

## CHAPTER 86

### *Al-Tāriq: The Comer By Night*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 17 verses)

This chapter states how great were the difficulties which the Prophet had before him in bringing light to a benighted world, and it is for this reason that he is called *The Comer by Night* in the first verse, this description giving the chapter its name. He appeared at a time of total darkness and is compared to one who stood in need of knocking at the doors which were shut against him. But he is given the comfort that a spiritual resurrection will be brought about. Before his advent the whole world was submerged in a gulf of ignorance, and the night had lasted for fully six hundred years, and it was no easy task to awaken the world from such a long and deep sleep. That the Holy Prophet was acquainted with the difficulties of his task is borne out by this chapter, which is classed among the earliest revelations. The reference to plans in vv. 15, 16 does not show that that part was revealed later, for while it is true that plans against the Prophet's life were formed very early, the reference in these verses may be prophetic.

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent,  
the Merciful.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

1 By the heaven and the Comer by  
night!

وَالسَّمَاءِ وَالطَّارِقِ ۝

2 And what will make thee know  
what the Comer by night is?

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الطَّارِقُ ۝

3 The star of piercing brightness<sup>a</sup>—

النَّجْمِ الثَّاقِبِ ۝

3a. *Tāriq* (from *ṭarq*, striking a thing) originally signifies a comer by night, because one who comes by night finds the doors shut, and knocking at the doors becomes necessary (N). The Comer by night is here the Holy Prophet; the revelation of the Qur'ān is also spoken of as taking place on a blessed night (44:3; 97:1). The reason is that the Holy Prophet appeared when total darkness spread on the earth, and no one ever stood more in need of knocking at the doors which were shut against him and fastened with strong bolts. It is noteworthy that Jesus compares his advent to that of a thief: "If the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, ... Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of

4 There is not a soul but over it is a keeper.<sup>a</sup>

إِنْ كُلُّ نَفْسٍ لَّمَّا عَلَيْهَا حَافِظٌ ۝

5 So let man consider of what he is created.

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ مِمَّ خُلِقَ ۝

6 He is created of water pouring forth,

خُلِقَ مِنْ مَّاءٍ دَافِقٍ ۝

7 Coming from between the back and the ribs.<sup>a</sup>

يَخْرُجُ مِنْ بَيْنِ الصُّلْبِ وَالتَّرَائِبِ ۝

8 Surely He is Able to return him (to life).

إِنَّهُ عَلَى رَجْعِهِ لَقَادِرٌ ۝

9 On the day when hidden things are manifested,<sup>a</sup>

يَوْمَ تُبْلَى السَّرَائِرُ ۝

10 Then he will have no strength nor helper.

فَمَا لَهُ مِنْ قُوَّةٍ وَلَا نَاصِرٍ ۝

11 By the cloud giving rain,<sup>a</sup>

وَالسَّمَاءِ ذَاتِ الرَّجْعِ ۝

12 And the earth opening (with herbage)!

وَالْأَرْضِ ذَاتِ الصَّدْعِ ۝

man cometh” (Matt. 24:43, 44). It may be added that *Tāriq* is also the name given to the *morning star* (LL), because it comes at the end of the night. But in that sense too the word is applicable to a *great man* or a *chief*, as in the saying of Hind on the day of Uhud: “We are the daughters of the morning-star” (Ar., *al-tāriq*) where the meaning is that we are the daughters of a *chief*, “likening him to the star in elevation” (LL).

In the third verse *the Comer by night* is called *the star of piercing brightness*, indicating that the Comer by night is a star of such resplendent brightness that all darkness will be dispelled before him.

4a. Though the words are general, and signify that the deeds done by man are guarded so that he cannot escape their consequences, there is also a comfort for the Holy Prophet here that his opponents will not be able to harm him and that in time they will meet their doom. This is made clear at the end of the chapter.

7a. *Water pouring forth* means the *sperma genitale*. The expression *between the back and the ribs* is a euphemism. A similar expression occurs in a saying of the Holy Prophet: “Whoever gives me a guarantee as to that which is between his two jaws and that which is between his two feet, I guarantee for him paradise” (Msh. 24:10), the significance being the control of the tongue and the control of lust.

