

# SŪRAH 78

## Al-Naba'

(The Tiding)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

*About what are they asking? (1)*

*About the fateful tiding (2)*

*on which they dispute. (3)*

*No indeed; they shall certainly know! (4)*

*Again, no indeed; they shall certainly know! (5)*

*Have We not spread and levelled the earth, (6)*

*and made the mountains as pegs? (7)*

*We created you in pairs, (8)*

*and made your sleep a cessation of activity. (9)*

*We made the night a mantle, (10)*

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿١﴾

عَنِ النَّبَاِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢﴾

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٣﴾

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٥﴾

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهْدًا ﴿٦﴾

وَالْجِبَالَ أَوْتَادًا ﴿٧﴾

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ﴿٨﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا ﴿٩﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا ﴿١٠﴾

and appointed the day for gaining a livelihood. (11)

We built above you seven mighty ones, (12)

and placed therein a blazing lamp. (13)

We send down out of the rain- clouds water in abundance, (14)

by which We bring forth grain and varied plants, (15)

and gardens thick with trees. (16)

Fixed is the Day of Decision. (17)

On that day the Trumpet is blown and you shall come in crowds, (18)

and heaven is opened, and becomes gates, (19)

and the mountains are made to move away, and seem to have been a mirage. (20)

Hell stands as a vigilant watch guard, (21)

a home for the tyrants and the transgressors. (22)

Therein they shall abide for ages, (23)

tasting neither coolness nor any drink, (24)

except boiling fluid and decaying filth: (25)

وَجَعَلْنَا الْيَوْمَ مَعَاشًا ﴿١١﴾

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا ﴿١٢﴾

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَّاجًا ﴿١٣﴾

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَّاجًا ﴿١٤﴾

لِنُخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًّا وَنَبَاتًا ﴿١٥﴾

وَجَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا ﴿١٦﴾

إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا ﴿١٧﴾

يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْوَاجًا ﴿١٨﴾

﴿١٨﴾

وَفُتِحَتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا ﴿١٩﴾

وَسُيِّرَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا ﴿٢٠﴾

إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا ﴿٢١﴾

لِلطَّيِّغِينَ مَغَابًا ﴿٢٢﴾

لِيَبْثِينَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا ﴿٢٣﴾

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَلَا شَرَابًا ﴿٢٤﴾

إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَغَسَّاقًا ﴿٢٥﴾

جَزَاءً وَفَاقًا ﴿٢٦﴾

*a fitting recompense. (26)*

*They did not expect to be faced with a reckoning, (27)*

*and roundly denied Our revelations. (28)*

*But We have placed on record every single thing, (29)*

*[and We shall say]: 'Taste this, then; the only increase you shall have is increase of torment.'* (30)

*The God-fearing shall have a place of security, (31)*

*gardens and vineyards, (32)*

*and high-bosomed maidens, of equal age, for companions, (33)*

*and a cup overflowing. (34)*

*There they shall hear no idle talk, nor any falsehood. (35)*

*Such is the recompense of your Lord, a truly sufficient gift. (36)*

*Lord of the heavens and earth and all that lies between them, the Most Gracious, with whom they have no power to speak. (37)*

*On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they shall not speak, except those to whom the Most Gracious*

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا ﴿٢٦﴾

وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَابًا ﴿٢٧﴾

وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا ﴿٢٨﴾

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَزِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا ﴿٢٩﴾

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا ﴿٣٠﴾

حَدَائِقَ وَأَعْنَابًا ﴿٣١﴾

وَكَوَاعِبَ أُنْرَابًا ﴿٣٢﴾

وَكَأْسًا دِهَاقًا ﴿٣٣﴾

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا ﴿٣٤﴾

جَزَاءً مِّن رَّبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا ﴿٣٥﴾

رَبِّ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنَهُمَا

الرَّحْمَنِ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا ﴿٣٦﴾

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًّا ۗ لَّا

يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَن أذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ

وَقَالَ صَوَابًا ﴿٣٧﴾

*has given leave, and who shall say what is right.* (38)

*That day is a certainty. Let him who will seek a way back to his Lord.* (39)

*We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge, on the day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust!'* (40)

ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحَقُّ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ

