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THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 76
SURAH AL-INSAN

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

076

SURAH AL-INSAN

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Introduction and Summary

The revelation of this Surah was probably in the early Makkan period, with the possible exception of some verses, but its date has no particular significance.

Its theme is the contrast between the two classes of men, those who choose good and who choose evil, with special reference to the former.

The title of the Surah recalls a Pagan Arab idea, which personified Time as existing spontaneously from eternity to eternity and responsible for the misery or the happiness of

mankind. In Surah 45:24 we read: "They say... 'nothing but Time can destroy us.'" This attitude is of course wrong Time is a created thing: it has its mysteries, but it is no more eternal than matter. It is also relative to our conceptions and not absolute, as Einstein has proved, It is only Allah Who is Self-Subsisting, Eternal from the beginning and Eternal to the end, the absolute Existence and Reality. We must not transfer His attributes to any figments of our imagination.

This deification of Time (*Dahr*) as against a living personal God has given rise to the term *dahriyah*, as applied to an atheist or a materialist.

The whole of Surah is full of the highest symbolism, as in generally the case with Makkan Surahs, and this should always be remembered in their interpretation.

C.293 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Man was evolved out of nothing, through low
Beginnings; but he was given Insight
And Understanding. Allah showed him the Way;
And if man doth willfully reject the Right.
Man but chooses Chains and Yokes and a Blazing
Fire within his own soul. Not so
The Devotees of Right: they attain
The Mystics Fountain of Kafur:
For, purely out of love for Allah,
They do good to Allah's Creatures, and serve them.
The Light of Beauty and Joy will be
On them. In full felicity and honour
Will they live in the garden of Delights, and share
In the Banquet--- the Presence and Glory Divine!*

*The Righteous are patient in Constant Devotion:
Allah's Way is open to all: whoever
Has the Will, may attain to the Perfect Goal.*

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُن شَيْئًا مَّذْكُورًا (١)

1. **Has there not been** over Man a long period **of Time** when he was nothing --

(not even) mentioned?

C5830. The undoubted fact is mentioned in the form of a question, to get the assent of man. It is certain that the physical world existed long before man was ever heard of or mentioned, as geological records prove. It is also true that the world existed long before man came on the scene:

see 2:30-31. Man is here taken in a generic sense.

C5831. Dahr is Time as a whole, or for a long period.

Time used to be deified by the Pagan Arabs, as explained in the introduction to this Surah. An analogy can be found in the Greek ideas connected with Chronos or Kronos, themselves a blend of different myths. Kronos (or Time), they said, was the father of Zeus himself. (R).

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَّبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا (٢)

2. Verily We created Man from a drop **of mingled sperm**, in order to try him:

so We gave him (the gifts) of Hearing and Sight.

C5832. Mingled: the female ovum has to be fertilised with the male sperm before a new animal can be born. Man as an animal has this humble origin. But he has been given the gift of certain faculties of receiving instruction (typified by Hearing) and of intellectual and spiritual insight (typified by Sight).

His life has therefore a meaning: with a certain amount of free-will, he is to be vicegerent on earth (2:30). But he must be trained and tried, and that is the whole problem of human life.

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (٣)

3. We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).

C5833. Besides the gift of the faculties, Man has been shown the Way by means of Revelation, through men of the highest spiritual standing.

If he is grateful, he will accept Guidance, be of the Righteous, and join the company of the Blessed.

If not, he puts chains round himself, thus burdening himself with sin, and gets into the Blazing Fire of Punishment. See next verse. His choice rests on his will. (R).

إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَلَاسِلًا وَأَغْلَالًا وَسَعِيرًا (٤)

4. For the Rejecters We have prepared

- Chains,
- Yokes, and
- a Blazing Fire.

C5834. Cf. 13:5, 34:33, 40:71 [Eds.]

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا (٥)

5. As to the Righteous, they shall drink of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with **Kafur** --

C5835. Kafur is literally Camphor. It is a fountain in the Realms of Bliss. It is a seasoning added to the Cup of pure, beatific Wine, which causes no intoxication (56:18-19), but stands for all that is wholesome, agreeable, and refreshing.

Camphor is cool and refreshing, and is given as a soothing tonic in Eastern medicine. In minute doses its odour and flavour are also agreeable. (R).

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا (٦)

6. A Fountain where the Devotees of Allah do drink, making it flow in unstinted abundance.

يُؤْفُونَ بِالَّذِينَ ...

7. **They perform (their) vows ...**

C5836. They: i.e., the Righteous: they are known in the present life by the virtues described in verses 7-10, and in the life of the Hereafter they will enjoy the Bliss described in verses 11-22.

C5837. Cf. 22:29.

The vows must be vows of spiritual service, which of course includes service to humanity, such as is mentioned in the next verse. They are Devotees of Allah, and they must perform all vows and contracts (5:I and n. 682). Vows of the Pagan sort, savouring of a sort of "bribe" to the Deity, are not approved.

... وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَتْ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا (٧)

... and they fear a Day whose evil flies far and wide.