9a. Note this description of the day of Resurrection. The hidden things are the consequences of one’s good or evil deeds, which will be made palpably manifest in the shape of Gardens and fruits or chains and Fire.

11a. *Raj’* (the inf. noun of *raja’a*, *he returned*) means *rain*, because God returns it time after time, or because the water is raised from the sea and then returned to the earth, by the *samā’* here being meant the *cloud* (LL).

13 Surely it is a decisive word,<sup>a</sup>

إِنَّهُ لَقَوْلٌ فَصْلٌ ﴿١٣﴾

14 And it is not a joke.

وَمَا هُوَ بِالْهَزْلِ ﴿١٤﴾

15 Surely they plan a plan,

إِنَّهُمْ يَكِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ﴿١٥﴾

16 And I plan a plan.

وَأَكِيدُ كَيْدًا ﴿١٦﴾

17 So grant the disbelievers a respite — let them alone for a while.<sup>a</sup>

فَمَهِّلِ الْكٰفِرِينَ اَمْهَلْهُمْ رُوٰدًا ﴿١٧﴾

13a. The *decisive word* is the Holy Qur'ān. Just as when rain comes down, the earth produces vegetation, so the coming of the Divine revelation is bound to raise a dead nation to life, and no efforts against it would hamper its progress. There is also a reference to the doom of the disbelievers in v. 10, in the words *he will have no strength nor helper*.

17a. Whatever doubt there may be as to the significance of this chapter, it is dispelled by the last three verses, which speak of the plans of the opponents to exterminate Truth. The plan of God could not be frustrated, and the earth will receive life, but the Prophet is told to wait for a while. The same is true today.



## CHAPTER 87

### *Al-A 'lā: The Most High*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 19 verses)

The title of this chapter is taken from the injunction to the Prophet to glorify his *Rabb*, his nourisher to perfection, *The Most High*, the indication clearly being that the Prophet himself would be raised to the highest position. See further 1a. The reference to the scriptures of Abraham and Moses in the concluding verse is to show not only that the Holy Qur'ān agrees with previous scriptures in essential principles, but also that those scriptures contain prophecies of the Holy Prophet's advent. The chapter is one of the earliest revelations.

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent,  
the Merciful.

- 1 Glorify the name of thy Lord, the Most High!<sup>a</sup>
- 2 Who creates, then makes complete,
- 3 And Who measures, then guides,<sup>a</sup>

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى  
الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى  
وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى

1a. There is here in fact a message of great importance, not only for the Prophet, that he would be raised to the highest place to which man can rise, but for every man that, through the glorification of God, he can rise to the highest place to which he is capable of rising. Hence the order to glorify *The Most High* is immediately followed by the words that He not only creates and makes complete but has also ordained a measure for everyone and He guides everyone to this goal. The glorification of God is thus here stated to be the means of raising man to the highest place to which he is capable of rising. It should be noted that the most important *dhikr* in prayer is *subhāna rabbiya-l-A 'lā*, which is repeated again and again when man is in a state of prostration and assumes the humblest position of which he is capable, thus showing that it is by humbling himself to his utmost before God that he can rise to the highest place.

3a. Vv. 2 and 3 speak of four Divine acts, *khalq* or *creation*, *taswiyah* or *completion*, *taqdīr* or *measuring*, and *hidāyah* or *guiding*. Everything in this universe is subject to these four laws, and so is man. He is created from a very humble and low beginning, his first condition being that of a life-germ which cannot be seen. Then it develops gradually to

