

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

**THE
HOLY QURAN**

**ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 81
SURAH AT-TAKWIR**

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

www.quran.live

HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

081

SURAH AT-TAKWIR

ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

Introduction and Summary

This is quite an early Makkan Surah, perhaps the sixth or seventh in chronological order. It opens with a series of highly graphic images portraying the break-up of the world as we know it (verses 1-13) and the enforcement of complete personal responsibility for each soul (verse 14). This is followed by a passage showing how the Quranic Revelation was true, and revealed through the angel Gabriel, and not merely a rhapsody from one possessed. Revelation is given for man's spiritual guidance (verses 14-29). (R).

Comparable with this Surah are Surahs 82 and 84 which may be read with this.

C.261 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*How can the soul's self-conviction be fitly
Expressed, except by types of tremendous
Cataclysms in nature, and still more by tremendous
Searching in the heart of man These want
Deep pondering. When once the spiritual Dawn
Has "breathed away" the Darkness of the Night,
The Vision Glorious clears all doubts,
And brings us face to face with Truth.
The highest Archangel in heaven is sent
By Allah to bring these truths to men
Through their Prophet. Allah's Grace flows freely:
We have but to tune our Will to His---
The ever-loving Righteous God.*

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

إِذَا الشَّمْسُ ...

1. **When the sun** (with its spacious light)

C5969. Verses 1 to 13 are conditional clauses, and the substantive clause is in verse 14.

The time will come when nature's processes as we know them will cease to function, and the soul will only then know by self conviction the results of its actions. With reference to an individual soul, its resurrection is its supreme crisis: the whole world of sense, and even of imagination and reason, melts away, and its whole spiritual scroll is laid bare before it.

... كَوَّرَتْ (١)

is folded up;

C5970. The conditional clauses are twelve, in two groups of six.

The first six affect the outer or physical life of man; the last six, his inmost spiritual life. Let us take them one by one.

1. The biggest factor affecting us in the external physical World is the light, heat, and perhaps electric or magnetic energy of the sun. The sun is the source of all the light, heat, and energy, and indeed the source and support of all the physical life that we know. It is the biggest factor and yet most remote from us in our solar system. Yet the sources of our inner spiritual life will be greater and more lasting, for they will survive it. The sun as the center of our solar system also stands as a symbol of the present order of things. The physical forces, as defined in Newton's laws of Matter and Attraction, will also break up with the break-up of the sun.

Is folded up: is folded up, or twisted up, like a sheet or garment.

وَإِذَا النُّجُومُ انْكَدَرَتْ (٢)

2. **When the stars fall**, losing their lustre;

C5971.

2. Next after the sun, we can derive faint lights from the innumerable stars in the firmament. For all the ages of which we have any record, these stars have remained fixed. Nothing can be more fixed; yet they can and will fail.

وَإِذَا الْجِبَالُ سُيِّرَتْ (٣)

3. **When the mountains vanish** (like a mirage);

C5972. Cf. 78:20.

3. On our own earth the mountains the "eternal hills"- seem the most striking examples of stability; yet

they will be swept away like a mirage, as if they had never existed.

وَإِذَا الْعِشَارُ عُطِّلَتْ (٤)

4. When the she-camels, ten months with young, are left untended;

C5973.

4. The type of Arab property, as well as the type of the Arab pet, was the camel, and the most precious camel was the she-camel just about to be delivered of her young. She would in normal times be most sedulously cared for. But when all our landmarks of this life vanish, even she would be left untended. Nothing would then be as it is now.

وَإِذَا الْوُحُوشُ حُشِرَتْ (٥)

5. When the wild beasts are herded together (in human habitations);

C5974.

5. In the present world, the wild animals fear each other, and they all fear man and normally keep away from human habitations. But when this order passes away, there will be scarcely any differentiation between human habitations and the wilds of the forests.

وَإِذَا الْبِحَارُ سُجِّرَتْ (٦)

6. When the oceans boil over with a swell;

C5975. See 52:6 and n. 5041.

6. The oceans, which now keep their bounds, will surge and boil over, and overwhelm all landmarks. At present the waters seem to have reached their fixed and normal levels, but the whole equilibrium will then be disturbed. Such will be the complete wreck of this transitory world, at the approach of the dawn of the permanent Reality.

But these are physical symbols, relating to the outer nature surrounding the physical nature of man. The remaining six. viz.: the 7th to the 12th, describe the

ordering of the new World, from which all present seeming incongruities will be removed.

