



Tafsir Al-Mizan / Volume 40

35 Pages

Chapter 78

al-Naba (The Great News)

Verses 1-16

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the Ever-Merciful.

This sūrah was revealed in Mecca and consists of 40 verses. It affirms the occurrence of the Day of Judgment, discusses its attributes, and provides arguments for its undoubtable truth. It starts by narrating the audience's inquiry from each other concerning its news. It answers them, with a tone of admonition, that they will soon know. Then it proves its truth by referring to the order of the world before our eyes. The wise management of affairs in this world clearly shows that beyond this realm of constant change and impermanence, there must be a fixed and eternal realm. The signs in this world reveal that following this life where there is action but no compensation, there will be a life where there is compensation but no action.

The chapter then describes that day, when the people will be summoned and gathered in one place, when the transgressors will be doomed to excruciating punishment, and when the Godwary will be elevated to eternal bliss. Finally, the sūrah ends with an admonition. The chapter's theme clearly shows that it was revealed in Mecca.

عَمَّ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ

(78:1) *What is it about which ('amma) they question each other (yatasā' alūna, from tasā'ul)?*

There are two possible meanings for *tasā'ul*: (1) a group of people asking one another; (2) a group of people asking another person one after another. This shows that the audience were asking one another about something, or were asking the Prophet about it. The overriding tone of warning and admonition in these verses shows that those who were inquiring one

another were the polytheists in Mecca. The verses are about those who did not believe in prophethood and the hereafter. The verses are neither about the believers, nor about both the believers and disbelievers. The Qur'an reports this inquiry of the polytheists in the form of a rhetorical question which implies criticism and absurdity, because the answer to it is obvious. The matter is so evident that it is questionable why someone should inquire about it.¹

عن النَّبِيِّ الْعَظِيمِ ﷺ

(78:2) About the great news,

This verse is a reply to the question in the last verse. It means: "They are questioning one another concerning the great news." The adjective '*azīm* (great, magnificent, immense) serves to glorify and emphasize the intensity and significance of this news. *The great news* here refers to resurrection and afterlife, which is a primary Qur'anic theme in the Meccan chapters, especially the earliest chapters that were revealed at the outset of the Prophet's mission (called *al-'atā'iq*). This interpretation can be confirmed by the subsequent arguments for the truth of the Day of Judgment, and the description of the events on that day, notwithstanding the brevity of the chapter.

Here are two views concerning *the great news*:

(1) It refers to the news that is found in the Glorious Qur'an.

Comment: The context of the verses does not support this view, although that is also implied.

(2) It refers to all topics of controversy among the audience, including the existence of God, the divine attributes, the angels, the messengers, the resurrection, paradise and hell.

Comment: Apparently this view is based on the fact that all these aspects are incorporated in the true message of Islam, which can be deduced from the chapter. The problem with this view, however, is that all these aspects are implications of the resurrection, which comes with retribution for true and false beliefs, and for good and bad deeds. This

¹ *Amma* is an abbreviation of *'ammā*, which is an elided form of *'an-mā* (about what, from which). The particle *mā* (what) is inquisitive. The letter *alif* at its end is omitted since it is preceded by a preposition (*harf al-jarr*). The same kind of omission is seen in words like *li-ma* (for what), *mim-ma* (from what), *'alā-ma* (on what) and *ilā-ma* (to what). (Auth.)

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would mean that the descriptions of the Day of Judgment in this chapter are a secondary and subordinate discussion.¹ Furthermore, as we said above, those who were questioning one another were the polytheists, who admitted the existence of the creator and the angels, but denied the other topics in the suggested view.

الَّذِي هُمْ فِيهِ مُخْتَلِفُونَ ﴿٣﴾

(78:3) *the one about which they differ.*

The polytheists agreed on their denial of the resurrection, but differed regarding their basis for denial. Some of them rejected it on the account that it is impossible, as God narrates from them: *Shall we show you a man who will inform you [that] when you have been totally rent to pieces you will indeed have a new creation?* (34:7). Others rejected it based on finding it very unlikely, as they said: *Does he promise you that when you have died and become dust and bones you will indeed be raised [from the dead]? Far-fetched, far-fetched is what you are promised* (23:35-36). And some rejected it since they were uncertain about it, as reflected in the verse: *Do they comprehend the knowledge of the Hereafter? No, they are in doubt about it* (27:66). Finally, some of them were certain about its truth, but they opposed it defiantly and obstinately, just as they refused to believe in God's oneness, prophethood and other branches of religion despite having been proven for them. The Qur'an says: *Rather they persist in defiance and aversion* (67:21).