رَبِّهِ مَعَابًا ﴿٣٨﴾

إِنَّا أَنْذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ

الْمَرْءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ الْكَافِرُ

يَلَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا ﴿٣٩﴾

## Overview

This volume contains 37 *sūrahs* forming what is traditionally known as the thirtieth part of the Qur'ān, on the basis that divides the Qur'ān into 30 parts of equal length, so as to make it easy to read the whole book once a month. Yet this part has a special, distinctive colour. All the *sūrahs* it includes are Makkan, except two, The Clear Proof and Divine Help, which take numbers 98 and 110 respectively. Although they vary in length, they are all short. More significant, however, is the fact that they form a single group with more or less the same theme. They enjoy the same characteristics of rhythm, images, connotations and overall style. They are, indeed, like a persistent and strong knocking on a door, or a series of loud shouts seeking to awaken those who are fast asleep, or those who are drunk and have lost consciousness, or are in a night club, completely absorbed in their dancing or entertainment. The knocks and the shouts come one after the other: Wake up! Look around you! Think! Reflect! There is a God! There is planning, trial, liability, reckoning, reward, severe punishment and lasting bliss. The same warning is repeated time after time. A strong hand shakes them violently. They seem to open their eyes, look around for a second and return to unconsciousness. The strong hand shakes them again. The shouts and knocks are repeated even more loudly. They may wake up once or twice to say obstinately, "No!" They may stone the person warning them or insult him and then resume their position of inattention. He shakes them anew.

This is how I feel when I read this part of the Qur'ān. It places much emphasis on a small number of significant facts and strikes certain notes which touch people's hearts. It concentrates on certain scenes in the universe and in the world of the human soul, as well as certain events which take place on the Day of Decision. I note

how they are repeated in different ways, which suggests that the repetition is intended.

This is how one feels when one reads: *"Let man reflect on the food he eats."* (80: 24) Or: *"Let man then reflect of what he is created."* (86: 5) Or: *"Let them reflect on the camels, how they were created; and heaven, how it is raised aloft; and the mountains, how they are hoisted; and the earth, how it is spread out."* (88: 17-20) Or: *"Which is stronger in constitution: you or the heaven He has built? He raised it high and gave it its perfect shape, and gave darkness to its night, and brought out its daylight. After that He spread out the earth. He brought out water from it, and brought forth its pastures; and the mountains He set firm, for you and your cattle to delight in."* (79: 27-33) Or: *"Have We not spread and levelled the earth, and made the mountains as pegs? We created you in pairs, and made your sleep a cessation of activity. We made the night a mantle, and appointed the day for gaining a livelihood. We built above you seven mighty ones, and placed therein a blazing lamp. We send down out of the rain- clouds water in abundance, by which We bring forth grain and varied plants, and gardens thick with trees."* (78: 6-16)

We entertain similar feelings when we read: *"Let man reflect on the food he eats: how We pour down the rain in torrents, and cleave the earth in fissures; how We bring forth the corn, the grapes and the fresh vegetation, the olive and the palm, the dense-treed gardens, the fruit-trees and the green pastures, for you and your cattle to delight in."* (80: 24-32) Or: *"O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form. He can give you whatever shape He wills."* (82: 6-8) Or: *"Extol the limitless glory of the name of your Lord, the Most High, who creates and proportions well, who determines and guides, who brings forth the pasturage, then turns it to withered grass."* (87: 1-5) Or: *"We indeed have created man in the finest form, then We brought him down to the lowest of the low, except for those who believe and do good deeds; for theirs shall be an unfailing recompense. Who, then, can henceforth cause you to deny the Last Judgement? Is not God the most just of judges?"* (95: 4-8) Or: *"When the sun is darkened, when the stars fall and disperse, when the mountains are made to move away, when the camels, ten months pregnant, are left untended, when the wild beasts are brought together, when the seas are set alight, when people's souls are paired (like with like), when the infant girl, buried alive, is asked for what crime she was slain, when the records are laid open, when the sky is stripped bare; when hell is made to burn fiercely, when paradise is brought near, every soul shall know what it has put forward."* (81: 1-14) Or: *"When the sky is cleft asunder, when the stars are scattered, when the oceans are made to explode, when the graves are hurled about, each soul shall know its earlier actions and its later ones."* (82: 1-5) Or: *"When the sky is rent asunder, obeying her Lord in true submission; when the earth is stretched out and casts forth all that is within her and becomes empty, obeying her Lord in true submission."* (84: 1-5) Or: *"When the earth is rocked by her [final] earthquake, when the earth shakes off her burdens, and man asks: 'What is the matter with her?' On that day she will tell her news, for your Lord will have inspired her."* (99: 1-5)