- 4 And Who brings forth herbage, وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى ۝٤
- 5 Then makes it dried up, dust-coloured.<sup>a</sup> فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى ۝٥
- 6 We shall make thee recite so thou shalt not forget — سَنُقْرِئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى ۝٦
- 7 Except what Allāh please.<sup>a</sup> Surely He knows the manifest, and what is hidden. إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى ۝٧
- 8 And We shall make thy way smooth to a state of ease.<sup>a</sup> وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى ۝٨
- 9 So remind, reminding indeed profits.<sup>a</sup> فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّمُنَّ بِالذِّكْرِى ۝٩
- 10 He who fears will mind, سَيَذَكِّرْكَ مَنْ يُخَشَى ۝١٠
- 11 And the most unfortunate one will avoid it, وَيَتَجَدَّبُهَا الْأَشْقَى ۝١١
- 12 Who will burn in the great Fire. الَّذِي يَصَلَّى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى ۝١٢
- 13 Then therein he will neither live nor die.<sup>a</sup> ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى ۝١٣

complete human form. This is the subject-matter of v. 2. The third verse then lays down that everything in creation is held under control: it is made according to a measure and its progress lies along a certain line; and that it is God Who guides it or makes it walk along that line. The whole is in special reference to the spiritual advancement of man through Divine glorification.

5a. This is to show that herbage, too, receives life but there is no higher purpose in its creation beyond the fact that it serves to sustain man; so it dries up. But there is a higher purpose in the creation of man; and it is to fulfil that purpose that God sends His revelation, which is spoken of in the next verse.

7a. Man is apt to forget, and the Prophet was a human being and he too was apt to forget. But he never forgot a word of the Divine revelation which came to him. He sometimes received long chapters, such as the sixth, which runs into twenty sections, on a single occasion, but the whole was so deeply impressed on his mind that once it was read out to him by the Holy Spirit, he repeated it without forgetting a word of it. Still more difficult was his task when chapters were received piecemeal. The reference in *what Allāh please* is not to Divine revelation which the Prophet never forgot, but to other things which he forgot as a human being.

8a. The words predict the Prophet's triumph and the removal of the distress in which Islām was.

9a. For *in*, meaning *qad*, or *indeed*, see LL, which quotes numerous instances from the Qur'ān as well as from Arabic prose and poetry.

13a. There is no *life* in hell, for life is only for the righteous; neither is there *death*, because death signifies a state of complete rest.

14 He indeed is successful who purifies himself,

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى ۝

15 And remembers the name of his Lord, then prays.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى ۝

16 But, you prefer the life of this world,

بَلْ تُوْشِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ۝

17 While the Hereafter is better and more lasting.

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى ۝

18 Surely this is in the earlier scriptures,

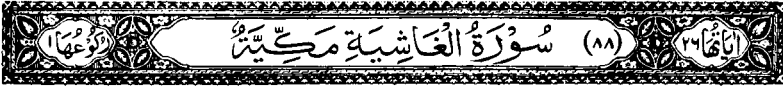
إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى ۝

19 The scriptures of Abraham and Moses.<sup>a</sup>

صُّحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَ مُوسَى ۝

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19a. The preference of the good of the Hereafter to the transitory advantage of this life is the one great truth preached by all prophets. There is also a reference here to the prophecies concerning the Holy Prophet which are to be found in the revelation granted respectively to Abraham and to Moses; see 2:124a and 2:41a. Or, the essential principles of religion are meant, which are common to all the great religions.



## CHAPTER 88

### *Al-Ghāshiyah: The Overwhelming Event*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 26 verses)

*The Overwhelming Event*, whose mention in the first verse supplies a name to this chapter, is the doom of the opponents in this life and their punishment in the Hereafter. The date of revelation is placed about the fourth year of the Prophet's call.

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent, the Merciful.

