

SPREAD KNOWLEDGE

THE
HOLY QURAN

ENGLISH TAFSEER
CHAPTER 87
SURAH AL-A'LA

COMMENTARY & EXPLANATORY

By
ABDULLAH YUSUF ALI

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HOLY QURAN

CHAPTER

087

SURAH AL-A'LA

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Introduction and Summary

This is one of the earliest of Makkan Surahs, being usually placed eighth in chronological order, and immediately after Surah 81.

The argument is that Allah has made man capable of progress by ordered steps, and by His Revelation will lead him still higher to purification and perfection.

C.267 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Wonderful are the ways of Allah
In creation, and the love with which
He guides His creatures' destinies,
Gives them the means by which to strive
For maturity by ordered steps, and reach
The end most fitted for their natures.
His Law is just and easy, and His Grace
Is ever ready to help: let us look
To the Eternal Goal, with hearts and souls
Of Purity, and glorify His name:
For in this changing, fleeting world,
His Word is always true, and will remain,
Through all the ages, ever the same.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى (١)

1. Glorify the name of thy Guardian-Lord, Most High,

C6080. The word "**Lord**" by itself is an inadequate rendering here for **Rabb**. For it implies:

- cherishing,
- guarding from harm,
- sustaining,
- granting all the means and opportunities of development.

See n. 20 to 1:2.

For shortness, perhaps "Guardian-Lord" will be sufficient in the Text.

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى (٢)

2. Who hath created, and further, given order and proportion;

C6081. The story of Creation is wonderful and continuous. There are several processes which we contemplate in glorifying Allah's name.

First, He brings us into being.

Secondly, He endows us with forms and faculties exactly suited to what is expected of us, and to the environments in which our life will be cast, giving to everything due order and proportion.

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى (٣)

3. Who hath ordained laws. And granted guidance;

C6082.

Thirdly, He has ordained laws and decrees, by which we can develop ourselves and fit ourselves into His whole scheme of evolution for all His Creation. He has measured exactly the needs of all, and given us instincts and physical predispositions which fit into His decrees.

Fourthly, He gives us guidance, so that we are not the sport of mechanical laws. Our reason and our will are exercised, that we may reach the higher destiny of man.

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى (٤)

4. And Who bringeth out the (green and luscious) pasture.

C6083.

Fifthly, after maturity comes decay. But even in that decay, as when green pasture turns to stubble, we subservise other ends.

In so far as we are animals, we share these processes with other forms of material Creation, animal, vegetable, and even mineral, which all have their appointed laws of growth and decay. But man's higher destiny is referred to in subsequent verses.

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى (٥)

5. And then doth make it (but) swarthy stubble.

... سَنُفَرِّقُكَ ...

6. By degrees shall We teach thee to declare (the Message),

C6084. The soul, as it reaches the Light of Allah, makes gradual progress, like a man going from darkness into light. So the Quran was revealed by stages. So all revelation from Allah comes by stages.

As usual, there are two parallel meanings:

1. that connected with the occasion of direct inspiration to the holy Prophet; and
2. the more general Message to mankind for all time. Everyone who understands the Message must declare it, in words, and still more, in his conduct.

... فَلَا تَنْسَى (٦)

so thou shalt not forget,

C6085. The particular occasion was an assurance to the Prophet, that though he was unlettered, the Message given to him would be preserved in his heart and in the hearts of men. The more general sense is that mankind, having once seized great spiritual truths, will hold fast to them, except as qualified in the following verse.

... إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ ...

7. Except as Allah wills:

C6086. There can be no question of this having any reference to the abrogation of any verses of the Quran. For this Surah is one of the earliest revealed, being placed about eighth according to the most accepted chronological order. While the basic principles of Allah's Law remain the same, its form, expression, and application have varied from time to time, e.g., from Moses to Jesus, and from Jesus to Muhammad. It is one of the beneficent mercies of Allah that we should forget

some things of the past, lest our minds become confused and our development is retarded. Besides, Allah knows what is manifest and what is hidden, and His Will and Plan work with supreme wisdom and goodness.

...إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى (٧)

For He knoweth what is manifest and what is hidden.

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى (٨)

8. And We will make it easy for thee (to follow) the simple (Path).

C6087. The Path of Islam is simple and easy. It depends on no abstruse mysteries or self-mortifications, but on straight and manly conduct in accordance with the laws of man's nature as implanted in him by Allah (30:30).

On the other hand, spiritual perfection may be most difficult, for it involves complete surrender on our part to Allah in all our affairs, thoughts, and desires: but after that surrender Allah's Grace will make our path easy.

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى (٩)

9. Therefore give admonition in case the admonition profits (the hearer).

C6088. This is not so strong as the Biblical phrase, "Cast not pearls before swine" (Matt. 7:6).

The cases where admonition does produce spiritual profit and where it does not, are mentioned below in verses 10 and 11-13 respectively.

Allah's Message should be proclaimed to all: but particular and personal admonitions are also due to those who attend and in whose hearts is the fear of Allah; in the case of those who run away from it and dishonour it, such particular and personal admonition is useless. They are the unfortunate ones who prepare their own ruin.

سَيِّدَكُرُّ مَن يَخْشَى (١٠)

10. The admonition will be received by those who fear (Allah):

وَيَجْتَبِئُهَا الْأَشْفَى (١١)

11. But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones.

الَّذِي يَصَلِّي النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى (١٢)

12. Who will enter the Great Fire,

C6089. The Great Fire is the final Penalty or Disaster in the Hereafter, as contrasted with the minor Penalties or Disasters from which all evil suffers from within in this very life.

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى (١٣)

13. In which they will then neither die nor live.

C6090. A terrible picture of those who ruin their whole future by evil lives here below.

They introduce a discord into Creation, while life should be one great universal concord. And their past clings to them as part of their own will. They are not even like the dry swarthy stubble mentioned in verse 5 above, which grew naturally out of the luscious pasture, for they have grown harmful, in defiance of their own nature. "Neither die nor live-:

Cf. 20:74.

فَدَأْفَلِحَ ...

14. But those will prosper...

C6091. Prosper. in the highest sense; attain to Bliss or Salvation; as opposed to "enter the Fire.

... مَن تَزَكَّى (١٤)

...who purify themselves.

C6092. The first process in godliness is to cleanse ourselves in body, mind, and Soul. Then we shall be in a fit state to see and proclaim the Glory of Allah. That leads us to our actual absorption in Praise and Prayer.

وَدَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى (١٥)

15. And glorify the name of their Guardian-Lord, and (lift their hearts) in Prayer.

بَلْ تُؤْتِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا (١٦)

16. Nay (behold),
ye prefer the life of this world;

وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى (١٧)

17. But the Hereafter is better and more enduring.

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى (١٨)

18. And this is in the Books of the earliest (Revelations) --

C6093. The law of righteousness and godliness is not a new law, nor are the vanity and short duration of this world preached here for the first time. But spiritual truths have to be renewed and reiterated again and again.

صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى (١٩)

19. The Books of **Abraham** and **Moses**.

C6094. No Book of Abraham has come down to us. But the Old Testament recognises that Abraham was a prophet (Gen. 20:7).

There is a book in Greek, which has been translated by Mr. G.H. Box, called the Testament of Abraham (published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London, 1927). It seems to be a Greek translation of a Hebrew original. The Greek Text was probably written in the second Christian century, in Egypt, but in its present form it probably goes back only to the 9th or 10th Century. It was popular among the

Christians. Perhaps the Jewish Midrash also refers to a Testament of Abraham.

C6095. The original Revelation of Moses, of which the Present Pentateuch is a surviving recension.

See [Appendix II](#).

The present Gospels do not come under the definition of the "earliest- Books. Nor could they be called "Books of Jesus': they were written not by him, but about him, and long after his death.