We experience the same feeling as we meditate on the scenes of the universe portrayed at the beginning or in the middle of some of the *sūrah*s in this part of the Qur'ān: "I swear by the turning stars, which move swiftly and hide themselves away, and by the night as it comes darkening on, and by the dawn as it starts to breathe." (81: 15-18) Or: "I swear by the twilight, and by the night and what it envelops, and by the moon in her full perfection." (84: 16-18) Or: "By the dawn, by the ten nights, by that which is even and that which is odd, by the night as it journeys on!" (89: 1-4) Or: "By the sun and his morning brightness, by the moon as she follows him, by the day, which reveals his splendour, by the night, which veils him. By the heaven and its construction, by the earth and its spreading, by the soul and its moulding and inspiration with knowledge of wickedness and righteousness." (91: 1-8) Or: "By the night when she lets fall her darkness, by the day in full splendour, by Him who created the male and the female." (92: 1-3) Or: "By the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark." (93: 1-2)

Strong emphasis is laid, throughout this part of the Qur'ān, on the origin of man as well as on the origin of life, in both its vegetable and animal forms. Emphasis is also given to various scenes in the universe, such as the Day of Resurrection, which is described in different places as the Greatest Catastrophe, the Stunning Blast, the Enveloper, etc. Scenes of the reckoning, fine reward and severe retribution are also given prominence. They are drawn with images which leave a stunning effect. All these are given as a proof of the reality of creation and the elaborate planning of the universe by God, as well as evidence confirming the reality of the life to come, and its decisive reckoning. These scenes are, at times, combined with scenes of the fate of some of the communities which rejected the divine messages. The whole of this part exemplifies all this. We will make, however, a brief reference in this introduction to some examples.

The present *sūrah*, The Tiding, lays its emphasis on the realities of creation and resurrection, and on scenes of the universe and the hereafter. The same applies to the next *sūrah*, The Pluckers. The third *sūrah* in this part, The Frowning, begins with a reference to a certain incident during the early days of Islam. The rest of the *sūrah* is devoted to a discussion of the origins of man and plants before it tackles what it terms the 'Stunning Blast':

*On that day everyone will forsake his brother, his mother and his father, his wife and his children: for each one of them will on that day have enough preoccupations of his own. Some faces on that day shall be beaming, smiling and joyful. Some other faces on that day shall be covered with dust, veiled with darkness. (80: 34-41)*

*Sūrah* 81, The Darkening, portrays scenes of the great upheaval which envelops the whole universe on the Day of Resurrection. It also draws some fine and inspiring scenes of the universe in the context of affirming the reality of revelation and the

Prophet's honesty. The next *sūrah*, Cleaving Asunder, also contains scenes of universal upheaval, coupled with scenes of perfect happiness and eternal suffering in the hereafter. As it portrays these it aims to shake and awaken people's hearts: "O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord?" (82: 6) Scenes of both types are also portrayed in *Sūrah* 84, The Rending. *Sūrah* 85, The Constellations, touches very briefly on aspects of the universe and the hereafter by way of introduction to its main theme. The *sūrah* then tackles the history of a group of believers who were subjected to extreme fire torture by the unbelievers. It also states how God will inflict greater and more severe torture with fire on those unbelievers.

The next *sūrah*, The Night Visitor, draws some scenes of the universe and speaks of the origins of man and plants prior to an oath, by all these, affirming that "This is surely a decisive word; it is no idle talk." (86: 13-14) *Sūrah* 87, The Most High, speaks of creation, planning, divine guidance and the various stages of the growth of pastures. All this is given by way of introduction to the theme of the hereafter, reckoning, reward and retribution. The next *sūrah*, The Enveloper, provides some images of the believers' happiness in the hereafter, and the unbelievers' misery. It also draws attention to the creation of camels, heaven, earth and the mountains. The same applies right through to the end of this part, with the exception of a few *sūrahs* which are devoted to the exposition of the fundamental principles of faith, such as those *sūrahs* entitled Purity of Faith, The Unbelievers, Small Kindness, The Declining Day, Power, and Divine Help. Also excepted are a few *sūrahs* which give encouragement and solace to the Prophet and direct him to seek refuge with his Lord against all evil, such as those entitled, The Morning Hours, Solace, Abundance, The Daybreak, and Mankind.