وَإِذَا النُّفُوسُ زُوِّجَتْ (٧)

7. When the souls are sorted out (Being joined, like with like);

C5976. Cf. 56:7, where the sorting out into three classes is mentioned, viz:

- Those Nearest to Allah,
- the Companions of the Right Hand, and
- the Companions of the Left Hand.

That was a sort of broad general division. The meaning in this passage is wider,

7. Whereas in this world of probation, good is mixed with evil, knowledge with ignorance, power with arrogance, and so on, in the new world of Reality, all true values will be restored, and like will consort with like, for it will be a world of perfect Peace, Harmony, and Justice.

وَإِذَا الْمَوْؤُودَةُ سُئِلَتْ (٨)

8. When the female (infant), Buried alive, is questioned --

بِأَيِّ ذَنْبٍ قُتِلَتْ (٩)

9. For what crime she was killed;

C5977.

8. In this world of sin and sorrow, much unjust suffering is caused, and innocent lives sacrificed, without a trace being left, by which offenders can be brought to justice. A striking example before the Quraish was female infanticide:

Cf. 16:58-59, and n. 2084.

The crime was committed in the guise of social plausibility in secret collusion, and no question was asked here. But in the world of Justice, full questions will be asked, and the victim herself-dumb here-will be able to give evidence, for she had committed no

crime herself. The proofs will be drawn from the very means used for concealment.

وَإِذَا الصُّحُفُ نُشِرَتْ (١٠)

10. When the Scrolls are laid open;

C5978.

9. The Scrolls recording the deeds of men, good or bad, will then be laid open before all.

Cf. 50:17-18, n. 4954; also 82:11-12.

In the present phenomenal world, things may be concealed; but in the world of absolute Reality, every secret is opened out, good or bad. The whole tale of acts, omissions, motives, imponderable spiritual hurt, neglect, or help will be laid bare.

وَإِذَا السَّمَاءُ كُشِطَتْ (١١)

11. When the World on High is unveiled:

C5979. The World on High: literally the Sky, or Heaven as standing for both the Blazing Fire and the Garden, the Home of the Hereafter.

10. Just as when an animal is skinned, its real flesh and blood and inner organs become visible, without any outer coating to hold them together, so the inmost state of every soul will then become plain.

وَإِذَا الْجَحِيمُ سُعِّرَتْ (١٢)

12. When the Blazing Fire is kindled to fierce heat;

C5980.

11. Then will burn the Blazing Fire of the Hell, worse than the fiercest fire. (R).

وَإِذَا الْجَنَّةُ ...

13. And when the Garden...

C5981.

12. Lastly the Garden will come in sight, not yet attained, but visible, or "brought near". For the scales have fallen from the eyes, and the soul knows itself.

... أُرْلِفْتُ (١٣)

is brought near --

C5982.

See 75:22, n. 5822; 78:40, n. 5914; and 79:14, n. 5926.

عَلِمَتْ نَفْسٌ مَّا أَحْضَرَتْ (١٤)

14. (Then) shall each soul know what it has put forward.

C5983. This is the conclusion. It is only on such conditions that the soul reaches its full realization. Put forward: cf. "the Deeds which his hands have sent forth" in 78:40.

... قُلَّا

15. So verily I call ...

C5984. Cf. 56:75, n. 5258, for the witness that the heavenly bodies bear to the power, beauty, and goodness of Allah, in sending His Revelation.

See n. 5798 to 74:32, for the significance of an adjuration in the Quran.

... أَقْسِمُ ...

... to witness the planets -- ...

C5985. The appeal here is made to three things,

- the Planets,
- the Night, and
- the Dawn.

1. The Planets have a retrograde and a forward motion, and, during occultation, hide or disappear behind the sun or moon, or are otherwise invisible or appear stationary. They behave differently from the millions of stars around them. Yet they are not mere erratic bodies, but obey definite laws, and evidence the power and wisdom of Allah.

... بِالْخُنُسِ (١٥)

... that recede,

الْجَوَارِ الْكُنُسِ (١٦)

16. Go straight, or hide;

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا عَسْعَسَ (١٧)

17. And the Night as it dissipates --

C5986. How the Night gradually declines after its height at midnight!

It seems gradually to steal away, and as Dawn approaches, to merge into Day. So a soul in spiritual darkness gradually awakes to its spiritual Dawn through Revelation.

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا تَنَفَّسَ (١٨)

18. And the Dawn as it breathes away the darkness --

C5987. The slow "breathing out" of the darkness by the Dawn, shows us, by beautiful imagery, that these wonderful operations, of which people in their ignorance are frightened if they have to do with darkness, are really beneficent operations of Allah. They have nothing to do with evil spirits, or witches, or magic. For three questions were actually raised about the holy Prophet's Ministry by the ignorant.