- 1 Has there come to thee the news of the Overwhelming Event?<sup>a</sup>
- 2 Faces on that day will be downcast,
- 3 Labouring, toiling,
- 4 Entering burning Fire,
- 5 Made to drink from a boiling spring.
- 6 They will have no food but of thorns,
- 7 Neither nourishing nor satisfying hunger.
- 8 Faces on that day will be happy,
- 9 Glad for their striving,
- 10 In a lofty Garden,

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ ۝  
 هَلْ اٰتٰكَ خَبْرُ الْغَاشِيَةِ ۝  
 وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ خَاشِعَةٌ ۝  
 عَامِلَةٌ تَاَصْبَةٌ ۝  
 تَصْلٰى نَارًا حَامِيَةً ۝  
 تُسْقٰى مِنْ عَيْنٍ اٰنِيَةٍ ۝  
 لَيْسَ لَهُمْ طَعَامٌ اِلَّا مِنْ صَرِيْعٍ ۝  
 اِلَّا يُسِيْنُ وَلَا يُغْنٰى مِنْ جُوْعٍ ۝  
 وُجُوهُ يَوْمَئِذٍ سَاعِمَةٌ ۝  
 لَسَعِبَهَا سَرٰ اِضْيِئَةٌ ۝  
 فِيْ جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ ۝

1a. The Overwhelming Event is no doubt the Resurrection, but the overwhelming event of this life is the doom of the opponents of Truth. The description of the two parties that follows applies to an utterly discomfited and disappointed enemy and to the faithful in the hour of their triumph.

11 Wherein thou wilt hear no vain talk.

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لِأَغْيَةٍ ۝١١

12 Therein is a fountain flowing.

فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ ۝١٢

13 Therein are thrones raised high,

فِيهَا سُرُرٌ مَّرُوعَةٌ ۝١٣

14 And drinking-cups ready placed,

وَ أَكْوَابٌ مَّوْضُوعَةٌ ۝١٤

15 And cushions set in rows,

وَ تَسَارِيفٌ مِّصْفُوفَةٌ ۝١٥

16 And carpets spread out.

وَ تَنَارَاتِي مَبْتُوثَةٌ ۝١٦

17 See they not the clouds,<sup>a</sup> how they are created?

أَفَلَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَى الْإِبِلِ كَيْفَ

18 And the heaven, how it is raised high?

خُلِقَتْ ۝١٧

19 And the mountains, how they are fixed?

وَأِلَى السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ رُفِعَتْ ۝١٨

20 And the earth, how it is spread out?

وَأِلَى الْجِبَالِ كَيْفَ نُصِبَتْ ۝١٩

21 So remind. Thou art only one to remind.

وَأِلَى الْأَرْضِ كَيْفَ سُطِحَتْ ۝٢٠

22 Thou art not a warder over them —

فَذَكِّرْهُ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ مُذَكِّرٌ ۝٢١

23 But whoever turns back and disbelieves,

لَسْتُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِمُصَيِّرٍ ۝٢٢

24 Allāh will chastise him with the greatest chastisement.

إِلَّا مَنْ تَوَلَّى وَكَفَرَ ۝٢٣

25 Surely to Us is their return.

فَيُعَذِّبُهُ اللَّهُ الْعَذَابَ الْأَكْبَرَ ۝٢٤

26 Then it is for Us to call them to account.

إِنَّ إِلَيْنَا إِيَابَهُمْ ۝٢٥

ثُمَّ إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا حِسَابَهُمْ ۝٢٦

17a. *Ibil* means *clouds that bear the water for rain* (T, LL). As this significance suits the context better, I adopt this instead of the usual rendering, the *camels*, the mention of the clouds along with the heavens, where they exist, and with mountains, which cool the vapours so that they pour down water, and the earth, which benefits by that water, being in accordance with what is said in many other places.





## CHAPTER 89

### *Al-Fajr: The Daybreak*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 30 verses)

The important *Daybreak* which gives its name to this chapter is the first morning of the month of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*, or the month of pilgrimage, because pilgrimage gave Makkah great importance as a trade centre and made its residents enjoy a life of ease, the trade of the whole country being brought to their very doors. A warning is given here of the punishment that must overtake the city, as punishment overtook 'Ad, Thamūd and others. It is one of the earliest revelations.

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent,  
the Merciful.

- 1 By the daybreak!
- 2 And the ten nights!
- 3 And the even and the odd!
- 4 And the night when it departs!<sup>a</sup>
- 5 Truly in this is an oath for men of understanding.