Another aspect of this part is its artistic use of fine expressions, images, rhythm, meter and rhyme to touch upon areas of exceptional beauty in the human soul and in the universe at large. It does this in order to achieve better results as it addresses those who have lost sight of the truth, trying to attract their attention and awaken their feelings. This is clearly evident, for example, in its portrait of the stars as they turn in their orbits, rise and set, in the image of deer disappearing in their dens then appearing again, its image of the night as a living being walking quietly in the dark, and the dawn breathing with the first rays of light: "I swear by the turning stars, which move swiftly and hide themselves away, and by the night as it comes darkening on, and by the dawn as it starts to breathe." (81: 15-18)

It is also clear in the description of sunset, the night and the moon: "I swear by the twilight, and by the night and what it envelops, and by the moon in her full perfection." (84: 16-18) And in the scenes of dawn and the travelling night: "By the dawn, by the ten nights, by that which is even and that which is odd, by the night as it journeys on!" (89: 1-4) Or: "By the bright morning hours, and the night when it grows still and dark." (93: 1-2)

Again it is markedly evident in the inspiring address to the human heart: *"O man, what has lured you away from your gracious Lord, Who created and moulded you and gave you an upright form? He can give you whatever shape He wills."* (82: 6-8) The same applies to scenes from heaven: *"Other faces on that day are jocund, well pleased with their striving, in a sublime garden, where they hear no babble."*(88: 8-11) And in a similar fashion it applies to scenes from hell: *"But he whose weight is light in the balance, shall have the abyss for his home. Would that you knew what that is like! It is a scorching fire."* (101: 8-11)

Allegory is often employed and an unusual derivation is sometimes preferred in order to obtain the intended musical effect. All this shows the artistry which so entirely pervades this part of the Qur'ān.

The present *sūrah* is a good example of the general bent of this part, its themes, the fundamental principles it seeks to establish, the scenes and images it portrays, its inferences, its music and its fine touches, as well as its artistic selection and manipulation of terms and expressions to enhance its effect. It opens with a form of question imparting a sense of gravity to the matter in dispute, yet it is something that admits of no dispute. This is followed by an immediate warning of what will happen on the day when they will realize its nature: *"About what are they asking? About the fateful tiding on which they dispute. No indeed; they shall certainly know! Again, no indeed; they shall certainly know!"* (Verses 1-5) Discussion of this fateful tiding is then temporarily dropped. The *sūrah* draws attention to what we see around us in the universe and what we feel in our souls which give an unmistakable indication of what will follow: *"Have We not spread and levelled the earth, and made the mountains as pegs? We created you in pairs, and made your sleep a cessation of activity. We made the night a mantle, and appointed the day for gaining a livelihood. We built above you seven mighty ones, and placed therein a blazing lamp. We send down out of the rain- clouds water in abundance, by which We bring forth grain and varied plants, and gardens thick with trees."* (Verses 6-16)

After this multitude of images taken from actual life the *sūrah* takes up the issue of the event of which they have been warned. It explains to them its nature and how it takes place: *"Fixed is the Day of Decision. On that day the Trumpet is blown and you shall come in crowds, and heaven is opened, and becomes gates, and the mountains are made to move away, and seem to have been a mirage."* (Verses 17-20)

Then follows a scene of misery, that is at once both violent and infinitely powerful: *"Hell stands as a vigilant watch guard, a home for the tyrants and the transgressors. Therein they shall abide for ages, tasting neither coolness nor any drink, except boiling fluid and decaying filth, a fitting recompense. They did not expect to be faced with a reckoning, and roundly denied Our revelations. But We have placed on record every single thing, [and We shall say]: 'Taste this, then; the only increase you shall have is increase of torment.'"* (Verses

21-30) The scene of happiness, on the other hand, overflows with beauty: *"The God-fearing shall have a place of security, gardens and vineyards and high-bosomed maidens, of equal age, for companions, and a cup overflowing. There they shall hear no idle talk, nor any falsehood. Such is the recompense of your Lord, a truly sufficient gift."* (Verses 31-36)

The *sūrah* closes with a distinctive note which accompanies a majestic scene of the day when all this takes place: *"Lord of the heavens and earth and all that lies between them, the Most Gracious, with whom they have no power to speak. On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they shall not speak, except those to whom the Most Gracious has given leave, and who shall say what is right. That day is a certainty. Let him who will seek a way back to his Lord. We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge, on the day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust!'"* (Verses 37-40)

This is the fateful tiding about which they ask, and this is what will happen on the day when they realize the true nature of this great event.

