

SŪRAH 82
Al-Infitār
(Cleaving Asunder)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of God, the Lord of Grace, the Ever Merciful.

When the sky is cleft asunder, (1)

إِذَا السَّمَاءُ أَنْفَطَرَتْ ﴿١﴾

when the stars are scattered, (2)

وَإِذَا الْكَوَاكِبُ انْتَثَرَتْ ﴿٢﴾

when the oceans are made to explode, (3)

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ فُجِّرَتْ ﴿٣﴾

when the graves are hurled about, (4)

وَإِذَا الْقُبُورُ بُعْثِرَتْ ﴿٤﴾

each soul shall know its earlier actions and its later ones. (5)

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا قَدَّمَتْ وَأَخَّرَتْ ﴿٥﴾

O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord (6)

يَتَأْتِيهَا الْإِنْسَانُ مَّا غَرَّكَ بِرَبِّكَ الْكَرِيمِ ﴿٦﴾

who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form? (7)

الَّذِي خَلَقَكَ فَسَوَّاكَ فَعَدَلَكَ ﴿٧﴾

He can give you whatever shape He wills. (8)

فِي أَيِّ صُورَةٍ مَّا شَاءَ رَكَّبَكَ ﴿٨﴾

Shun it! But you deny the Last Judgement. (9)

Yet there are guardians watching over you, (10)

noble recorders, (11)

who know all that you do. (12)

Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, (13)

while the wicked shall be in a blazing fire, (14)

*which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement;
(15)*

nor shall they ever be absent from it. (16)

*Would that you knew what the Day of
Judgement is! (17)*

*Oh, would that you knew what the Day of
Judgement is! (18)*

*It is the day when no soul can be of any help to
any other soul; for on that day all sovereignty is
God's alone. (19)*

كَلَّا بَلْ تُكَذِّبُونَ بِالَّذِينَ ﴿٩﴾

وَإِنَّ عَلَيْكُمْ لَحَافِظِينَ ﴿١٠﴾

كِرَامًا كَتَبِينَ ﴿١١﴾

يَعْلَمُونَ مَا تَفْعَلُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ لَفِي نَعِيمٍ ﴿١٣﴾

وَإِنَّ الْفُجَّارَ لَفِي جَحِيمٍ ﴿١٤﴾

يَصَلَوْنَهَا يَوْمَ الذِّكْرِ ﴿١٥﴾

وَمَا هُمْ عَنْهَا بِغَائِبِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الذِّكْرِ ﴿١٧﴾

ثُمَّ مَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا يَوْمَ الذِّكْرِ ﴿١٨﴾

يَوْمَ لَا تَمْلِكُ نَفْسٌ لِّنَفْسٍ شَيْئًا ۗ وَالْأَمْرُ

يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلَّهِ ﴿١٩﴾

Overview

This short *sūrah* refers to the great upheaval discussed in the previous *sūrah* The Darkening, but gives it a special colour. It has a different rhythm, deep and calm. It adds a touch of expostulation coupled with an implicit threat. Hence, it does not detail the scenes of the great upheaval as in the previous *sūrah*, where these scenes predominate. Instead the scenes here are shorter, in order to suit its quieter

atmosphere and slower rhythm.

At the opening the *sūrah* mentions the cleaving of the sky, the scattering of the stars, the bursting of the oceans and the hurling of the graves as simultaneous with every soul's knowledge of its earlier and later actions, on that momentous day.

The second part starts with a remonstrance combined with an implicit threat to man who is the recipient of abundant grace but who shows no gratitude for it. "O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form? He can give you whatever shape He wills." (Verses 6-8)

The third part provides the reason for man's ungrateful attitude. Denial of reckoning and judgement, the *sūrah* tells us, is the source of every evil. The reality of meting out reward and punishment at the Last Judgement is re-emphasized; "Shun it! But you deny the Last Judgement. Yet there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do. Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, while the wicked shall be in a blazing fire, which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement, nor shall they ever be absent from it." (Verses 9-16)

The final part gives an idea of how fearful the Day of Judgement is, how everyone is absolutely helpless and how all power belongs to God: "Would that you knew what the Day of Judgement is! Oh, would that you knew what the Day of Judgement is! It is the day when no soul can be of any help to any other soul; for on that day all sovereignty is God's alone." (Verses 17-19) Thus, the *sūrah* represents yet another way of portraying the same basic principles stressed in this thirtieth part of the Qur'ān in various methods and styles.