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 وَالْفَجْرِ  
 وَلَيَالٍ عَشْرٍ  
 وَالشَّفْعِ وَالْوَتْرِ  
 وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَسْرِ  
 هَلْ فِي ذَلِكَ قَسَمٌ لِذِي حِجْرٍ

4a. There is a great variety of opinion as to what is meant by *the daybreak*, *the ten nights*, and *the even and the odd*. I think the reference is to the importance attached to Makkah (which is mentioned as *The City* in the commencement of the next chapter), because it was not only the spiritual centre of Arabia, but had also become its trade centre, on account of pilgrims resorting to it from all parts of Arabia. *The daybreak* would thus signify the daybreak of the first of the month of *Dhu-l-Hijjah*; *the ten nights* would stand for the first ten nights of that month, the tenth day being the day of sacrifices. According to another interpretation, the ten nights are the last ten nights of the month of Ramaḍān, in which occurs the *lailat al-qadr*. By the *even* and the *odd*, according to a ḥadīth, is meant the prayer which consists of even and odd rak'ahs (Tr. 44:89). Others however say that by *shaf'* is meant the creation, which consists all of pairs (51:49) and by *watr* (odd) is meant the Creator (RM). The whole is a warning to the people of Makkah that, if they do not heed the warning, their end will be the same as the end of previous rejectors of truth.

- 6 Hast thou not considered how thy Lord dealt with 'Ād,  
 7 (Of) Iram,<sup>a</sup> having lofty buildings,  
 8 The like of which were not created in the land;  
 9 And (with) Thamūd, who hewed out rocks in the valley;  
 10 And Pharaoh, the lord of hosts,  
 11 Who exceeded limits in the cities,  
 12 And made great mischief therein?  
 13 So thy Lord poured on them a portion of chastisement.<sup>a</sup>  
 14 Surely thy Lord is Watchful;  
 15 As for man, when his Lord tries him, then gives him honour and favours him, he says: My Lord honours me.  
 16 But when He tries him, then straitens to him his subsistence, he says: My Lord has disgraced me.<sup>a</sup>  
 17 Nay, but you honour not the orphan,  
 18 Nor do you urge one another to feed the poor,<sup>a</sup>

أَلَمْ تَرَ كَيْفَ فَعَلَ رَبُّكَ بِعَادٍ ﴿٦﴾  
 إِرَامَ ذَاتِ الْإِصْمَادِ ﴿٧﴾  
 الَّتِي لَمْ يُخْلَقْ مِثْلُهَا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿٨﴾  
 وَثَمُودَ الَّذِينَ جَابُوا الصَّخْرَ بِالْوَادِ ﴿٩﴾  
 وَفِرْعَوْنَ ذِي الْأَوْتَادِ ﴿١٠﴾  
 الَّذِينَ طَعَوْا فِي الْبِلَادِ ﴿١١﴾  
 فَأَكْثَرُوا فِيهَا الْفُسَادَ ﴿١٢﴾  
 فَصَبَّ عَلَيْهِمْ رَبُّكَ سَوْطَ عَذَابٍ ﴿١٣﴾  
 إِنَّ رَبَّكَ لَبِالْأَيْرُسَادِ ﴿١٤﴾  
 فَأَمَّا الْإِنْسَانُ إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ رَبُّهُ ﴿١٥﴾  
 فَأَكْرَمَهُ وَنَعَّمَهُ فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَكْرَمَنِ ﴿١٦﴾  
 وَأَمَّا إِذَا مَا ابْتَلَاهُ فَقَدَرَ عَلَيْهِ رِزْقَهُ ﴿١٧﴾  
 فَيَقُولُ رَبِّي أَهَانَنِ ﴿١٨﴾  
 كَلَّا بَلْ لَا تَكْرُمُونَ الْيَتِيمَ ﴿١٩﴾  
 وَلَا تَحْضُونَ عَلَى طَعَامِ الْيُسُكِينِ ﴿٢٠﴾

7a. *Iram* or *Aram* was, according to one account, the name of the grandfather of 'Ād, from whom the tribe took its name, and according to another, the name of a city in which it lived. The 'Ād are here called *dhāt al-'imād*, the word 'imād meaning *lofty buildings, supported by columns*. But *dhāt al-'imād* may also mean *possessing tallness* (LL).