### **Needless Enquiry**

*About what are they asking? About the fateful tiding on which they dispute. No indeed; they shall certainly know! Again, no indeed; they shall certainly know!* (Verses 1-5)

The *sūrah* opens by shunning the enquirers and the enquiry. It wonders that anyone should raise doubts about resurrection and judgement, which were central points of bitter controversy. For the unbelievers could hardly imagine that resurrection were possible, despite the fact that it is most logical. The *sūrah* asks what they are talking about: *"About what are they asking?"* (Verse 1) We are then given the answer. The question is not meant to solicit information but rather draws attention to the subject of their questions and stating its nature: *"About the fateful tiding on which they dispute."* (Verses 2-3) The answer does not name the event but describes it to enhance the feeling of wonder and amazement at such people. The dispute was between those who believed in resurrection and those who denied it, but the questions were raised by the latter only.

The *sūrah* does not provide any more details about the event in question. It simply describes it as great before adding an implicit threat which is much more frightening than a direct answer. *"No indeed, they shall certainly know! Again, no indeed, they shall certainly know!"* (Verses 4-5) The phrase, 'no indeed,' is used here as the nearest possible rendering of the Arabic term, *kallā*, which denotes strong shunning. The whole sentence is repeated to add force to the threat implied.

## **Around Man's World**

The *sūrah* then puts aside, apparently, that great event which is at the centre of controversy, only to pick it up later on. We are then taken on a quick round of the universe in which we see a multitude of scenes, creatures and phenomena. Contemplation of which strongly shakes any human heart: *"Have We not spread and levelled the earth, and made the mountains as pegs? We created you in pairs, and made your sleep a cessation of activity. We made the night a mantle, and appointed the day for gaining a livelihood. We built above you seven mighty ones, and placed therein a blazing lamp. We send down out of the rain-clouds water in abundance, by which We bring forth grain and varied plants, and gardens thick with trees."* (Verses 6-16)

In this round we traverse the vast universe, observing a great multitude of scenes and phenomena, which are sketched out with great economy of words. This helps make the rhythm sharp and penetrating, like an incessant hammering. The form of questioning implying a statement is also used here deliberately. It may be likened to a strong hand shaking those who are still unaware. It draws their attention to all these creatures and phenomena which provide strong evidence of the deliberate planning and designing which go into their creation, the ability to create and re-create, and the wisdom behind creation, which dictates that no creature will be left out of the great reckoning. Hence we come back to the fateful tiding, the subject of the argument.

The first leg in this round takes us across the earth and the mountains: *"Have We not spread and levelled the earth, and made the mountains as pegs?"* (Verses 6-7) Both facts mentioned here can be easily recognized and appreciated by everyone. Indeed, even primitive man can be affected by them once his attention is drawn to them.

As human knowledge advances and man acquires better insight into the nature of the universe and its varied phenomena, his appreciation of these two aspects is enhanced. He recognizes more fully God's elaborate planning of the universe, the accurate balance maintained between the individual kinds of creation and their respective needs, the preparation of the earth for human existence and man's adaptability to his environment. That the earth has been specially prepared as a comfortable home for human life in particular is irrefutable evidence of the careful designing of this existence. It is sufficient to break one relation in the conditions available on earth or in the conditions and proportions required for life and the earth would no longer be that comfortable home for mankind to tread on.

Man recognizes easily, by eyesight, that the mountains are very much like the pegs of a tent. From the Qur'ān we learn that they steady the earth and keep its balance. This may be because the height of the mountains offsets the depth of the seas and oceans. An alternative explanation is that mountains balance out the inner

with the outer movements of our planet. Or probably they merely increase the weight of the earth at certain spots to prevent its violent shaking with earthquakes, volcanoes or internal tremors. There may be another explanation not yet known to man. In the Qur'ān we find numerous references to natural laws the essence of which was completely unknown to man at the time of revelation, but knowledge of which was acquired a few centuries later.

In its second leg, this round touches upon various aspects of human existence: *"We created you in pairs."* (Verse 8) Again, this is a well established phenomenon, easily recognized by every human being. God has made the survival and continuity of mankind conditional on each of the two different sexes, male and female, playing its role in life fully. Not much knowledge is required to appreciate what this involves of comfort, pleasure and recreation. Hence the Qur'ānic statement stands to be appreciated by every generation in every society according to its abilities and knowledge.

