

SŪRAH 94

Al-Sharḥ

(Solace)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

Have We not opened up your heart, (1)

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ ﴿١﴾

and relieved you of your burden, (2)

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنْكَ وِزْرَكَ ﴿٢﴾

which weighed heavily on your back? (3)

الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ ﴿٣﴾

And have We not given you high renomn? (4)

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ ﴿٤﴾

With every hardship comes ease. (5)

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٥﴾

Indeed, with every hardship comes ease. (6)

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا ﴿٦﴾

*When you have completed your task resume your
toil, (7)*

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ ﴿٧﴾

and to your Lord turn with love. (8)

وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَأَرْعَبْ ﴿٨﴾

This sūrah was revealed soon after the preceding one, Sūrah 93, The Morning

Hours, as if it were a continuation of it. Here, also, the feelings of sympathy and an atmosphere of delightful, friendly discourse abound. It portrays the divine care the Prophet enjoys and explains the measures taken out of concern for him. The *sūrah* also gives the good news of forthcoming relief, points out to the Prophet the secret of ease, and emphasizes his strong ties with God.

"Have We not opened up your heart, and relieved you of your burden, which weighed heavily on your back? And have We not given you high renown?" (Verses 1-4) This suggests that the Prophet was troubled for some reason concerning the message he was entrusted with, and the obstacles in its way. These verses also suggest that the difficulties facing his mission weighed heavily on his heart, making him feel the need for urgent help and backing. Hence this comforting address.

"Have We not opened up your heart," so that it may warm to this message? Have We not facilitated it for you, endeared it to you, defined its path and illuminated it for you to see its happy end? Look into your heart! Do you not see it to be full of light, happiness and solace? Reflect on the effects brought about by all the favours bestowed on you! Do you not feel comfort with every difficulty, and find contentment with every kind of deprivation you suffer?

"And relieved you of your burden, which weighed heavily on your back?" (Verses 2-3) Your burden was so heavy that it almost broke your back, but We relieved you of that. Relief took the form of giving your heart a lift so that you might feel your mission easier and your burden not so hard to shoulder. Another aspect of the relief was the guidance you received on how to discharge your mission and how to appeal to people's hearts. Furthermore, there is relief for you in the revelation of the Qur'ān which explains the truth and helps you to drive it home to people easily and gently. Do you not feel all this when you think of how heavy your burden was? Do you not feel it to be lighter after We opened up your heart?

"And have We not given you high renown?" (Verse 4) We exalted you among those on high, on earth and in the whole universe. We raised your fame high indeed as we associated your name with that of God's whenever it is pronounced. "No Deity but God, Muḥammad is God's Messenger." Indeed, this is the highest degree of praise. It is a position granted only to Muḥammad, with no share of it to anyone else. God has willed that one century should turn after another and generations succeed generations with millions and millions of people in all corners of the world honouring the blessed name of Muḥammad with prayers for peace and blessings to be granted him, and with his profound love entrenched in their hearts. Your fame spread far and wide when your name became associated with this divine way of life.

Certainly the mere fact that you were chosen for this task is an exaltation to which no one else in this universe can ever aspire. How can there remain any feeling of

affliction or hardship after this favour which heals all such difficulties?

God, nevertheless, addresses His beloved messenger kindly. He comforts and reassures him, explaining to him how He has given him unceasing ease. *"With hardship comes ease. Indeed, with every hardship comes ease."* (Verses 5-6) Hardship is never absolute, for ease always accompanies it. When your burden became too heavy, We lifted up your heart and relieved you.

This is strongly emphasized by a literal repetition of the statement: *"With hardship comes ease."* The repetition suggests that the Prophet had endured serious hardship and much affliction. This reminder recalls the various aspects of care and concern shown to the Prophet and then reassures him emphatically. A matter which afflicts Muḥammad's soul so much must be very serious indeed.

Then follows a statement pointing out the aspects of comfort and the factors contributing to the lifting up of hearts and spirits, which is of great help to Muslims as they travel along their hard and long way: *"When you have completed your task resume your toil, and to your Lord turn with love."* (Verses 7-8)

With hardship goes ease, so seek relief and solace. When you have finished whatever you may have to do, be it a matter relating to the delivery of your message or an affair of this life, then turn with all your heart to what deserves your toil and striving, namely devotion and dedication in worship. *"And to your Lord turn with love."* (Verse 8) Seek Him alone and let nothing whatsoever distract you. Do not ever think of the people you call on to believe in Him. A traveller must have his food with him, and this is the real food for your journey. A fighter for a cause needs to have his equipment, and this is the equipment necessary for you. This will provide you with ease in every difficulty you may encounter, and with comfort against every kind of affliction you may suffer.

The *sūrah* ends on the same note as the preceding *sūrah*, The Morning Hours. It leaves us with two intertwined feelings. The first is a realization of the great affection shown to the Prophet, which overwhelmed him because it was the love of his Lord, the Compassionate, the Merciful. The other feeling is one of sympathy shown to his noble self. We can almost feel what was going on in his blessed heart at that time which required this reminder of delightful affection.

It is this mission of Islam: a grave trust and a burden which weighs him down. It is nevertheless the rising of the divine light, the link between mortality and eternity, existence and non-existence.