes of lightning within the clouds, the feathers under the wing of a bird which become exposed when the bird unfolds its wings, and the dress of the bride which can become exposed sometimes if the garment sways left or right.¹³⁵

Sirr is something completely hidden. *Akhfā* is something hidden but not completely.

There is another problem. *Akhfā* is in the superlative. There is something hidden but not completely. What can be the superlative of such a thing? It is the maximum extent to which you can hide it. There is something that cannot be concealed completely but there is a maximum limit or extent to which you can conceal it. Think of it like hiding something by 99%. It cannot be hidden 100% and so the maximum percentage by which you can hide it is 99%.

So what does *akhfā* mean? There is pain that you announce. Then there is pain that you keep deeply hidden within you (*sirr*). Then there is *akhfā*, pain so intense that

¹³⁴ Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm, vol. 2, p. 981

¹³⁵ Al-Mu‘jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu‘aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur‘ān al-Karīm, vol. 1, p. 582

you can try your best to keep it hidden and concealed within you but you just cannot. Sometimes, in some subtle ways, it comes out against your will.

It can come out in the form of 2 - 3 tears that come out despite you trying your best to hold them back. In the form of soft groans, sighs, wails, murmurs, gasps, whimpers, or as sadness on your face, or in the way you walk, in the form of dead eyes, or your head hanging down etc. This is a pain that is too much for the person. The reason why the word *akhfā* is in the superlative is because the person tries his very best to hide it, but it still comes out against his will.

In verse 2, we mentioned that the word used for suffering did not mean just any suffering, it meant a suffering that pushed a person to his utmost limits. *Akhfā* implies a suffering that one cannot hide even though he tries his best to; the most intense form of suffering. They are both the same.

Allah says he recognizes and knows your pain. He also understands it is getting too much for you. He describes Himself with the qualities of extreme love and care in this passage. By describing Himself as *Raḥmān*, He is saying that He is more loving than a mother to her child. He understands you and your pain; and He also understands that the pain is getting so much that you cannot hide it even though you try your best to. But the earth is already moist. You have withered and become dry, but He is already watering the seed of a lush new green plant for you. The seed of your comfort and happiness is already being watered, it is already being grown. Allah understands and he will provide you comfort, and comfort is near; He is already watering the seed of relief.

He concludes the passage with this:

اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَلَهُ الْأَسْمَاءُ الْحُسْنَىٰ

Allah! There is no god but Him! His are the most beautiful names and descriptions.

There is no god beside Him. There is no god who can overpower Him. There is no entity who can override His will. He is already watering the plant of your relief and there is no one who can stop the water flow.

The prophet was facing hostility, persecution and pain from the people around him. Allah says there is no god beside Him. There is no one who can stand in His way. He will give you relief and victory and nobody can do anything about it. These people

who persecute you are powerless and helpless before Him. So do not be worried. The one who owns all power is with you.

The most beautiful names and attributes belong to Him. He is loving, caring and generous, not someone who wants pain and misery for people. He is not unjust and unforgiving. These evil descriptions do not belong to Him. Rather, the best and most beautiful descriptions belong to Him. He brings comfort to the weak and suffering. He helps the oppressed, comforts those suffering, and brings joy to the sad.

وَهَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰ

Did the news of Mūsā come to you?

To say this in the form of a question is again for the purpose of showing kindness and love. It is like the situation when you are sitting down crying, a person comes and sits beside you, puts his hand over your shoulder, comforts you and then lovingly says, 'did the story of Mūsā come to you?' It is better than saying 'listen to the story of Mūsā' because it is a more loving and kind manner of speech.

There is something in the story of Moses that will comfort you.

إِذْ رَأَىٰ نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ امْكُثُوا إِنِّي آنَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّي آتِيكُمْ مِنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجْدٍ عَلَىٰ النَّارِ هُدًى

When he saw a fire, he said to his family "Wait here for I am drawn to a fire. I may bring you a torch from it or find guidance at the fire."

فَلَمَّا أَتَاهَا نُودِيَ يٰمُوسَىٰ

Then when he finally came to it he was called out - Mūsā!