Beyond the primitive importance of this fact there is the wider scope of contemplation as man's knowledge increases and his feelings become more refined. We may contemplate how one sperm produces a male child while another, absolutely similar to the first, produces a female one. Our contemplation, however penetrating, is bound to lead us to the inescapable conclusion that it is God's perfect planning which gives each sperm its distinctive characteristics, so that we may eventually have a male and a female, for life to continue.

*"And made your sleep a cessation of activity. We made the night a mantle, and appointed the day for gaining a livelihood."* (Verses 9-11) God has willed that sleep should overpower man and make him lose consciousness and activity. When asleep, man is in a state which is unlike life and unlike death. It ensures rest for his body and mind and compensates both for whatever effort they have exerted during wakefulness. All this happens in a way the true nature of which man cannot conceive. His will plays no part in it and it is impossible for him to discover how it happens. When awake, man does not know his condition while he is asleep. He is also unable, when asleep, to observe his condition and how sleep affects him. It is one of the secrets of man's constitution and of all living creatures, unknown except to the Creator Who has made sleep essential for life. For there is no living creature who can stay without sleep except for a limited period. If he were forced, by external means, to stay awake, he would certainly die.

Sleep does not merely satisfy some of man's physical and mental needs. It is, indeed, a truce for the human soul from the fierce struggle of life. It is a respite which allows man to lay down his armour, willingly or unwillingly, and enjoy a period of perfect peace which he needs no less than he needs food and drink. Sometimes, when one is low-spirited, mentally exhausted, possessed by fear and alarm, sleep may

overpower one, for a few minutes perhaps, and bring about a total change in one's condition. Sleep does not merely renew one's strength, but it may revive one in such a way as to wake up a new person altogether. This is miraculous, yet very true. It happened on a large scale to the early Muslims who fought in the Battles of Badr and Uḥud. God mentions both occasions in the Qur'ān, reminding the Muslims of His favours. *"He made slumber fall upon you, as an assurance from Him."* (8: 11) *"Then, after sorrow, He let peace fall upon you, in the shape of a slumber which overtook some of you."* (3: 154) Many other people have had the same experience in similar conditions.

Cessation of activity and consciousness through sleep is a prerequisite for the continuity of life. Yet it can be given only by God. It is mentioned here by way of inviting man to contemplate his own creation and constitution.

God's perfection of creation has provided a correspondence between the movement of the universe and that of living creatures. As man requires sleep after his day's work, so God has provided the night as a covering mantle for man to enjoy his slumber. Day is also provided as a period of activity for man to pursue his livelihood. Thus perfect harmony is established. The world is perfectly suited to the creatures who live in it, and God's creation is endowed with those characteristics which fit in easily and gently with the universe. What perfect planning by a scrupulous Designer!

The final leg of this round touches on the creation of heaven: *"We built above you seven mighty ones, and placed therein a blazing lamp. We send down out of the rain-clouds water in abundance, by which We bring forth grain and varied plants, and gardens thick with trees."* (Verses 12-16) The seven mighty ones God has built above the earth are the seven heavens or skies, the precise nature of which is known only to God. They may be seven galaxies which have a bearing on our planet or on our solar system. The phrase may also refer to something else that is unknown to us. What we know for certain, however, is that these seven have a strong constitution and do not easily disintegrate. This much we know about the stars and we observe in what we call 'the sky'. The *sūrah* also points out that the construction of the seven mighty ones is in perfect harmony with the creation of the earth and the world of man. This is implied in the following verses: *"And placed therein a blazing lamp."* (Verse 13) This is a reference to the sun which shines and gives the heat necessary for the earth and its living creatures. It also plays an important part in forming the clouds by evaporating sea water: *"We send down out of the rain-clouds water in abundance."* (Verse 14) The Arabic text refers to these clouds as something squeezable. But who squeezes them to extract their juice? The winds, maybe, or perhaps some kind of electric charge in the atmosphere! Beyond both types, however, there is the hand of the Designer, who has assigned to everything in the universe its respective qualities.