- Did his wonderful works come from himself and not from Allah?
- Was he possessed of an evil spirit? In other words, was he mad? For that was the theory of madness then current.
- Was he a soothsayer, or necromancer, or magician? For he had virtues, powers and eloquence, so extraordinary that they could not understand him.

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلُ رَسُولٍ كَرِيمٍ (١٩)

19. Verily this is the word of a most honorable Messenger,

C5988. They are told here that all their three theories were foolish.

The Revelation was really from Allah. Their wonder should cease if they observe the daily miracles worked round them in nature. The bringer of Allah's Message was the angel Gabriel, and not an evil spirit.

ذِي قُوَّةٍ عِنْدَ ذِي الْعَرْشِ مَكِينٍ (٢٠)

20. Endued with Power, with rank before the Lord of the Throne,

C5989. Not only was the bringer of the Revelation, Gabriel, an honorable Messenger, incapable of deceit, but he had, in the angelic kingdom, rank and authority before Allah's Throne, and he could convey an authoritative divine Message. He was, like the holy Prophet, faithful to his trust; and therefore there could be no question of the Message being delivered in any other way than exactly according to the divine Will and Purpose.

These epithets could apply to the Prophet himself, but in view of verse 23 below, it is best to understand them of Gabriel.

مُطَاعٍ ثَمَّ أَمِينٍ (٢١)

21. With authority there, (and) faithful of his trust.

وَمَا صَاحِبُكُمْ بِمَجْنُونٍ (٢٢)

22. And (O people!) your companion is not one possessed;

C5990. After describing the credentials of the Archangel Gabriel, the Text now appeals to the people to consider their own "Companion", the Prophet, who had been born among them and had lived with them, and was known to be an honorable, truthful, and trustworthy man.

If Gabriel was the one who brought the Message to him, then there was no question of demoniacal possession. And the Prophet had seen him in his inspired vision "in the clear horizon".

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ بِالْأُفُقِ الْمُبِينِ (٢٣)

23. And without doubt he saw him in the clear horizon.

C5991. Read along with this the whole passage in 53:1-18 and notes there; specially n.5092, where the two occasions are mentioned when there was a vision of inspiration:

"For truly did he see, of the Signs of his Lord, the Greatest" (53:18).

وَمَا هُوَ عَلَى الْعَيْبِ بِضَنِينِ (٢٤)

24. Neither doth he withhold Grudgingly a knowledge of the Unseen.

C5992. Such would be the words of a soothsayer, guarded, ambiguous, and misleading. Here everything was clear, sane, true, and under divine inspiration.

وَمَا هُوَ بِقَوْلِ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمِ (٢٥)

25. Nor is it the word of an evil spirit accursed.

C5993. Such as evil suggestions of envy, spite, greed, selfishness, or other vices. On the contrary the teaching of the Quran is beneficent, pointing to the Right Way, the Way of Allah.

Rajim: literally, driven away with stones. rejected with complete ignominy. Cf. 15:17.

The rite of throwing stones in the valley of Mina at the close of the Makkan Pilgrimage [see n. 217 (6) to 2:197] suggests symbolically that the Pilgrim emphatically, definitely, and finally rejects all Evil.

فَأَيْنَ تَذْهَبُونَ (٢٦)

26. Then whither go ye?

C5994. It has been shown that this is no word of a mortal, but that it is full of divine wisdom; that its teaching is not that of a madman, but sane to the core and in accordance with human needs; that it freely and clearly directs you to the right Path and forbids you the Path of evil.

Why then hesitate?

Accept the divine Grace; repent of your sins; and come to the higher Life.

إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ لِلْعَالَمِينَ (٢٧)

27. Verily this is no less than a Message to (all) the Worlds:

C5995. It is not meant for one class or race; it is universal, and is addressed to all the Worlds. For the meaning of "Worlds", see n. 20 to 1:2.

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَسْتَقِيمَ (٢٨)

28. (With profit) to whoever among you wills to go straight.

C5996. Cf. 74:55-56.

Allah is the Cherisher of the Worlds, Lord of Grace and Mercy, and His guidance is open to all who have the will to profit by it. But that will must be exercised in conformity with Allah's Will (verse 29). Such conformity is Islam.

Verse 28 points to human free-will and responsibility; verse 29 to its, limitations. Both extremes, viz.,: cast-iron Determinism and an idea of Chaotic Free-will, are condemned.

وَمَا تَشَاؤُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ رَبُّ الْعَالَمِينَ (٢٩)

29. But ye shall not will Except as Allah wills,
The Cherisher of the Worlds.