Later on, When Allah converses with Moses, He will tell him that Allah brought him up and he has arrived to meet Allah at the exact appointed time. This is why the word 'finally' is used. When finally, after all of that, did Moses arrive...

The verb of calling (نُودِيَ / “he was called”) is constructed in the passive voice to increase suspense and curiosity about the story. The ambiguity of the caller makes the listener eager to know who is speaking. Then, when the verse suddenly reveals in the next verse:

“Indeed, I alone am your Lord,” the listener realizes that the one calling is Allah Himself — and this realization deeply impacts the soul.

The use of the passive voice also helps vividly portray the scene, where Mūsā is called by an unknown voice, which is why the verb is narrated in the passive form.

Through this call, Mūsā understood that the words were being directly addressed to him by Allah Himself — because the voice was unfamiliar and extraordinary.

إِنِّي أَنَا رَبُّكَ فَاخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ إِنَّكَ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

*Indeed I alone am your Rabb. Remove your sandals for you are in the holy valley of
Ṭuwā*

There are a couple of interesting things here which I will just briefly mention. First is the sentence. *“I alone am your Rabb.”* If I were to get very literal about it, I could translate it as *“I am Me, Your Rabb.”*

From a linguistic perspective, this verse contains confinement. I alone, none else, am your Lord.

This will again be repeated a couple verses down but there it is even more explicit. Now this sentence *‘I am Me, your Lord’* does not seem to make sense, but in the Hebrew Bible, in Exodus 3:14, in the same incident when God speaks to Moses, this is literally what he calls Himself. He calls Himself *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh - I am who I am.*

Ṭuwā literally means something to be piled up. It is the valley of multiple blessings; in which blessings are piled up, one on top of another.

The Qur’ān contains many such instances. Sometimes, the Qur’ān quotes the Torah directly. For example, the unique word the Qur’ān uses for “testing” Ibrāhīm in Baqarah has the same dual meaning in both Hebrew and Arabic of testing and also blessing. The Qur’ān will many times translate the names of Prophets and

certain other people which are of Hebrew origin, such as Ibrāhīm (where it will quote the passage in Genesis), Dāwūd (surah Ṣād), the mother of Mūsā (surah Qaṣaṣ) among others. In Āl Imran, it will literally, word for word, quote the Talmud to slam the Jews.

وَأَنَا اخْتَرْتُكَ فَاسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَىٰ

I have chosen you for the good in you - so listen closely - for what is revealed

Most translations translate it as “I have chosen you’ but Allah uses the word *Khayr* which means goodness. When used in this context, it means Allah chose Moses because of the good qualities he possessed. It could also mean that I have chosen you for this good thing or purpose. The latter would be consistent with the theme of the whole passage. I have chosen you for a good purpose, to do a good thing. The prophet was in pain and he is being reminded that revelation from Allah is for a good purpose, not to cause suffering.

There is something extremely important to note here.

The normal structure of this verse is as follows: ‘I have chosen you because of the good in you for what is revealed so listen closely.’ So the words “listen closely’ are advanced to create emphasis Furthermore, the pattern of the verb employed is also emphatic. This is why I added the word ‘closely’ after the word ‘listen’ to capture the emphasis placed just in the word itself. So the pattern is emphatic by itself, but by foregrounding this word, there is even more emphasis placed. Something very important is about to be said so listen very closely and carefully.

إِنِّي أَنَا اللَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدْنِي وَأَقِمِ الصَّلَاةَ لِذِكْرِي

Indeed, I am Me/ I am who I am. Allah. There is no God but Me. So give ‘ibādah to me and establish the ṣalāt for my dhikr

This is the central verse of this whole surah. This is the main point and answer that we are looking for. The reason why so much emphasis was placed to listen to this in the last verse is because this is the answer we are looking for. How to gain strength and how to endure pain in times of difficulties is answered here.

Again the name of God in Exodus 3:14 is repeated here. When looked at purely from a linguistic perspective, “I am, Me’ or “I am who I am” simply means “I alone am God.” or literally “لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ” There is no god but Allah.