The Great Upheaval

When the sky is cleft asunder, when the stars are scattered, when the oceans are made to explode, when the graves are hurled about, each soul shall know its earlier actions and its later ones. (Verses 1-5)

In the commentary on the previous *sūrah* we described the feelings generated in people when they visualize the universe undergoing a change so violent that it leaves nothing in its familiar shape and condition. We also said that such feelings tend to pull man away from anything which gives him a sense of security, with the exception of God, the Creator of the universe, the One who lives on after everything has died and withered away. Man's heart is thus made to turn to the only true being who neither changes nor dies, to seek His support and security in the face of the general upheaval which destroys everything that might once have seemed so permanent. For nothing lives forever except the Creator who is the only one worthy

of worship.

The first aspect mentioned here of the universal upheaval is the cleaving or rending of the sky, which is mentioned in other *sūrah*s: “When the sky is split asunder and becomes rose red, like freshly tanned leather.” (55: 37) “When the sky will be rent asunder, for on that day it is frail and tottering.” (69: 16) “When the sky is rent asunder.” (84: 1) That the sky will be split or rent asunder on that hectic day is certain. What is meant exactly by such rending, and how the sky will look after it has been rent are difficult to say. All that we are left with is a feeling of violent change which overwhelms the universe, as we see it, and a realization that its perfect system will no longer be in operation.

The violent upheaval in the universe causes the stars to scatter after they have been held together by a system which makes every star stick to its orbit, even though its movement is exceedingly fast. If this system is broken, as will happen when the life of the stars comes to its end, they will just disappear in the wide space, as does a particle of dust running loose.

The explosion of the oceans may refer to their being overfull to the extent that they swallow all dry land and rivers. It may, alternatively, mean an explosion which separates oxygen from hydrogen, the two gases which form water. Thus water returns to its original gas condition. The verse may also be taken to refer to a nuclear explosion of the atoms of the two gases. If this is the case, then the explosion would be so fearful that our nuclear devices of today would seem, in comparison, like child’s toys. The explosion may also take a different form, totally unknown to us. One thing, however, we know for certain is that there will be a horror far greater than any man could ever have experienced.

The hurling about of the graves may be a result of one of the events mentioned above. It may also be a separate event which occurs on that eventful day. As these graves are hurled about people are resurrected so as to face the reckoning and receive their reward or punishment. This is complemented by the verse which follows: “Each soul shall know its earlier actions and its later ones.” (Verse 5) That is, each soul shall come face to face with what it has done and what it has left behind of the consequences of its actions; or, what it has enjoyed in this present life and what it has saved for the hereafter. Such knowledge, however, will accompany these horrific events. It will indeed be part of them, for it terrifies the soul no less than any of the other events.

The Arabic expression used here, *‘alimat nafsun*, may be translated literally as “a soul shall know...” It is, however, in Arabic a neater and more effective denotation of “each soul shall know...” Furthermore, such knowledge by every soul is not the end of the matter. It has consequences which are as violent as the scenes portrayed here of

the great upheaval. These consequences are merely implied, not stated, and this is even more effective.

Grace Without Limits

After this opening which alerts men's senses and consciences, the *sūrah*, by means of gentle remonstrance coupled with an implicit threat, touches the hearts of men who busy themselves with trivialities. It reminds man of God's very first act of grace towards him, namely, his moulding in such an upright, perfectly proportioned form. God could have easily given him any form He wished. Yet man is ungrateful: "*O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form? He can give you whatever shape He wills.*" (Verses 6-8) The address appeals to man's most noble quality, his humanity, which distinguishes him from all other creatures and assigns to him the highest position among them. This quality represents God's gracious blessing to man and His abundant generosity.

This appeal is immediately followed by a gentle remonstrance: "*What has lured you away from your gracious Lord?*" (Verse 6) What makes you neglect your duties to your Lord and behave impudently towards Him when He has given you your humanity which raises you above all His creation and provides you with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong. A few details of God's generosity are then added: "*man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form.*" (Verses 6-7) It is an address which appeals straight to man's heart. He listens to God's remonstrance as He reminds him of His grace while he continues with his erring ways and impudent behaviour towards Him.