We can deduce from these three verses [78:1-3], and the following ones, that the polytheists were immensely affected by hearing the warnings of the Qur'an concerning the resurrection and retribution on the Day of Judgment. Thus they began going around and asking one another about this astonishing news, which they had not heard of until that day. Perhaps they also referred to the Prophet and the believers, asking them what that day will be like, and *When will this promise be fulfilled, should you be truthful?* (10:48, 21:38, 27:71, 34:29, 36:48, 67:25). They might have also gone to the People of the Book, especially the Jews, and asked them to help them understand the message of the Qur'an and the new religion. God narrates this story in the form of a dialogue. First it says, *What is it about which*

¹ In other words, apparently the entire chapter is an elaboration of *the great news*, not a digression from it. (Ed.)

they question each other? (78:1), which questions their questioning. Then the verses answer what they are questioning about: *[Is it] about the great news, the one about which they differ (77:2-3)*. Finally, the following verses respond to their dispute and inquiry: *Nay! They will soon know... (77:4-5)*.

Exegetes have offered numerous views concerning the meanings of the terms in these verses [78:1-3] and how they are constructed. We shall not discuss them since they are not commensurate with the context of the verses. Our interpretation above is what can be deduced from the context.

كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

(78:4) Nay (kallā)! They will soon know!

The word *kallā* (nay, never, by no means) implies a prohibition. The verse forbids their questioning, which had stemmed from their difference over their denial of the hereafter. The meaning is: “They must stop such an inquiry because soon the matter concerning this news will unveil itself to them and they will know it.” The verse’s expression implies a threat, much like the verse: *And the wrongdoers will soon know at what goal they will end up (26:227)*.

ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَيَعْلَمُونَ

(78:5) Again, nay! They will soon know!

This verse emphasizes and reiterates the prohibition and threat in the last verse. These verses [78:4-5] indicate that those who were questioning one another did not believe in the resurrection and retribution. They were neither the believers, nor the entire society including both the believers and the polytheists.

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلِ الْأَرْضَ مِهَادًا

(78:6) Have We not made the earth a resting place,

This verse and the following eleven verses [up to verse 78:16] prove the occurrence of *the great news (78:2)*, which is the resurrection and retribution. Once that is proven, it follows that: *They will soon know (78:4-5)*. In other words, they will soon know the above mentioned forecast as they will witness the incident with their own eyes [upon the resurrection].

The argument in these verses [78:6-16] can be elaborated as follows:

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We observe a robust and ordered universe that consists of the earth, the sky, the night, the day, and human beings which reproduce. It is impossible that such a fine and subtle system is a futile work that is made in vain and sport. Rather, beyond this impermanent and ever-changing world there must be a fixed and eternal system, where the outcome of righteousness and wrongdoing may manifest. Our pristine divine intuition (*fitrah*) commands us to conscientiousness and prohibits us from mischief. This world, however, lacks the capacity to reflect the felicity of the Godwary and the wretchedness of the mischievous. And it is not logical that God would inspire an inclination or disinclination in our pristine nature toward something that has no effect or reality in the world. This proves that there must be a day when the humans will be paid for their deeds: good reward for good deeds, and evil retribution for evil deeds. The argument in these verses can be compared to: *We did not create the sky and the earth and whatever is between them in vain. That is a conjecture of the faithless. So shame on the faithless for the fire! Shall We treat those who have faith and do righteous deeds like those who cause corruption on the earth? Shall We treat the Godwary like the wicked?* (38:27-28).

The conclusion of this argument is that there will be a day to be faced by humans, when they will be compensated for their deeds: if their deeds were good, then their compensation will be good; and if their deeds were evil, then their compensation will be evil. Therefore, the polytheists have no reason to disagree on this—where some would reject it as impossible, some would consider it to be unlikely, some would be undecided about it, and some would not believe in it defiantly despite knowing its truth. This day will inevitably occur, and there is no doubt in the upcoming retribution.

Some exegetes have interpreted the verses as offering another argument:

The signs discussed in these verses prove God's omnipotence. Since the return is similar to the original creation, and since God had power over the original creation, it follows that He can return it a second time.

This argument is sound in and of itself, and is also found in other places in the Qur'an. However, it only proves the *possibility* of the return, not its definite *occurrence*. The theme and context of the current verses suggest that the latter is intended. Thus, the first argument that we offered is more coherent.

Have We not made the earth a resting place (mihādan): This is a rhetorical question which implies a negation. *Mihād* means “a floor cover,

background, or place of settlement where one can act, manipulate and operate.” It is also used for a carpet on which people sit. The meaning is: “We have indeed made the earth a place of peace for you, where you may be established and operate.”

وَالْجِبَالُ أَوْتَادٌ

(78:7) *and the mountains as stakes (awtādan)?*

Awtād is the plural of *watad*, which means “a thick nail,” according to *Majma‘ al-bayān*. Apparently the mountains are called stakes because most of the mountains on the earth are a result of volcanic eruptions which split the earth open. The ejected magma then solidifies in the form of a nail on the opening, rooted down toward the center of the earth. That is a means of settling the agitation of the underlying magma. Thus the mountains provide stability for the earth.