13a. *Sawt* signifies primarily *the mixing of one thing with another* (R). It then comes to signify *a whip*, but here it means *a portion* or *a share* (LL), the significance being that they received a portion of the punishment here, greater punishment overtaking them after death.

16a. As a general statement, it means that God tries man both by granting him affluence, in which case he is puffed up with pride and says that his wealth is an indication that God honours him, and by poverty, in which case he thinks that God has disgraced him. But wealth is no indication of a man's honour.

18a. Vv. 17 and 18, as also the 19th, show how the Prophet felt for the orphans, the poor and the weak, so much so that he warns his powerful and wealthy opponents that their indifference to the orphans and the poor and their injustice to the weak will bring

- 19 And you devour heritage, devouring all,<sup>a</sup> وَتَأْكُلُونَ التُّرَاثَ أَكْلًا لَمًّا ۝
- 20 And you love wealth with exceeding love. وَتُحِبُّونَ الْمَالَ حُبًّا جَمًّا ۝
- 21 Nay, when the earth is made to crumble to pieces, كَلَّا إِذَا دَاكَّتِ الْأَرْضُ دَكًّا دَكًّا ۝
- 22 And thy Lord comes with the angels, ranks on ranks; وَجَاءَ رَبُّكَ وَالْمَلَكُ صَفًّا صَفًّا ۝
- 23 And hell is made to appear that day.<sup>a</sup> On that day man will be mindful, and of what use will being mindful be then?<sup>b</sup> وَجَاءَ يَوْمَئِذٍ يَوْمَئِذٍ بِجَهَنَّمَ لَا يَوْمَئِذٍ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ وَأَنَّى لَهُ الذِّكْرَى ۝ يَقُولُ يَا لَيْتَنِي قَدَّمْتُ لِحَيَاتِي ۝ فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُعَدِّبُ عَذَابَهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ وَلَا يُوثِقُ وَثَاقَهُ أَحَدٌ ۝ يَا أَيَّتُهَا النَّفْسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ ۝ ارْجِعِي إِلَىٰ رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةً مَرْضِيَّةً ۝ فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي ۝ وَادْخُلِي جَنَّاتِي ۝
- 24 He will say: O would that I had sent before for (this) my life!
- 25 But none can punish as He will punish on that day.
- 26 And none can bind as He will bind on that day.<sup>a</sup>
- 27 O soul that art at rest,
- 28 Return to thy Lord, well-pleased, well-pleasing,
- 29 So enter among My servants,
- 30 And enter My Garden!<sup>a</sup>

down upon them the Divine judgment, which will shatter their power. As he was in the beginning so he remained to the end, a true well-wisher of the weak and the oppressed. And when he became the head of a State, he provided for the orphans and the poor out of the public funds, thus forestalling the Poor Laws and Old Age Pensions by thirteen centuries; see 9:60.

19a. Among the Arabs, women and young children were not allowed to have any share in the inheritance, because they could not fight the enemy.

23a. The crumbling to pieces of the earth, the coming of the Lord with angels, and the appearance of hell, refer equally to the punishment in this life as to that in the next.

23b. Being “mindful” is of no use to a man when punishment overtakes him.

26a. These words indicate the severity of the punishment.

30a. The concluding verses of this chapter refer to the highest stage of the spiritual development of man, the stage in which he *rests contented* with his Lord, and finds his

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quietude, his happiness, and his delight in Him. This is the heavenly life. It has already been noted — see 12:53a and introductory note to ch. 75 — that the Holy Qur'ān recognizes three stages in spiritual development, the *ammārah* or the animal stage (12:53), the *lawwāmah* or the human stage (75:2), and the *muṭma'innah* or the heavenly or spiritual stage, mentioned here. At this last stage, the pure and perfect sincerity, truth and righteousness of a person are rewarded by Almighty God by granting him a heaven on this earth. All others look to a prospective paradise, but he enters paradise in this very life. It is at this stage, too, that a person realizes that the prayers and worship which at first appeared to him as a burden are really a nourishment on which the growth of his soul depends, and that this is the basis of his spiritual development. The spirit — which in the second stage, although blaming a man for the impurities of life, is yet powerless to resist the evil tendencies, or to blot them out wholly, and too infirm to establish a man upon the principle of virtue with firmness — now reaches a stage of development in which its efforts are crowned with success. The state of struggle with sinful propensities passes away, an entire change comes over the nature of man, and the former habits undergo a complete transformation.