Allah commands Moses two things. *‘Ibādah* and to establish the *ṣalāt* (the five daily prayers)

‘Ibādah is usually translated as worship but it is deeper than that. This word comes from the root *‘ayn bā’ dāl* which was used for a fragrant plant the camels used to eat. This plant would produce more milk in them but it also made them very thirsty immediately after.¹³⁶ So to produce more milk in them, they have to endure the thirst that comes with it. *‘Ibādah* does not simply mean worship. It carries within itself the meaning of patience and endurance. Obeying Allah will come at a cost. Just as the camels had to endure the thirst that comes with eating that plant, so will you have to endure the difficulties that come with obeying Allah. But these difficulties are temporary just as the thirst goes away by drinking water. Obedience to Allah will come with temporary hardships and pain that will eventually go away. This is the concept of worship in Islam.

In this context, Allah is conveying to prophet Muhammad that these hardships that he is facing are common to all prophets. The reason why Allah specifies Moses is because the Qur’ān has explicitly stated that prophet Muhammad is like Moses. It applies the Deuteronomical prophecy of a prophet like Moses to Muhammad, and hence promises him that whatever happened with Moses, will happen with him. Allah is telling his prophet to first be patient and endure, and to place his trust in Him.

The second command Allah gives Moses is to establish the *ṣalāt*, the five daily prayers. The word *ṣalāt* is quite interesting. It comes from the root *ṣād lām alif* which was used for heating and softening a bent metal stick so that it could be straightened.¹³⁷ First you heat the bent metal rod to make it soft, then you can bend it back to its original position and then make it firm again. This is the original usage of this root.

The Qur’ān uses this root for the five daily prayers. It is a usage unique to the Qur’ān as with many other words. Just as the metal rod was straightened, so do the

¹³⁶ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu’aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1391

¹³⁷ *Al-Mu jam al-Ishtiqaqī al-Mu’aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur’ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1243

five daily prayers set us straight and right. They get rid of the crookedness in us first, and then set us upright.

Notice what Allah says next. Establish the *ṣalāt* for my *dhikr*. I said previously that *dhikr* is the main point of this surah and this word will come up again and again.

1. Moses was on the mountain with God. He actually talked to God Himself. Do you think he would ever forget this? It is by far the greatest thing any human being can experience. There is no way he is forgetting this, but Allah says to Moses, If you really want to remember Me and this meeting, establish the five daily prayers. We all have five opportunities everyday to experience what Moses experienced on the Mountain with God.
2. *The second root meaning of dhikr was strength.* Establish the five daily prayers for My *dhikr* - for my strength; to gain strength from me. If you want to be strengthened and comforted by Me, establish the five daily prayers. This is the answer to our pain. When you are in pain, pray to God and you will be comforted, You will find strength and comfort in the five daily prayers. This is the central point of this whole surah. This is the answer God gives to the one in sorrow.

This will be repeated many times in the surah, and in the final passage of this surah, it will be stated explicitly. The surah consistently carries the theme forward by using the word *dhikr* repeatedly and then in verse 130, in the final passage of this surah, it will explicitly mention in clear words that comfort lies in the five daily prayers. It's quite incredible as normally we would think that if the thing that causes us pain goes away we will gain comfort; or if the people who cause us pain would just go away; or if only our enemies would be punished or destroyed, our pain will be over. But Allah says none of that will give you the comfort that lies in the *ṣalāt*. The *ṣalāt* are your ultimate weapon against pain and your enemies. They are your best comfort in pain.

After this passage, Allah will use the word *dhikr* again and again in the surah.

Verse 34, Moses will say to Allah

كَيُّ نُسَبِّحُكَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٣٣﴾

So we may declare much tasbīḥ of You

وَنَذْكُرَكَ كَثِيرًا ﴿٣٤﴾

And do much dhikr of You

Verse 42, Before sending Moses and Aaron to Pharaoh, Allah will say

أَذْهَبَ أَنْتَ وَأَخُوكَ بِآيَاتِي وَلَا تَنِيَا فِي ذِكْرِي ﴿٤٢﴾

Go, you and your brother, with My signs and do not slacken in My dhikr

Verse 99, after completing the story of Moses, Allah will address our Prophet saying:

كَذَلِكَ نَقُصُّ عَلَيْكَ مِنْ أَنْبَاءِ مَا قَدْ سَبَقَ وَقَدْ آتَيْنَاكَ مِنْ لَدُنَّا ذِكْرًا ﴿٩٩﴾

Thus do we walk you through the prophecies of old. We did give you, from Us, a dhikr

What is meant here is the Qur'ān. A strong and impactful word that changes and impacts the soul.

مَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْهُ فَإِنَّهُ يَحْمِلُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ وِزْرًا ﴿١٠٠﴾

Whoever turned away from it, bears on the day of resurrection, a heavy burden.

After expelling Adam and Eve from Paradise, Allah will say to them:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَنْ ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَمَةِ أَعْمَى ﴿١٢٤﴾

Whoever turned away from my dhikr, then for him is a tightened life. We will bring him on the day of resurrection, blind.

What is meant by a tight life is that whoever turns away from God's dhikr will live not just a “hard” life — but a tight and suffocating life. A mentally and spiritually compressed life, regardless of material wealth.

Then Allah will conclude the whole surah with this. I will just roughly translate it since we are not diving deep down.

فَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ قَبْلَ طُلُوعِ الشَّمْسِ وَقَبْلَ غُرُوبِهَا وَمِنْ ءَآنَآءِ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْ وَأَطْرَافَ
النَّهَارِ لَعَلَّكَ تَرْضَىٰ ﴿١٣٠﴾

So be patient with what they say- celebrate the praise of your Lord, before the rising and setting of the sun, and celebrate His praise during the night, and at the beginning and end of the day, so you may be satisfied

This means the prayers. It does not just mean to verbally say something; rather, what is meant here are the ṣalāt as will come in the very next verses:

وَلَا تَمُدَّنَّ عَيْنَيْكَ إِلَىٰ مَا مَتَّعْنَا بِهِٓ أَزْوَاجًا مِنْهُمْ زَهْرَةَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا لِنَفْتِنَهُمْ فِيهِ وَرِزْقُ رَبِّكَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ ﴿١٣١﴾

Do not gaze longingly at what We have given some of them to enjoy, the finery of this present life: We test them through this, but the provision of your Master is better and more lasting.

وَأْمُرْ أَهْلَكَ بِالصَّلَاةِ وَاصْطَبِرْ عَلَيْهَا لَا نَسْأَلُكَ رِزْقًا نَّحْنُ نَرْزُقُكَ وَالْعَاقِبَةُ لِلتَّقْوَىٰ ﴿١٣٢﴾

Order your people to offer Ṣalāt, and offer Ṣalāt steadfastly yourself. We are not asking you to give Us provision; We provide for you, and the rewards of the Hereafter belong to those who keep safe.

This last verse clarifies what is meant are the ṣalāt. This surah started with consoling the prophet and now it gives him the remedy to his pain. Offer the five daily prayers and you will not only be pain free, you will be happy and satisfied. It is remarkable since we would normally think that comfort in such a situation would lie in gaining victory over our enemies. If the ṣalāt can not only make us pain free but also make us happy and satisfied in times of extreme and deep pain, is it not a sign of God?

The Promise We Never Heard

Surah 19: Maryam (58-61)



أُولَٰئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَءِيلَ
وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا ﴿٥٨﴾

They are from the prophets Allah lovingly blessed, from the seed of Adam; of those we carried with Nūḥ; from the seed of Ibrāhīm and Isrāʾel and of those we guided and singled out for ourselves. When the verses of Raḥmān were recited upon them, they fell down, prostrating and crying.

﴿٥٩﴾ * نَخَلَفَ مِنْ بَعْدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهْوَةَ فَسَوْفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غَيًّا ﴿٥٩﴾

Then an evil succession succeeded them, whose desires distanced them from the Ṣalāt, so soon they will receive Ghayy

﴿٦٠﴾ إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا ﴿٦٠﴾

But the one who repented, believed and worked as a Ṣāliḥ. Those alone enter the garden; not being wronged in the least.

﴿٦١﴾ جَنَّاتٍ عِدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَأْتِيًّا ﴿٦١﴾

Gardens of eternal residences which Raḥmān has promised his servants in the unseen/ at a time unseen. Listen! His promise, truly, will be reached.



