

SŪRAH 92

Al-Layl

(The Night)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

By the night when she lets fall her darkness, (1)

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَىٰ ﴿١﴾

by the day in full splendour, (2)

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّىٰ ﴿٢﴾

by Him who created the male and the female: (3)

وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَىٰ ﴿٣﴾

surely your endeavours have divergent ends. (4)

إِنَّ سَعْيَكُمْ لَشَتَىٰ ﴿٤﴾

As for him who gives and is God-fearing (5)

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَىٰ وَاتَّقَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

and believes in the truth of the ultimate good, (6)

وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

We shall smooth the way to perfect ease. (7)

فَسَنيسِرُهُ لِيَسْرَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

*But as for him who is a miser and deems himself
self-sufficient, (8)*

وَأَمَّا مَنْ نَحِلَ وَأَسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٨﴾

and rejects the truth of the ultimate good, (9)

وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

We shall smooth the way to affliction. (10)

What will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his grave]. (11)

It is for Us to give guidance, (12)

and Ours is the life to come, and this first life. (13)

I warn you, therefore, of the raging fire, (14)

which none shall have to endure but the most hapless wretch, (15)

who denies the truth and turns away. (16)

Kept away from it will be him who is God-fearing, (17)

who gives away his money to purify himself, (18)

not in recompense of any favours done him by anyone. (19)

but only out of a longing for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High. (20)

He shall indeed be well pleased. (21)

فَسُنِّيْـسِرُهُ لِّلْعُسْرَى ﴿١٠﴾

وَمَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّى ﴿١١﴾

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾

وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾

فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَّىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى ﴿١٥﴾

الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّىٰ ﴿١٦﴾

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَى ﴿١٧﴾

الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَىٰ ﴿١٩﴾

إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

Overview

Within a framework of scenes taken from the universe and human nature, this *sūrah* states emphatically the basic facts of action and reward. This issue has diverse aspects: "Surely your endeavours have divergent ends. As for him who gives and is God-

fearing and believes in the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to perfect ease. But as for him who is a miser and deems himself self-sufficient, and rejects the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to affliction.” (Verses 4-10)

The end in the hereafter is also varied, according to the type of action and the direction taken in this life: *“I warn you, therefore, of the raging fire, which none shall have to endure but the most hapless wretch, who denies the truth and turns away. Kept away from it will be him who is God-fearing, who gives away his money to purify himself” (Verses 14-18)*

The subject matter of the *sūrah*, i.e. action and reward, is by nature double directional, so the framework chosen for it at the beginning of the *sūrah* is of dual colouring. It is based on contrasting aspects in the creation of man and the universe: *“By the night when she lets fall her darkness, by the day in full splendour, by Him who created the male and the female.” (Verses 1-3)* This is one form of artistic harmony used extensively in the Qur’ān.

An Oath by Universal Phenomena

“By the night when she lets fall her darkness, by the day in full splendour, by Him who created the male and the female.” (Verses 1-3) God swears by these two of His signs, namely, the night and the day, and describes them by the scene each produces on the horizon: the night as she enshrouds everything with her veil of darkness, and the day as it attains its full splendour. The night covers and conceals the land and all there is on it, and the day brightens up and makes every object apparent and visible. These times contrast in the astrological cycle and in their respective scenes, qualities and effects. God also swears by His creation of all species in two contrasting sexes: *“By Him who created the male and the female.” (Verse 3)* This completes the contrast both in the general atmosphere of the *sūrah* and in the facts it emphasizes.

The night and the day are two general phenomena which carry a certain message with which they inspire human hearts. The human soul is automatically affected by the cycle of the night and its curtain and the day and its splendid brightness. This continuous succession of night and day speaks about the universe, its mysterious secrets and phenomena over which man has no control. It suggests that there is a power which controls time in the universe as if it was a simple wheel. It also tells of never-ending change in the universe.

As one contemplates and meditates upon these phenomena one is bound to conclude that there is an able hand which controls the universe and alternates the night and day in that perfect, unfailing accuracy. One is also bound to conclude that the hand of God also controls the lives of men. He has not created them in vain, and He does not abandon them to lead a life without purpose.