Indeed, man should reflect deeply over his creation, and the fact that he has been given a physically and physiologically perfect constitution. Reflection should prompt him to show his real love, deep respect and genuine gratitude towards God, his gracious Lord, who has blessed him with such constitution: perfect, upright and handsome. The miraculous aspects of man's constitution are far greater than what he sees all around him and what he can imagine. Perfection and right balance are easily evident in man's physical, mental and spiritual constitution. Full volumes have been written on the perfection of creation as evidenced by man. It is perhaps useful to include here one or two quotations from such works.

The human body is composed of a number of specialized systems: the skeleton, muscular system, skin, digestive system, blood circulation, respiratory system, procreative system, lymphatic system, nervous system, the urinal system and the senses of taste, smell, hearing and sight. Every one of these systems is miraculous and far more wonderful than any scientific achievement. Yet man tends to overlook the wonders of his own constitution! A contributor to the British Scientific Journal

writes:⁶

Man's hand is one of the most remarkable wonders of nature. It is extremely difficult, indeed impossible, to invent a device which can match the human hand for simplicity, efficiency, ability and instant adaptability. When you read a book you take it in your hand, then you hold it in the position most suitable for your reading. The same hand will automatically correct the position of your book whenever a correction of position is necessary. When you turn a page you place your finger underneath the paper and apply the amount of pressure needed for turning the page. When the page is turned no more pressure is applied. You also use your hand to hold a pen and to write. With your hand you use all the tools you need such as a spoon, a knife or a pen. You use it to open or close the window and to carry anything you wish to carry. Each hand has 27 pieces of bone in addition to 19 groups of muscles.⁷

A part of the human ear is a series of some four thousand minute but complex arches graduated with exquisite regularity in size and shape. These may be said to resemble a musical instrument, and they seem adjusted to catch, and transmit in some manner to the brain, every cadence of sound or noise, from the thunderclap to the whisper of the pines and the exquisite blending of the tones and harmonies of every instrument in the orchestra. If in forming the ear the cells were impelled to evolve strict efficiency only that man might survive, why did they not extend the range and develop a superacutness? Perhaps the power behind these cells' activities anticipated man's coming need of intellectual enjoyment, or did they by accident build better than they knew?⁸

The visual functions are carried out mainly by the eye with its 130 million retinal light receptors. The eyelids with the eyelashes at their tips protect the eyes day and night. Their movement, which is involuntary, keeps out dust particles and other alien bodies. The eyelashes throw their shades over the eye to lessen the intensity of light. Furthermore, by their movement the eyelids prevent the eyes from becoming dry. The fluid around the eye, which we call tears, is a highly effective, most powerful disinfectant ...

In human beings, the taste function is carried out by the tongue, through

⁶ The original passages of this journal could not be traced by the translators, so a re-translation is given to put back into English the two passages quoted here. The author quotes them from `Abd al-Razzāq Nawfal, *Allāh wal-`Ilm al-Hadīth*, or 'God and Modern Science', Cairo, 1957. Nawfal, however, does not specify the name and number of the Journal he quotes from. — Editor's note.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ A.C. Morrison, *Man Does Not Stand Alone*, London, 1962, pp. 63-64.

groups of the taste cells which are located in the taste buds of the mucosal surface of the tongue. These buds are of different shapes: some are filamentary, some mushroom-shaped and others are lenticular. They are supplied by fine branches of the glosso-pharangeal nerve as well as the nerve which carries the taste sense. When we eat, these fine branches of the taste nerve are stimulated and convey the impulses of the taste sensation to the brain. This system is located at the front of the tongue, so that we may reject what we sense to be harmful. It is this system which helps us sense whether what we eat is bitter or sweet, hot or cold, sour or salty, etc. The tongue contains nine thousand of these fine taste buds, each of which is linked with the brain by more than one nerve. Hence we may wonder: How many nerves have we? What are their sizes? How do they function individually and how do they combine to give the brain their various types of sensation?

