

SŪRAH 95

Al-Tīn

(The Fig)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

By the fig and the olive, (1)

and by Mount Sinai, (2)

and by this secure city, (3)

*We indeed have created man in the finest form,
(4)*

*then We brought him down to the lowest of the
low, (5)*

*except for those who believe and do good deeds; for
theirs shall be an unfailling recompense. (6)*

*Who, then, can henceforth cause you to deny the
Last Judgement? (7)*

Is not God the most just of judges? (8)

وَالْتَيْنِ وَالزَّيْتُونَ ﴿١﴾

وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ ﴿٢﴾

وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ ﴿٣﴾

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ﴿٤﴾

﴿٥﴾

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ ﴿٥﴾

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ ءَامَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ

فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ ﴿٦﴾

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ ﴿٧﴾

Overview

The basic fact outlined in this *sūrah* is that God has given man an upright nature. This is essentially in perfect harmony with the nature of faith. With faith it attains its ultimate perfection. But when man deviates from this upright nature and from the straight path of faith he sinks into the lowest abyss.

God swears to the validity of this by the fig, *tin*, the olive, *zaytūn*, Mount Sinai, *Ṭūr Sīnīn* and the secure city of Makkah, *al-balad al-amīn*. As we have already seen in many *sūrahs* in this part of the Qur'ān, this oath is the framework which perfectly fits the essential facts presented within it.

The Tar in Sinai is the mountain on which Moses received his divine summons. The secure city is Makkah, which houses the Ka`bah, God's inviolable house. The relationship between the two on the one hand and religion and faith on the other is obvious. But a similar relationship is not readily clear with regard to the figs and olives. Suggestions as to the significance of these are numerous. It is said that the fig refers to the fig tree in heaven, with the leaves of which Adam and his wife, Eve, tried to cover their private parts. Another suggestion is that it refers to the place where the fig tree appeared on the mountain where Noah's ark landed.

As for the olive, it is suggested that it refers to the Mount of Ṭūr Zaitā in Jerusalem. It is also said that it refers to Jerusalem itself. Another suggestion is that it refers to the olive branch brought back by the pigeon which Noah released from the ship to examine the state of the foods. When the pigeon brought back an olive branch, he knew that the land had reappeared and that vegetation was growing.

A different opinion posits that the fig and olive mentioned in the *sūrah* are simply those two kinds of food with which we are familiar. Alternatively, it is claimed, they are symbols of growth out of land.

There is another reference in the Qur'ān to the olive tree in association with Mount Sinai. The verse there reads as follows: "And a tree issuing from Mount Sinai which bears oil and seasoning for all to eat." (23: 20) This, however, is the only case where reference to the fig tree is made in the Qur'ān.

Hence, we cannot say anything definite on this matter. However, on the basis of parallel frameworks in other *sūrahs*, the most likely explanation of the fig and olive mentioned here is that they refer to certain places or events which have some relevance to religion and faith or to man as the creature fairest in shape and form. This may have been established in heaven where man's life began. The harmony

between this detail and the main fact outlined in the *sūrah* is yet another example of the unique method of the Qur'ān whereby the framework fits perfectly with the facts contained within it.

Man's Fair Shape

The essential fact of the *sūrah* is embodied in the verses: *"We indeed have created man in the finest form, then We brought him down to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds; for theirs shall be an unfailing recompense."* (Verses 4-6)

God has perfected all His creation; and the special emphasis laid here and elsewhere in the Qur'ān on man's being endowed with perfect form shows clearly that man has enjoyed extra divine care. Moreover, God's care for man, despite his distortion of his upright nature and the corruption he indulges in, suggests that God has given him special rank and special weight in the universe. God's care is most clearly apparent in the moulding of man's highly complicated physical structure and his unique spiritual and mental make-up.

The emphasis here is on man's spiritual qualities since these are the ones which drag man down to the most ignoble state when he deviates from his upright nature and turns away from belief in God. Needless to say, man's physical structure does not sink to such a low level. Moreover, the superiority of man's creation is most clearly apparent in his spiritual qualities. He is made in such a way as to be able to attain a sublime standard, superior to that of the highest ranking angels. This is illustrated in the story of the Prophet's ascension to heaven. Then, Gabriel stopped at a certain level and Muḥammad, human as he was, was elevated much higher.

At the same time, man is given the dubious ability to sink down to levels unreached by any other creature: *"Then We brought him down to the lowest of the low."* (Verse 5) In this case, the animals are superior to him and more upright, since they do not violate their nature. They praise the Lord and fulfil their function on earth as they are guided to do. But man who has been given the fairest form and abilities denies his Lord and so sinks right down.

"We have created man in the finest form." (Verse 4). This is a reference to his nature and abilities. *"Then We brought him down to the lowest of the low."* (Verse 5) That is, when he forces his nature away from the line God has defined for him. Having laid down the way, God left man to choose whether to follow it or not.

"Except for those who believe and do good deeds." (Verse 6) For these are the ones who stick to their upright nature, consolidate it with faith and righteous deeds, and who elevate it to the highest level it can attain in this world so they can finally attain a life of perfection in the world of perfection: *"For theirs shall be an unfailing recompense."*

(Verse 6) But those who cause their nature to sink to the lowest of the low go down along their slippery road until they reach the lowest level, that is, in hell where their humanity is shed and they are completely debased. Both ends are natural results of two widely different starts and lines of action.

Thus, the importance of faith in human life becomes clear. Faith is the elevating path through which upright human nature ascends to its ultimate perfection. It is the rope stretched between man and his Maker. It is the light showing him where to step along the elevating path. When the rope is cut and the light put out, the inevitable result is the fall down the steep path into the lowest of the low. The clay element in man's make-up separates from the spiritual element and man, along with stones, becomes the fuel for hell-fire.

In light of this fact, the Prophet is addressed in this manner: *"Who, then, can henceforth cause you to deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the most just of judges?"* (Verses 7-8) What makes you, man, deny this religion after you have known this fact, realized the importance of faith in the life of humanity, and become aware of the destiny awaiting those who disbelieve? Why do you turn away from this light and refuse to follow the straight path laid down by God?

"Is-not God the most just of judges?" (Verse 8) Is not He the most just when He gives this ruling concerning the destiny of creation? Is not God's wisdom clearest and most reassuring as He rules between believers and unbelievers? Justice is certainly clear and wisdom is manifest. Hence, we are taught in a *ḥadīth* related by Abū Hurayrah that when one reads this *sūrah* one should answer the rhetorical question, *"Is not God the most just of judges?"* by saying: *"Indeed, and I am a witness to that."*