However unbelievers try to drown this reality and divert attention away from it, our hearts remain responsive to this universe. We receive its intimations and ponder over its changes and phenomena. Contemplation and meditation endorse our innate feeling that there is a Controller whose presence is bound to be felt and recognized in spite of all conceited denials.

The same applies to the creation of male and female. In man and mammals it all starts with a living germ settling in a womb, a sperm which unites with a cell. What is the reason then for this difference in outcome? What is it that tells one germ to be a male, and instructs another to be a female? Discovery of the operative factors does not make the matter any different. How do the male factors exist in one case and the female in another? What makes the end product, i.e. division of the species into two sexes, so fitting with the course of life as a whole and a guarantee of its continuity through procreation?

Is it all a coincidence? Even coincidence has a rule which deems it impossible for all those elements to come together accidentally. The only explanation is that there is a Controller in charge who creates the male and the female according to a carefully worked out plan which has a definite objective. There is no room for chance in the order of this universe.

Moreover, the male and female division is not limited to mammalia alone: it is applicable to all animate species, including plants. Singularity and oneness belong only to the Creator who has no parallel whatever.

A Journey with Divergent Ends

God swears by these contrasting aspects of the universe and of man's creation and constitution that the striving of human beings is diverse. Since the roads they follow lead to different ends, their rewards are also diverse. Good is not the same as evil; following right guidance is unlike wrong-doing; and righteousness is different from corruption. Generosity and God-consciousness are unlike hoarding and conceit. The faithful are totally different from those devoid of faith. Variance of ways necessitates variance of destinations: *"Surely your endeavours have divergent ends. As for him who gives and is God-fearing and believes in the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to perfect ease. But as for him who is a miser and deems himself self-sufficient, and rejects the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to affliction. What will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his gravel]." (Verses 4-11)*

"Your endeavours have divergent ends." (Verse 4) These endeavours vary in essence, motives, directions and results. Men have diverse temperaments, environments, concepts and concerns, so much so that every man seems to be a distinct world unto himself living in his own, special planet.

This is a fact, but along with it there is another general fact which applies to all beings and their different worlds. It groups them into two distinct classes and two contrasting positions. It assigns to each its distinctive label: one *“who gives and is God-fearing and believes in the truth of the ultimate good;”* and another *“who is a miser and deems himself self-sufficient, and rejects the truth of the ultimate good.”*

These are the two positions at which disparate souls line up where all diverse striving and divergent ways of life end. Each group has its way in this life smoothed, with all obstructions removed: *“As for him who gives and is God-fearing and believes in the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to perfect ease.”* (Verses 57) He who is charitable, God-fearing and believes in an ideology which is synonymous with ultimate good has indeed done his best to purify himself, seeking right guidance. Hence, he deserves the help and grace which God has, by His own will, committed Himself to provide. For without this grace man finds himself absolutely helpless. He whose path to perfect ease and comfort is made smooth by God achieves something great. What is more, such a person achieves this great goal in this life without difficulty. He lives in ease. Indeed, ease flows from him to all around him. Ease becomes characteristic of his movement, action and handling of all things and situations. Success and quiet contentedness become the distinctive mark of his life in all its details and general aspects. He attains the highest grade of all, in the sense that he joins the Prophet as a recipient of God’s promise to His Messenger: *“We shall smooth your way to perfect ease.”* (87: 8)

But as for him who is a miser and deems himself self-sufficient, and rejects the truth of the ultimate good, We shall smooth the way to affliction. What will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his grave]. (Verses 8-11)

He who sacrifices nothing of himself or his wealth, professes that he is in no need of His Lord or His guidance and disbelieves in His message and religion, makes himself vulnerable to evil. For so doing he deserves that everything should be made hard for him. Hence, God makes easy his path to affliction, and withholds from him all kinds of help. God makes every stride he takes really hard, drives him away from the path of right guidance, and leaves him to traverse the valleys of misery, although he may imagine himself to be taking the road to success. How greatly mistaken he is! He loses balance: thus he tries to avoid falling only to go down heavily, and finds himself further away from the path set by God, deprived of His pleasure. When he eventually goes down to his grave, he can make no use of the wealth he has hoarded. It is that very wealth that has caused him to imagine himself in no need of God or His guidance. *“What will his wealth avail him when he goes down [to his grave].”* (Verse 11) Facilitating evil and sin is the same as facilitating the way to affliction, even though the sinful may be successful and prosperous in this life. For is there any

affliction worse than hell? Indeed, hell is affliction itself?