The nervous system, which effectively controls the body, is composed of fine neurons which cover every part of the body. The neurons are linked to larger nerves which are, in turn, linked to the central nervous system. Whenever any part of the body feels any sensation, even the slightest change of temperature, the neurons convey this sensation to the peripheral nerves which, in turn, convey it to the brain so that it may order the necessary action. The signals are carried through the nerves at the speed of 100 metres per second.⁹

If we think of digestion as a process in a chemical laboratory and of the food that we eat as raw materials, we immediately discover that it is a wonderful process which will digest anything edible except the stomach itself.

First into this laboratory we put a variety of food as a raw material without the slightest regard for the laboratory or how the chemistry of digestion will handle it. We eat steak, cabbage, corn and fried fish, wash it down with any quantity of water, and top it off with alcohol, bread, and beans. We may add sulfur and molasses as spring medicine. Out of this mixture the stomach selects those things which are useful by breaking down into its chemical molecules every item of food, discarding the waste, and reconstructs the residue into new proteins, which become the food of the various cells. The digestive tract selects calcium, sulphur, iodine, iron and any other substances which are necessary, takes care that the essential molecules are not lost, that the hormones can be produced and that all of the valid necessities of life are on hand in regulated quantities, ready to meet every necessity. It stores fat and other reserves to meet such an emergency as starvation, and does all this in spite of human thought or reason. We pour this infinite variety of

⁹ A. Nawfal, op. cit.

substances into this chemical laboratory with almost total disregard of what we take in, depending on what we consider the automatic process to keep us alive. When these foods have been broken down and are again prepared, they are delivered constantly to each of our billions of cells, a greater number than all the human beings on earth. The delivery to each individual cell must be constant, and only those substances which the particular cell needs to transform them into bones, nails, flesh, hair, eyes, and teeth are taken up by the proper cell. Here is a chemical laboratory producing more substances than any laboratory which human ingenuity has devised. Here is a delivery system greater than any method of transportation or distribution the world has ever known, all being conducted in perfect order.¹⁰

Man's Unique Qualities

A lot may be said about every other system of the human body. But wonderful as these systems are, man may have them in common with animals. He, however, is privileged to possess his unique mental and spiritual qualities, regarded in this *sūrah* as a special favour from God. After the *sūrah* has dealt with man's humanity, it mentions the perfection of his creation and the right proportioning of his mould: "*O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form.*" (Verses 6-7)

Let us reflect on our powers of comprehension, the nature of which is unknown to us. The mind is the medium of comprehension but the working of our minds and how they function remain to us incomprehensible. If we suppose that what we grasp is transmitted to the brain through the nerves, where and how does the brain store its information? If we compare the brain to a magnetic recording tape, every man needs in his average lifetime of sixty years¹¹ a great many billion metres on which to record such a huge multitude of pictures, words, meanings, feelings and responses so that he may, as he actually does, remember them several decades later. Furthermore, how does man sort out individual words, meanings, events and pictures to mould them together in a sort of coherent education? How does he transform information and experiences into knowledge?

Yet this is by no means the most significant of man's distinctive qualities. There is that wonderful ray of God's spirit which provides a link between man and the beauty of the universe and its Creator. As this link is established, man can experience at clear, bright moments a sense of communion with the infinite, the absolute, which

¹⁰ A.C. Morrison, op. cit., pp. 88-89.

¹¹ Average life expectancy has considerably risen since the author's time, but the idea is still correct. If anything the tape required for storing all what human memory stores would today be far greater in length, and its efficiency much more enhanced. — Editor's note.

prepares him for a blissful eternal life in God's paradise. Yet man has no power to comprehend the nature of his spirit, which is God's greatest favour to him and which makes him a man. Hence God addresses him by this quality "O man!" He then remonstrates with him directly: "What has lured you away from your gracious Lord?" Thus man is reminded of God's greatest favour, but he stands impudent, negligent of his duties, unashamed and ungrateful. But man does not need more than to realize the source of this remonstrance and what attitude he adopts when he stands before his Lord to be absolutely overwhelmed by shame: "O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form? He can give you whatever shape He wills." (Verses 6-8)

The *sūrah* moves on to explain the reason for man's impudence and negligence, namely, denial of the Last Judgement. It emphatically confirms the reality of reckoning, reward and punishment: "Shun it! But you deny the Last Judgement. Yet there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do. Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, while the wicked shall be in a blazing fire, which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement; nor shall they ever be absent from it." (Verses 9-16) The English expression, 'shun it', is used here to render the meaning of the Arabic word, *kallā*, which is a command to desist and an indication of a change of subject and style. Hence the following verses are in the form of a statement.