## CHAPTER 90

### *Al-Balad: The City*

(REVEALED AT MAKKAH: 20 verses)

*The City* spoken of in the first verse, from which this chapter receives its name, is Makkah — the City which in the last chapter has been warned of punishment overtaking it as it had overtaken former nations. But it was to be the spiritual centre of the whole world, and there is a clear prophecy in the second verse that a time would come when, not only would the Muslims not be persecuted in that city, but they would even enjoy freedom from all obligations in it — the reference being to the establishment of their rule therein. By general consent the chapter is regarded as one of the very earliest revelations; it is assigned to the first year of the Call.

In the name of Allāh, the Beneficent,  
the Merciful.

1 Nay, I call to witness this City!<sup>a</sup>

2 And thou wilt be made free from  
obligation in this City!<sup>a</sup> —

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

لَا أُقْسِمُ بِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ ۚ

وَ أَنْتَ حِلٌّ لِهَذَا الْبَلَدِ ۚ

1a. By *this City* is meant Makkah (B. 65:xc). Thousands of years before, Abraham had prayed for a city to be raised in that wilderness where he had left one branch of his descendants (14:37), and for a Prophet to be raised among them (2:129); see 2:124a.

2a. The words are parenthetical. *Hill* is an infinitive noun, and signifies the same as *ḥalāl*, meaning *in a state which is the opposite of ḥarām*, and hence it signifies *free from obligation or responsibility with respect to a thing*. English translators have generally adopted a different translation: *And thou a dweller in this land* (Palmer); and *thou reside-st in this territory* (Sale); *the soil on which thou dost dwell* (Rodwell); which is wrong, because *ḥalla*, as meaning *nazala*, i.e., *he alighted, or abode, or lodged in a place*, has its infinitive *ḥulūl* or *ḥull* (LL) and not *ḥill*, which is the word occurring here. Some commentators have also been led into this error. The significance which I adopt is in accordance with the true significance of the word *ḥill*, for you say *anta fī ḥill-in min kadhā*, meaning *thou art free from obligation or responsibility with respect to such a thing*. The statement in this case is prophetic, indicating that the Prophet would be made free from obligation in respect to the sacredness of the territory of Makkah, being allowed to enter it by force

3 And the begetter and he whom he begot!<sup>a</sup>

وَوَالِدٍ وَمَا وَلَدٌ ۝

4 We have certainly created man to face difficulties.<sup>a</sup>

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي كَبَدٍ ۝

5 Does he think that no one has power over him?<sup>a</sup>

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَنْ يُقَدِّرَ عَلَيْهِ أَحَدٌ ۝

6 He will say: I have wasted much wealth.<sup>a</sup>

يَقُولُ أَهْلَكْتُ مَالًا لُبَدًا ۝

7 Does he think that no one sees him?

أَيَحْسَبُ أَنْ لَمْ يَرَكَ أَحَدٌ ۝

8 Have We not given him two eyes,

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ ۝

9 And a tongue and two lips,

وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ ۝

10 And pointed out to him the two conspicuous ways?<sup>a</sup>

وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ ۝

(Bd), as he did at the conquest of Makkah, to which, in fact, the words refer. There is also a saying of the Holy Prophet in support of this: "And even I was made free from obligation with respect to it only for an hour of the day" (B. 64:55).

3a. The *great begetter* is none other than Abraham, the progenitor of the Arabs, and by *he whom he begot* is meant either Ishmael, who assisted Abraham in raising the foundations of the Sacred House at Makkah, or the Holy Prophet himself, who was the object of Abraham's prayer.