C5838. That is, they prepare for the Judgment to come, where the effects of Sin will not be transitory but far-reaching.

وَيُطْعِمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَى حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا (٨)

8. **And they feed, for the love of Allah,**

- the indigent,
- the orphan,
- and the captive --

C5839. The captive: when taken literally, it refers to the old state of things when captives of war had to earn their own food, or their own redemption;

even ordinary prisoners in jail for criminal offences often starved unless food was provided for them by private friends or from their own earnings.

But there is a further symbolic meaning, which applies to the indigent, the orphans, and the captives, viz, those who are so in a spiritual sense: those have no mental or moral resources, or have no one to look after them, or are held down in social or moral or economic

captivity. they hunger for spiritual food, or perhaps their appreciate is deadened, but the righteous understand and supply their real needs.

It has also been held that "captive" include dumb animals who are under subjection to man; they must be properly fed, housed, and looked after; and the righteous man does not forget them.

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَّا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا (٩)

9. (Saying),

"We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: No reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.

C5840. These words need not be actually uttered. They express the true motives of pious and unpretentious Charity.

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبَّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا (١٠)

10. "We only fear a Day of distressful Wrath from the side of our Lord."

C5841. It is a Day of Distress for sin and evil. But the truly righteous are not self-righteous. They have the fear of Allah in their minds: they know they are human, and they fear lest they should be found wanting in the sight of Allah. But Allah in His Mercy gives them a bountiful Reward.

فَوَقَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا (١١)

11. But Allah will deliver them from the evil of that Day, and will **shed over them a light** of Beauty and a (blissful) Joy.

C5842. Cf. 75:22-23.

وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا (١٢)

12. And because they were patient and constant, He will reward them with a Garden and (garments of) silk.

C5843. Cf. 22:23.

مُنْكَبِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ ...

13. Reclining in the (Garden) on raised thrones,

C5844. Cf. 18:31.

... لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمَهْرِيرًا (١٣)

they will see there neither the sun's (excessive heat) nor (the moon's) excessive cold.

C5845. The sun and the moon as we know them will be no longer there. It will be a new world on a different plane. But to give us an idea of comfort we recall the excessive heat of the sun especially in tropical climates, and the excessive cold of the moon especially in northern climates, and we negate them both. That is, the temperature will be just that delightful one that is most agreeable to our sensations as we know them now. The moon is not mentioned, but **Zamharir** (excessive cold) is sometimes used for the moon. (R).

وَدَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلَالُهَا وَذُلَّتْ أَطْوْفُهَا تَدْلِيلًا (١٤)

14. And the shades of the (Garden) will come low over them, and the bunches (of fruit), there, will hang low in humility.

C5846. Without sun and moon there will of course be no shade in the literal sense of the word. But for full comfort, there will be sheltering shade for rest and change from whatever light there be.

But the whole idea here is that of humility. Even the shadows show humility: Cf. 13:15.

So does the fruit in hanging low for man. Man has now reached the height of his dignity. (R).

وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِآنِيَةٍ مِّنْ فِضَّةٍ ...

15. And amongst them will be passed round vessels of silver ...

C5847. Cf. 43:71, where "dishes and goblets of gold" are mentioned.

The idea conveyed is that of rarity, preciousness, and spotless splendour. (R).

... وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرًا (١٥)

... and goblets of crystal --

قَوَارِيرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ ...

16. Crystal-clear, made of silver:

C5848. That is, silver polished and white, and shining like crystal.

... قَدَرُواهَا تَقْدِيرًا (١٦)

they will determine the measure thereof (according to their wishes).

وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا (١٧)

17. And they will be given to drink there of a Cup (of Wine) mixed with **Zanjabil** --

C5849. Cf. above, 76:5-6, and n. 5835, where the Cup of **Kafur** (Camphor) was mentioned for coolness and refreshment to the Righteous, who had just passed the great Event of Judgment.

The second stage is described in verses 12-14, when they enter the Garden in Garments of Silk, and find that their former humility in the probationary life is rewarded with high honour in the new world they have entered.

The third stage is in verses 15-21, where they settle down in Bliss, with Garments of fine silk and heavy brocades, with Ornaments and Jewels, with an ordered Feast of set service, and the Cup of **Zanjabil**. This word literally means Ginger. In Eastern medicine Ginger is administered to give warmth to the body and zest to the taste; this is appropriate for the Royal Feast which is now figured forth. (R).

عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلًا (١٨)

18. A fountain there, called **Salsabil**.

C5850. Salsabil: literally means "Seek the Way". The Way is now open to the presence of the Most High.

The Banquet is spread. Get thyself ready. It is a "Realm Magnificent" (verse 20) in a new spiritual world. (R).

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ ...

19. And round about them will (serve) youths of perpetual (freshness):

C5851. Cf. 56:17 and n. 5231.

... إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَّنثُورًا (١٩)

if thou seest them, thou wouldst think them scattered Pearls.

