

SŪRAH 100

Al-`Ādiyāt

(The Coursers)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

By the snorting coursers, (1)

وَالْعَدِيدِ صَبْحًا ﴿١﴾

striking sparks of fire, (2)

فَالْمُورِيَّتِ قَدْحًا ﴿٢﴾

rushing to assault at dawn, (3)

فَالْمُغِيرَاتِ صُبْحًا ﴿٣﴾

raising a trail of dust, (4)

فَأَثَرْنَ بِهِ نَقْعًا ﴿٤﴾

storming into any army: (5)

فَوَسَطْنَ بِهِ جَمْعًا ﴿٥﴾

man is surely ungrateful to his Lord, (6)

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لِرَبِّهِ لَكَنُودٌ ﴿٦﴾

and to this he himself bears witness; (7)

وَإِنَّهُ عَلَىٰ ذَٰلِكَ لَشَهِيدٌ ﴿٧﴾

and truly, he is passionate in his love of wealth.

(8)

وَإِنَّهُ لِحُبِّ الْخَيْرِ لَشَدِيدٌ ﴿٨﴾

Does he not know that when the contents of the graves are scattered about, (9)

﴿٩﴾ أَفَلَا يَعْلَمُ إِذَا بُعْثِرَ مَا فِي الْقُبُورِ ﴿٩﴾

and what is in the breasts is brought out — (10)

وَحُصِّلَ مَا فِي الصُّدُورِ ﴿١٠﴾

that on that day their Lord [will show that He] is fully aware of them? (11)

إِنَّ رَبَّهُم بِهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ لَّخَبِيرٌ ﴿١١﴾

Overview

This *sūrah* is presented in rapid and violent strokes. The text moves swiftly from one scene to another. As we come to the last verse, everything — the verbal expressions, connotations, subject matter and rhythm — settle down in a manner similar to that of a courser reaching the finishing line.

The *sūrah* starts with a scene of war steeds running, snorting, striking sparks of fire with their hoofs, launching a raid at dawn and blazing a trail of dust, cleaving suddenly into the centre of the enemies' camp, taking them by surprise and striking terror and fear in their hearts.

Then follows a picture of the human soul: a scene of ingratitude, ignobleness, greed and extreme miserliness. Immediately after that there is a description of graves laid open and their contents scattered, and the secrets of hearts poured out. Finally the trail of dust, ingratitude and miserliness, the contents of graves and dragged out secrets all come to the same terminus. They come to God and settle down: "On that day their Lord [will show that He] is fully aware of them?" (Verse 11)

The rhythm of the *sūrah* is robust and thunderous, and thus fits well with the dusty and clamorous atmosphere generated by the upturned graves and the secrets violently pulled out of people's breasts. These characteristics of the rhythm are also appropriate to the picture of ingratitude, thanklessness and extreme miserliness. The framework for this picture is provided by a dusty and tumultuous stampede of horses racing and thundering. Thus the frame and the picture are in perfect harmony with each other.

Witness to His Shortcomings

By the snorting coursers, striking sparks of fire, rushing to assault at dawn, raising a trail of dust, storming into any army: man is surely ungrateful to his Lord, and to this he himself bears witness; and truly, he is passionate in his love of wealth. (Verses 1-8)

God swears by the war horses and describes their movements one after the other: running, snorting and neighing. They strike their hoofs against rocks, producing sparks of fire. They wage their attack early at dawn in order to take the enemy by

surprise, producing a trail of dust during the unexpected battle. They swiftly pierce the enemy ranks creating disorder and confusion amongst them. These successive stages were well known to those who were first addressed by the Qur'ān. The fact that God swears by the horses provides an emphatic suggestion that the movement portrayed is a lovable one and that people should respond to it actively. This they do only after realizing how precious it is in God's measure, which is reflected in His paying attention to it. Added to all this is the harmony between this scene and the scenes which are the subject of the divine oath, namely the state of the human soul when it is devoid of faith and its impetus. The Qur'ān draws our attention to this state in order that we may gather all our will-power to combat it. For God is perfectly aware of how deeply it is ingrained in man and what great pressure it exercises on him.

"Man is surely ungrateful to his Lord, and to this he himself bears witness; and truly, he is passionate in his love of wealth." (Verses 68) It is a fact that man reacts with ingratitude to all the bounties of his Lord. He denies the favours which God confers on him. His thanklessness and ingratitude is reflected in a host of actions and verbal statements which will serve as witness against him. Or perhaps, on the Day of Judgement, he may testify against himself, admitting his ingratitude: *"and to this he himself bears witness."* (Verse 7) For on the Day of Judgement he will speak the plain truth even against himself, without contention or excuse. *"And truly, he is passionate in his love of wealth."* (Verse 8)

Man is a passionate self-lover. But he loves only what he imagines to be good for himself: wealth, power and the pleasures of this world. This is his nature unless he has faith which changes his concepts, values and even his concerns. Faith changes his ingratitude to humble thankfulness. It changes his greed and miserliness to benevolence and compassion. It makes him aware of the proper values which are worthy of being the object of ambition and hard competition. Indeed these are much more exalted than money, power and mundane pleasures.

Man without faith is an ignoble creature, having only trivial ambitions and petty concerns. However large his desires, however strong his ambitions and high his objectives may seem, he remains sunk in the cesspool of this earth, confined within the limits of this life, imprisoned in self. He cannot be freed or elevated except by an attachment to a world superior to this earth, extending beyond this life; a world which originates from God who is the First Being and returning to God the Eternal; a world into which this life and the life hereafter converge and which has no end.

Hence, the final touch in the *sūrah* provides the cure for ingratitude, greed and miserliness. It portrays the scene of resurrection in a way that makes man shudder, and puts his love for wealth and indulgence in worldly riches out of his mind, unshackling his soul and setting it free from earthly attachments: *"Does he not know*

that when the contents of the graves are scattered about, and what is in the breasts is brought out – that on that day their Lord [will show that He] is fully aware of them?” (Verses 9-11)

It is a violent and frightening scene in which we witness the ‘scattering about’ of the contents of the graves and the bringing out of closely-guarded secrets. The Arabic terms, *bu`thira* and *huṣṣila*, used here for scattering and pulling are very forceful, suggesting an atmosphere of violence and force.

Does he not know what happens when this will take place? Mere awareness of all this is enough to inspire man to seek an answer and explore every avenue in search of it. For it finally rests where every matter and destiny is settled: *“on that day their Lord [will show that He] is fully aware of them?” (Verse 11)*

So to their Lord is their end. On that day He shows that He knows them and all their affairs and secrets. God certainly knows everything at all times and in all conditions, but knowledge of “that day” has the effect of drawing their attention. It is a knowledge which necessitates reckoning and reward. This implicit meaning is the one underlined here.

All in all this *sūrah* is a swift, vehement and breathless piece, with a sudden terminus of meaning, expression and rhythm all at the same time.