4a. *Kabad* means *distress* or *difficulty*. We are here told that the advancement of man, *even physically*, lies along a path of hard struggle. Every conquest that man has made has been the result of suffering on his part. The same is the case in the sphere of the spiritual advancement of man. Abraham suffered great hardships in the cause of Truth; and so must the Prophet now, in order to bring about a spiritual awakening in the world. It is only a long and hard struggle on the part of certain benefactors of humanity that makes man's advancement possible, physically as well as spiritually.

5a. The opponents of Truth, having great power in their hands, never think of the mighty power of God. It is to this that attention is drawn here.

6a. The reference is apparently to the ultimate state of the opponents when, after spending all their wealth for the extermination of Truth, they would find that the cause of Truth was triumphant, and would then say that they really wasted their wealth in a wrong cause. Elsewhere we have: "Surely those who disbelieve spend their wealth to hinder (people) from the way of Allāh. So they will go on spending it, then it will be to them a regret, then they will be overcome" (8:36).

10a. *Najd* (from *najada*, he *overcame* or *conquered*) means *high* or *elevated land*, or also an *elevated* or *conspicuous road* or *way* (LL). *Najdain* or the *two conspicuous ways* are here spoken of as indicating *the ways of truth and falsehood, of truth and falsehood in word or good and evil in deed* (R). The *two eyes* (v. 8) enable him to distinguish good from evil, while with *the tongue and the lips* (v. 9) he can ask, if he cannot see for himself.

11 But he attempts not the uphill road;<sup>a</sup>

فَلَا اتَّخَذَ الْعُقَبَةَ ۝

12 And what will make thee comprehend what the uphill road is?

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا الْعُقَبَةُ ۝

13 (It is) to free a slave,

فَأَنْتَ سَرَقَبَةٌ ۝

14 Or to feed in a day of hunger

أَوْ إِطْعَمٌ فِي يَوْمٍ ذِي مَسْغَبَةٍ ۝

15 An orphan nearly related,

يَتِيمًا ذَا مَقْرَبَةٍ ۝

16 Or the poor man lying in the dust.<sup>a</sup>

أَوْ مَسْكِينًا ذَا مَتْرَبَةٍ ۝

17 Then he is of those who believe and exhort one another to patience, and exhort one another to mercy.

ثُمَّ كَانَ مِنَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَتَوَاصَوْا  
بِالصَّبْرِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالرِّحْمَةِ ۝

18 These are the people of the right hand.

أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ ۝

19 And those who disbelieve in Our messages, they are the people of the left hand.

وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا بِآيَاتِنَا هُمْ أَصْحَابُ  
السُّعْيَةِ ۝

20 On them is Fire closed over.

عَلَيْهِمْ نَارٌ مُّوَصَّدَةٌ ۝

11a. 'Aqabah means a mountain road or a road in the upper part of a mountain or a long mountain that lies across the way — metaphorically a difficult affair (LL).

16a. Note the tone of these earliest revelations. The service of humanity (along with the service of God) is the one topic. The doing of good to the oppressed, the poor, and the orphans is called an uphill road or a high mountain because of the difficulty of doing it. The constant reference to the helping of the poor and the orphans and the setting free of slaves brings to light the real character of the Prophet, who is described by one knowing him most intimately as *one who earned for those who had no means themselves* (B. 1:1). No religion has laid so much stress on the uplift of the poor and the distressed as Islām, and it is the only religion which enjoins the duty of granting freedom to slaves, and the Holy Prophet Muḥammad is the only founder of a religion who showed the noble example of freeing all slaves that he ever had and helping in the freedom of others. Yet prejudiced writers blame Islām for not taking any steps to uproot slavery. There is even a suggestion that such precepts regarding the nobility of liberating slaves as exist in the Makkan chapters were abrogated by later revelation (see Wherry), a preposterous statement in view of the plain directions given in 9:60 (the latest revelation) to the State itself to spend a part of the public funds in purchasing freedom for slaves.