The use of the word '*lamp*' to refer to the sun is very apt, for a lamp gives heat and

light. It also shines as if it is ablaze. The heat and the light provided by the sun combine with the water flowing in abundance, time after time, from the 'squeezable' clouds to help the seeds send out their shoots. This is how grains, vegetables, bushes and wide-branching trees grow. This consonance in the design of the universe could not have been achieved without God's careful planning. Any man can appreciate this if his attention is drawn to it. If he acquires advanced knowledge, he finds even more consonance and congruity in the universe, which leaves him wondering in complete amazement. He then finds completely insupportable the argument that all this is the result of coincidence. He considers those who evade admitting the fact of elaborate and conscious planning pigheaded and unworthy of respect.

### **Reckoning and Reward**

All this has been for work and pleasure, but there are reckoning and reward to follow, on the appointed day: *"Fixed is the Day of Decision. On that day the Trumpet is blown and you shall come in crowds, and heaven is opened and becomes gates, and the mountains are made to move away, and seem to have been a mirage."* (Verses 17-20) Creation is not without purpose. The Creator, who has accurately measured human life and carefully provided perfect harmony between it and the universe, will not let people just live and die in vain. Reason cannot accept that those who do good and the evildoers should both end in dust. The rightly-guided and the straying folk, the just and the tyrants cannot all share the same fate. There must be a day when everything is judged and evaluated. The day is appointed by God: *"Fixed is the Day of Decision."* (Verse 17)

It is a day when upheaval overtakes the universe and destroys its systems. *"On that day the Trumpet is blown and you shall come in crowds, and heaven is opened and becomes gates, and the mountains are made to move away, and seem to have been a mirage."* (Verses 18-20) The *'Trumpet'* is a kind of horn of which we know nothing except its name and that it will be blown. We need not waste our time trying to discover how, for such discovery will not strengthen our faith.

God has revealed to us what we need to know of the secrets of the universe so that we may not waste our energy in the futile pursuit of useless knowledge. We can imagine, however, a blast on a Trumpet which people answer by arriving in droves. We can visualize the scene whereby all the generations of mankind rise up, walking in their multitudes, from all directions, to attend the great reckoning. We can imagine the fearful sight of people rising from their graves and the great, huge, endless crowd they form. We can feel the horror of the day, people's helplessness and fear. We do not know where all this will happen, nor when, for the universe is full of great events: *"And heaven is opened and becomes gates, and the mountains are made to move*

*away, and seem to have been a mirage.” (Verses 19-20)*

Heaven, the mighty heaven, is opened up so that it becomes gates. It is, as described elsewhere in the Qur’ān, rent asunder. So, it will look very unfamiliar to us. The firmly dug-in pegs, i.e. the mountains, are made to move away. They are hammered, scattered, turned into dust, blown by the wind, as other Qur’ānic verses describe. Hence, they become non-existent, like a mirage which has no reality. Or, probably, different rays are reflected against them after they have been turned into dust and they look like a mirage.

All in all, horror is apparent in the upheaval which envelops the universe as well as in men’s resurrection after the Trumpet is blown. Such is the Day of Decision carefully and wisely fixed.

### **The Fateful Day**

The *sūrah* takes another step, beyond resurrection, to describe the fate of the tyrant unbelievers and also that of the righteous. It begins with the former group who raise doubts about the fateful tiding: *“Hell stands as a vigilant watch guard, a home for the tyrants and the transgressors. Therein they shall abide for ages, tasting neither coolness nor any drink, except boiling fluid and decaying filth: a fitting recompense. They did not expect to be faced with a reckoning, and roundly denied Our revelations. But We have placed on record every single thing, [and We shall say]: ‘Taste this, then; the only increase you shall have is increase of torment.’”* (Verses 21-30)

Hell has been created so that it may watch the tyrants and transgressors and await their arrival. They find it well prepared to receive them, as if they are returning to their natural home after having sojourned on earth a while. It is a home in which they stay endlessly. But they taste *“neither coolness nor any drink.”* (Verse 24) The next verse provides an exception to this, but the exception is even worse: *“except boiling fluid and decaying filth.”* (Verse 25) Their throats and stomachs burn as they drink the boiling fluid, which is the only ‘coolness’ they have, while their other drink is the filth of the burning bodies, decaying in the enormous heat. The Qur’ān comments that this is ‘a fitting recompense’. It is in keeping with what they have done in their lives. For they thought they would never return to God: *“They did not expect to be faced with a reckoning, and roundly denied Our revelations.”* (Verses 27-28) Their denial, as the Arabic verse suggests, is strongly emphatic and stubbornly upheld. But God keeps a meticulous record which does not leave out anything they do or say: *“But We have placed on record every single thing.”* (Verse 29) Then follows a reproach coupled with the tiding that they can hope for no change in their condition and no abatement of its intensity: *“Taste this, then; the only increase you shall have is increase of torment.”* (Verse 30)