This is a passage in Surah Maryam that is dedicated to the ṣalāt- the five daily prayers performed by the Muslims. Most people do not get anything from the five daily prayers except meaningless physical effort while there are others who would rather die than miss a single prayer. This passage explains why most people do not find peace in Ṣalāt.

This passage comes after the mention of many prophets. Allah will mention Zachariah, John, Mary, (not a prophetess but is called the greatest woman by Qur' ān) Jesus, Abraham, Moses, Ishmael, and Enoch. Then comes this verse:

أُولَئِكَ الَّذِينَ أَنْعَمَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنَ النَّبِيِّينَ مِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ آدَمَ وَمِمَّنْ حَمَلْنَا مَعَ نُوحٍ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَةِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَإِسْرَءِيلَ
وَمِمَّنْ هَدَيْنَا وَاجْتَبَيْنَا إِذَا تُتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا

They are from the prophets Allah lovingly blessed, from the seed of Adam; of those we carried with Nūḥ; from the seed of Ibrāhīm and Israel and of those we guided and singled out. When the verses of Raḥmān were recited upon them, they fell down, prostrating and crying.

These are men and women God singled out for Himself. As with any person, he leaves behind a legacy. The legacy of the people God singled out especially for Himself is the ṣalāt - the five daily prayers. And so the next verse is:

خَلَفَ مِنْ بَعدِهِمْ خَلْفٌ أَضَاعُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَاتَّبَعُوا الشَّهَوَاتِ فَسَوْفَ يَلْقَوْنَ غِيًّا

Then an evil succession succeeded them, who, driven by desires, distanced themselves from the ṣalāt, so soon they will receive ghayy

The word **ghayy** comes from the root **ghayn wāw alif** which was used for:

- Locusts
- Stomach bloating because of drinking too much milk
- For ambushing and killing
- A trap dug for a wolf with a pit containing a young goat. When the wolf sees it, it enters the pit and falls into the trap.
- A trap used to catch a lion
- A land that misleads - travelers get lost in it, drawn by illusion of a path but unable to find their way through

The core meaning is attraction or inclination towards something that results in harm.¹³⁸

The locusts swarm the earth and consume the crops - causing harm. The person who drank so much milk that it caused bloating obviously liked milk a lot. His desire for milk led him to harm himself. A wolf and the lion follow their desires and enter the pit only to find out it was a trap. Being driven by their desires, they were caught. The person who was ambushed was deceptively led to walk into it. The travelers are misled by the land. They think there is a path ahead only to find out it is a dead end.

This verse of the Qur'ān pairs desires with the word *ghayy*.

Your desires are a trap laid out for you. A trap has to be something that appeals to you. The goat lying in the pit obviously appeals to the wolf. They have a pull that attracts us to them. But they are only appealing to us so that we fall into the trap. They are a lure, a sucker punch. Follow your desires and you fall into the trap. This is *ghayy*. The consequence of following your desires; of getting caught in the trap like a fool. Once the wolf gets caught, it is called a fool for falling into such an obvious trap.

In this context, it means all desires that go against Islamic teachings. It is not the desire itself that is condemned, but acting on them outside of bounds permitted by Islam. This includes all sorts of prohibitions such as but not limited to, alcohol, extra marital relations, gambling, charging interest on money, earning money through impermissible means etc.

We follow our desires because we think they will make us happy. They will fill a certain hole in our heart. Ask a drug addict. Why does he consume those drugs?

¹³⁸ *Al-Mu'jam al-Ishtiqāqī al-Mu'aṣṣal li-Alfāz al-Qur'ān al-Karīm*, vol. 3, p. 1547

Because they appeal to him. He is drawn to them and then once he consumes them he regrets it. It's a trap. The initial attraction he feels towards the drug is just so he falls into the trap.

But the verse does say it will happen after a delay though. It says soon they will receive the *ghayy*, not now. It is as if when we enter the pit of our desire, the trap surrounding us is closing in on us little by little. While the wolf is busy eating the goat, it does not realize the trap is closing in. What this also means is that there is a chance to escape.

If the wolf realizes it's a trap, it will jump out. There is no escape when it completely closes in but while it has not, there is still a chance. Allah is saying that the sooner people come to their senses, the better or else it will be too late. Time is not on our side. The trap is closing in. Escape before it completely shuts you in.