"Shun it! But you deny the Last Judgement." (Verse 9) You think that reckoning and accountability are falsehoods, and this is precisely the cause of your impudence and negligence of duties. How can any person disbelieve in the judgement and still lead a life based on goodness and right guidance? Some people may achieve a higher degree of faith: they worship God because they love Him, neither out of fear of punishment nor in hope of reward. But these people continue to believe in the Last Judgement. They fear it and look forward to it at the same time, because they hope to be with their beloved Lord. When man, however, flatly rejects the Day of Judgement he will be devoid of politeness and light; his heart and conscience are dead.

You deny the Day of Judgement when you will certainly face it. Everything you do in this life will be counted for or against you. Nothing is lost, nothing forgotten: "Yet there are guardians watching over you, noble recorders, who know all that you do." (Verses 10-12) These recorders are the angels charged with accompanying people, watching them and recording all what they do and say. We do not know, and are not required to know, how this takes place. God knows that we are neither given the ability to understand it nor are we going to benefit by understanding it because it does not affect the purpose of our existence. Hence it is useless to attempt to explain by our means what God has chosen not to reveal to us of the world of imperceptibles. It is sufficient for us to feel that we do not live in vain and that there are noble recorders who note what we do, in order to be so that we are always alert and

prudent.

Since the atmosphere of the *sūrah* is one of benevolence and nobility, the description of those recorders is that they are “noble”, so that we are shy and polite in their presence. It is only natural for people to exercise extra care not to say or do anything impolite or disgraceful when they are in the presence of people whose character reflects nobility. How careful would they be if they realized they were always in the presence of angels? The *sūrah* then arouses the most noble feelings of our upright nature by portraying this fact in such a familiar way.

Different Destinies

We are then told of the destinies of the righteous and the wicked, which are determined by the reckoning based on the recordings of the noble angels: “*Surely the righteous shall be in bliss, while the wicked shall be in a blazing fire, which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement; nor shall they ever be absent from it.*” (Verses 13-16) The end is certain. That the righteous shall dwell in blissful happiness and the wicked shall end in hell is already determined. A righteous person is the one who consistently does right actions, i.e. good deeds, until doing them becomes his intrinsic quality. The adjective ‘righteous’ has connotations which fit in well with nobility and humanity. The contrasting quality, ‘wickedness’, carries connotations of insolence and impudence as the wicked indulge in sinful actions. Hell is a proper recompense for wickedness. The *sūrah* emphasizes the certainty of this punishment: “*which they shall enter on the Day of Judgement.*” Then it re-emphasizes it: “*nor shall they ever be absent from it.*” They cannot escape it in the first place, nor will they be allowed to leave it, not even for a short while.

Having stated what happens on the Day of Judgement, the *sūrah* emphasizes again the certainty of that day, since it is denied by some. The emphasis provided here is in the form of a rhetorical question which enhances the mystery surrounding the object of the question. The *sūrah* then states the complete helplessness of everyone, the absolute impossibility of giving or receiving support and that God is the absolute sovereign on that awesome day: “*Would that you knew what the Day of Judgement is! Oh, would that you knew what the Day of Judgement is! It is the day when no soul can be of any help to any other soul; for on that day all sovereignty is God’s alone.*” (Verses 17-19)

The form “*would that you knew...*” is a form of rhetorical question often used in the Qur’ān. It suggests that the matter under discussion is far beyond our imagining and understanding. This is stressed here by repetition of the question before details about conditions on the day concerned are given: “*It is the day when no soul can be of any help to any other soul.*” (Verse 19) It is a state of total helplessness when everyone stands alone, busy with their own problems, unable to think of anyone else, relative or

friend. "For on that day all sovereignty is God's alone." (Verse 19) He indeed reigns supreme in this life and the next. This fact, however, becomes so clear on that day that no one can overlook it, as the ignorant and the conceited do in this life.

The *sūrah* closes with an air of fear and speechless expectation which contrasts with the opening air of violent horror. In between the two man is addressed with that remonstrance which overwhelms him with shame.