We then have the corresponding scene of the righteous in complete bliss. *"The God-fearing shall have a place of security, gardens and vineyards, and high-bosomed maidens, of equal age, for companions, and a cup overflowing. There they shall hear no idle talk, nor any falsehood. Such is the recompense of your Lord, a truly sufficient gift."* (Verses 31-36) If hell is a vigilant watch guard which the tyrants cannot escape, the righteous, the God-fearing will end in a place of security. What a place it is: *"gardens and vineyards."* (Verse 32) The vine tree is specifically mentioned because it is well known to the addressees. The God-fearing will also have companions who are described here as high-bosomed and of equal age. They also drink from a cup overflowing with refreshing beverage.

These luxuries are given a physical description so that we may better appreciate them. The precise nature of these luxuries and how they may be enjoyed remain unknown to us as our understanding is restricted by our limited world. But the enjoyment provided to the righteous is not purely physical. *"There they shall hear no idle talk, nor any falsehood."* (Verse 35) So it is a pure life there, free of the idle chatting and falsehood which give rise to controversy. The reality is known to everyone, which means that there is no room for futile argument. It is a sublime state of affairs suitable for eternal life. Then follows the Qur'ānic comment: *"Such is the recompense of your Lord, a truly sufficient gift."* (Verse 36)

### **In God's Presence**

The *sūrah* closes with the final scene of the day when all this happens. It is a scene in which we see the angel Gabriel, who is the Holy Spirit, and all the angels standing in ranks before God, their Most Merciful Lord. They stand in awe of Him; no one dares utter a word without prior permission from Him. *"Lord of the heavens and earth and all that lies between them, the Most Gracious, with whom they have no power to speak. On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in ranks, they shall not speak, except those to whom the Most Gracious has given leave, and who shall say what is right."* (Verses 37-38)

The recompense given to the righteous and to the tyrant transgressors, which was detailed in the previous section, is from your Lord. *"Lord of the heavens and earth and all that lies between them, the Most Gracious."* (Verse 37) What a befitting context to reaffirm the eternal truth of Godhead. God is the Supreme Lord of man, the heavens and earth, this life and the next, who metes out reward for righteousness and punishment for transgression and tyranny. But above all He is the Most Gracious. The reward He assigns to each group is a manifestation of His mercy. Even the torment endured by the transgressors originates from God's mercy. For it is indeed part of mercy that evil should be punished and that it should not have the same end as good.

The other divine attribute implied here is majesty: *"with whom they have no power to speak."* (Verse 37) In this awesome situation neither man nor angel can speak without permission from the Most Gracious. Whatever is said will be right because He does not permit anyone to speak whom He knows will not be saying what is right.

When we think that the angels, who are favoured by God, and absolutely pure from sin, stand silent in front of God and dare not speak without His permission, we are bound to feel how awesome the atmosphere is. Having motivated such a feeling, the *sūrah* delivers a warning to those who have chosen not to hear or see: *"That day is a certainty. Let him who will seek a way back to his Lord. We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge, on the day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust!'"* (Verses 39-40)

Those who raise doubts and question the reality of the Day of Resurrection are here shaken violently: *"That day is a certainty."* (Verse 39) There is no room left for doubt and controversy. Yet there is time for mending one's erring ways before the fearful watch guard, i.e. hell, becomes a permanent home: *"Let him who will seek a way back to his Lord."* (Verse 39) The warning is stern enough to make the drunken awake: *"We have forewarned you of an imminent scourge."* (Verse 40) It will not be long coming, for man's life is but a short period. The scourge is so fearful that the unbelievers, when faced with it, will send up that great cry expressing the wish that they had never lived: *"On the day when man will look on what his hands have forwarded and the unbeliever will cry: 'Would that I were dust!'"* (Verse 40)

This is the cry of one who is in great distress, who feels ashamed for what he has been and what he has done. He feels that it is better not to be, or to be something as worthless as dust, than to witness such a fearful occasion. The terrible position of the unbelievers is the subject of the questions and doubts they raise concerning that fateful tiding.