C5852. Pearls for beauty and splendour: scattered, because they are moving to and fro all round the Banquet.

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ تَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا (٢٠)

20. And when thou lookest,

it is there thou wilt see a Bliss and a Realm Magnificent.

عَالِيَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٌ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُوعَا سَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ ...

21. Upon them will be green Garments of fine silk and heavy brocade, and they will be adorned with Bracelets of silver;

C5853. Cf. 18:31. The bracelets are there said to be of gold.

وَسَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا (٢١)

and their Lord will give to them to drink of a Wine Pure and Holy.

C5854. This would seem to be the culmination of the honour which the Blessed receive at the Royal and Divine Banquet. The words in the next verse express the sort of speech which will make the Guest a denizen of Heaven. (R).

إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا (٢٢)

22. "Verily this is a Reward for you,
and your Endeavor is accepted and recognized."

Section 2

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا (٢٣)

23. It is We Who have sent down the Qur'án to thee by stages.

C5855. The Quran was being revealed stage by stage as the occasion demanded and at the date of this Sura it was still one of the earlier stages. Persecution, abuse, and false charges were being leveled against the man of Allah, but he is bidden to stand firm and do his duty. In a minor degree this applies to all of us who suffer in the cause of Truth.

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تُطِعْ مِنْهُمْ آثِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا (٢٤)

24. Therefore be patient with constancy to the Command of thy Lord,

and hearken not to the sinner or the ingrate among them.

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا (٢٥)

25. And **celebrate the name** of thy Lord morning and evening,

C5856. Three methods of Prayer and Devotion are mentioned:

1. to remember and celebrate the holy name of Allah always;
2. to spend a part of the night in humble prostration; and
3. to glorify Him in the long hours of a weary night of waiting and watching.

As to 1, "morning and evening" means all the waking hours of our life, but in the special hours of morning and evening the physical world without us, and the inner world within us, combine to make us specially receptive of spiritual influences.

The "name" of Allah includes His attributes, as a locked golden casket might include priceless jewels. Any one may carry the casket, even though he may not be worthy to handle the jewels, If he carries the casket, he is in potential possession of the jewels, and he hopes

some time to get the key which opens the jewels to him. So the tyro, who celebrates the holy name of Allah, hopes some day to see the "Face" of Allah and be blessed with the privilege of proximity to His Person.

For 2 and 3 see next note. (R).

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا (٢٦)

26. And part of the night, prostrate thyself to Him;
and **glorify Him** a long night through.

C5857. See last note.

2 Humble prostration to Allah means some visible mode of dedication. That is best done at night, when the soul, free from worldly occupations, is alone with its God.

3 The weary hours of a long night are no longer weary, but become full of meaning when we join in concert with the whole Creation, which glorifies Allah: 57:1.

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ يُحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ وَيَذَرُونَ وَرَاءَهُمْ يَوْمًا ثَقِيلًا (٢٧)

27. As to these, **they love the fleeting life**, and **put away behind them** a Day (that will be) hard.

C5858. Fleeting life: Cf. 75:20.

They: the immediate reference was to the Pagan Quraish:

the general reference is to the Unbelievers of all ages. They reject, or at least put away the thought of, a Hereafter, a Day that will be hard, for the easy pleasures of a fleeting life.

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنَاهُمْ وَشَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ ...

28. It is We Who created them, and We have made their joints strong;

C5859. Allah has not only created men, but "made their joints strong", i.e., given them the power and strength to withstand the temptations of Evil and stand firmly in the Path of Right,

... وَإِذَا شِئْنَا بَدَّلْنَا أَمْثَلَهُمْ تَبْدِيلًا (٢٨)

but, when We will, We can substitute **the like of them** by a complete change.

C5860. If, in spite of Allah's loving care, any particular men or group of men, misuse their powers or willfully disobey Allah's Law, Allah will set them aside, and substitute others in their place, with like powers.

Allah's gifts are free, but let no one think that he can monopolise them or misuse them without being called to answer for the trust. And the man of Allah must not be discouraged by the whole world being at some moment completely against him. Allah can in a moment make a complete change. Either the same men that fought against him will be his zealous adherents, Or another generation will spring up, which will carry the flag of Righteousness to victory. Allah's Will and Plan work in their own good time.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذْكِرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (٢٩)

29. This is an admonition: whosoever will, let him take a (straight) Path to his Lord.

وَمَا تَشَاؤُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ ...

30. But ye will not, except as Allah wills;

C5861. Man in himself is weak; he must seek Allah's Grace; without it he can do nothing; with it he can do all, For Allah knows all things, and His wisdom comprehends the good of all.

... إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا (٣٠)

for Allah is full of Knowledge and Wisdom.

يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ ...

31. He will admit to His Mercy Whom He will;

C5862. That is according to His just and wise Plan. If the will is right, it obtains Allah's Grace and Mercy. If the will of man rejects Allah, man must suffer the Penalty.

... وَالظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (٣١)

but the wrongdoers -- for them has He prepared a grievous Penalty.