We see this in our daily lives as well. Think of a smoker, it is possible for him to quit smoking in the first month or perhaps in the second month. But if he does not stop smoking, there will come a time when he just cannot quit. They cannot quit on their own. Time is not on the side of a person who follows his desires. There will come a time when he just cannot stop following his desires even if he wants to.

By following these desires blindly, a person distances himself from God and from the five daily prayers. The five daily prayers hold great significance in Islam. Firstly, as mentioned in surah Ṭāhā, they are a chance to commune directly with God as Moses did on Mount Sinai. Those who follow their desires will be unfit to talk to God and they will find themselves naturally driven away from the ṣalāt.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَءَامَنَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَأُولَٰئِكَ يَدْخُلُونَ الْجَنَّةَ وَلَا يُظْلَمُونَ شَيْئًا ﴿٦٠﴾

But the one who repented, believed and worked as a ṣāliḥ. Those alone enter the garden; not being wronged in the least.

The ṣalāt are now called faith itself. You will see at the end why Allah does this.

The one who repented, believed and worked as a ṣāliḥ" - ṣāliḥ at its root means correction and rectification. The one who repents and corrects himself, will find

peace and worth in the five daily prayers. They will be driven back to them, not away.

These people will not be wronged in the least. They will not be taken into account for their previous actions and everything they do will be repaid in full.

جَنَّتٍ عَدْنٍ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الرَّحْمَنُ عِبَادَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ إِنَّهُ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَأْتِيًا ﴿٦١﴾

Gardens of eternal residences which Raḥmān has promised his servants in the unseen/ at a time unseen. Listen! His promise, truly, will be reached.

Why does God mention the phrase “*in the unseen / at a time unseen*”? Why does He say His ‘*promise*’, not His ‘*Gardens*’ will be reached?

The passage started with condemning those who followed their desires. This verse is remarkable in this context. There is a saying that:

The heart cannot desire what the eyes cannot see.

The root of every desire is the eye and our exposure to it. If you never knew of let’s say a smartphone, would you have any desire for it? Seeing something, exposure to it or knowledge of it is what creates its desire in us. But then these gardens, have we ever seen them? We have never seen them. So how are we supposed to desire them? The verse itself says they are unseen. If we do not have a desire for these gardens, how are we supposed to want them or want to work to attain them?

This is exactly it.

Do you trust Allah enough to leave what you see for what you have not seen?

Your desires are right in front of you, within arms reach, you not only see them but crave them. Will you leave them for gardens that you have never seen? For a promise that was made to you when you weren’t even around to hear or see it being made? Only the person who truly trusts Allah and truly believes in Him and His promise will do so. That is why the very next sentence is:

Listen! His promise, truly, will be reached.

Though you have never seen these gardens, though you never saw or heard God make this promise, it will come to pass. His promise - His gardens - will be reached by His people. Because God has said so. Do you trust Him on this word? Enough to leave what is right in front of you, for something that you have never seen or heard? This is what those whom Allah singled out for Himself did. Will you too?

The person who left these desires and became consistent in the ṣalāt proves by his actions that he believes in this promise of God. That he trusts God completely, enough for him to leave what is not only right in front of his eyes, but what he also deeply craves, for a promise that he never heard or saw God make with his own eyes or heard with his ears. This is what true faith is. This is why Allah called the ṣalāt faith itself and also why He said “*His promise will be reached.*” not “*His gardens will be reached*” because what is being talked about is the promise God made in the unseen as opposed to desires that are sitting right in front of us.

THE INHUMAN ELOQUENCE OF THE QUR'AN

“Produce even a single chapter like it.”

— the challenge of the Qur'an

For fourteen centuries that challenge has stood unanswered. But why? What is it about the language of the Qur'an that left the masters of Arabic speechless at merely hearing it?

Setting aside every assumption, this book approaches the Qur'an on its own terms — purely through its language. Verse by verse, it uncovers the precision, structure and breathtaking eloquence beneath the surface of the Arabic text, guided by the principle long held by the scholars: that the Qur'an explains itself.

This is Volume 1 of a linguistic and contextual tafsir, the beginning of a series whose ultimate goal is to cover the entire Qur'an.

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