Thus the first part of the *sūrah* ends having made clear that there are only two ways for all mankind at all times and in all places. All humanity forms into two parties, under two headings, however numerous their colours and forms may be.

And Different Ends

The second part states the fate of each group. It emphasizes firstly that the end and reward of each group is fair and inevitable, for guidance has been provided and warnings have been issued: *"It is for Us to give guidance, and Ours is the life to come, and this first life. I warn you, therefore, of the raging fire, which none shall have to endure but the most hapless wretch, who denies the truth and turns away. Kept away from it will be him who is God-fearing, who gives away his money to purify himself not in recompense of any favours done him by anyone but only out of a longing for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High. He shall indeed be well pleased."* (Verses 12-21)

One aspect of God's grace and mercy to His servants is that He has taken it upon Himself to provide clear guidance that is readily acceptable to human nature, and to explain it as well through His messages and messengers, and by means of the signs He has provided. Thus, no one has a valid argument for deviation, and no one will suffer injustice: *"It is for Us to give guidance."* (Verse 12) Then follows a straightforward statement of the essence of power which has control over man and everything around him, from which he can have no shelter: *"and Ours is the life to come, and this first life."* (Verse 13)

By way of elaboration on the two facts just mentioned, namely, God's provision of guidance and that to Him belongs this life and the hereafter, i.e. the realms of action and reward, there is a reminder to us that He has given clear warning to us all: *"I warn you, therefore, of the raging fire."* (Verse 14) It is only the most wretched of mankind who are thrown in this fire. Indeed there is no wretchedness worse than suffering in hell: *"None shall have to endure [it] but the most hapless wretch."* (Verse 15) We then have a definition of such a wretched person. It is he *"who denies the truth and turns away."* (Verse 16) He denies this message and turns away from divine guidance. He does not answer his Lord's beckoning so that He may guide him as He has promised any who come towards Him with an open mind.

"Kept away from it will be him who is God-fearing." (Verse 17) A person who fears God will be the happiest, in contrast to the most hapless wretch. The *sūrah* similarly gives a definition of such a person. He is the one *"who gives away his money to purify himself"* (Verse 18) He has no vain motive or need to satisfy any snobbery. He spends it voluntarily not out of any indebtedness, seeking gratitude from no one. His only objective is the pleasure of his Lord, the Most Exalted: *"Not in recompense of any*

favours done him by anyone but only out of a longing for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High.” (Verses 19-20)

What can the righteous person expect in return for spending his money in self-purification, and for seeking the pleasure of his Lord? The reward which the Qur’ān states is indeed surprising, and very unfamiliar: *“He shall indeed be well pleased.”* (Verse 21) It is the pleasure that fills the believer’s heart and soul, animates everything in his life, and radiates to all around him. What a reward, and what grace! *“He shall indeed be well pleased.”* He will be satisfied with his religion, his Lord and his destiny. He will be content with whatever befalls him of comfort or discomfort, and whether he is poor or wealthy. He will be free of anxiety and hard feelings. He does not worry about his burden being too heavy or his goal being too far. This satisfaction is in itself a reward, great beyond description. Only the person who sacrifices himself and his wealth for it and who seeks to purify himself and to win God’s pleasure deserves this reward. It is God alone who can pour such a reward into those hearts which submit to Him with all sincerity and pure devotion. Having paid the price, the believer *“shall indeed be well pleased.”* At this point, the reward comes as a surprise, but it is a surprise awaited by the one who attains the standard of the righteous, whose main qualifications are spending for self-purification and seeking God’s pleasure. Such a person will be well pleased and well satisfied.