Some have suggested that the mountains are called stakes in the sense that they carry essential resources and benefits that make human life possible on the earth. Without them, the earth would not have been able to sustain human life. The problem with this interpretation is that it opts out of the apparent meaning of the text without any reason to necessitate a secondary meaning.

وَخَلَقْنَاكُمْ أَزْواجًا

(78:8) *And We have created you in pairs (azwājan).*

Azwāj is the plural of *zawj* (couple, pair), where each *zawj* consists of a male and a female. We created you in this manner so that you may procreate to sustain the human species, as long as God wills. Other suggested meanings are:

- (1) *Azwāj* means *ashkāl* (forms, likes, molds). The meaning is: “You are all similar in shape to one another.”
- (2) *Azwāj* means *asnāf* (classes, divisions), referring to the various races such as white, black, red and yellow.
- (3) Each person is made of two reproductive cells: the sperm and the ovum.

Comment: All of these are implausible views.

While the audience were treated in the third person in the previous verses, they are brought in and addressed in the second person in this

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verse. It is said that this transition is to highlight the verse's decisive and irrefutable argument.

وَجَعَلْنَا نَوْمَكُمْ سُبَاتًا ﴿٩﴾

(78:9) *And We have made your sleep for rest (subātan).*

Subāt means “rest, comfort.” Sleep causes our physical faculties to subside from their daily activities, and recuperate from the exhaustion and weariness that we earn through putting our body into work. Two other suggestions are:

- (1) *Subāt* is synonymous with *qat'* (severance, disconnection, detachment). Sleep cuts one off from their physical activities.

Comment: This meaning is close to our interpretation above.

- (2) *Subāt* means “death” (*mawt*), because sleep is called death in the verse: *It is He who takes* (*yatawaffākum*, from *tawaffī*) *your souls at night* (6:60).

Comment: This is an unlikely interpretation. Verse 6:60 does not call sleep as *mawt* (death), but it calls it *tawaffī* (seizing, taking in full, grabbing). In fact, the Qur'an explicitly uses sleep in contradistinction with *mawt*: *Allah takes* (*yatawaffā*) *the souls at the time of their death* (*mawtihā*), *and those who have not died in their sleep* (39:42).

وَجَعَلْنَا اللَّيْلَ لِبَاسًا ﴿١٠﴾

(78:10) *And We have made the night a covering.*

The night covers visible things in its concealing darkness, just as the clothes cover the body. This is part of God's plan to make us stop our daily activities and occupations, retire to our homes and families, and settle down to rest

Some have suggested that the night is like a covering garment on the day, which can be taken off easily. The problem with this view should be clear.¹

وَجَعَلْنَا النَّهَارَ مَعَاشًا ﴿١١﴾

¹ The interpretation is inconsistent with the previous verses, which all speak about things that are made in the service and benefit of humans. It is also clearly disharmonious with the next verse. (Ed.)

(78:11) *And We have made the day for livelihood* (*ma‘āshan*, from ‘aysh).

According to al-Rāghib, ‘aysh is synonymous with *hayāh* (life), with the difference that it is used specifically for animal life. For instance, when talking about the life of God and the angels, the word *hayāh* is used, not ‘aysh. The word *ma‘āsh* can serve three possible functions: (1) A *māṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund). (2) A temporal noun (*ism zamān*). (3) A locative noun (*ism makān*). What is meant here is either of the last two functions. The meaning is: “We have made the day a time or place for you to live; that is, to seek sustenance from the grace of your Lord.” Some have favored the first function, where the verse would involve an omitted *mudāf* (annexed noun, construct noun). The implied meaning would be: “We have made the day for *seeking and securing* your living.”¹

وَبَنَيْنَا فَوْقَكُمْ سَبْعًا شِدَادًا ﴿١٢﴾

(78:12) *And We have built above you seven mighty [heavens].*

This verse describes the seven heavens which are firm and solid in construction.

وَجَعَلْنَا سِرَاجًا وَهَاجَا ﴿١٣﴾

(78:13) *And We have made a radiant (wahhājan) lamp.*

The adjective *wahhāj* means “very hot and bright.” What is meant by *a radiant lamp* is the sun.

وَأَنْزَلْنَا مِنَ الْمُعْصِرَاتِ مَاءً ثَجَاجًا ﴿١٤﴾

(78:14) *And We have sent down from (min) the rainy clouds (al-mu‘širāt) abundant water (thajjājan),*

The adjective *thajjāj* means “pouring, abundant.” *Mu‘širāt* means “rain-clouds.” Some have interpreted it as “winds which condense the clouds to rain.”²

¹ When used as a *māṣdar* (verbal noun, gerund), “living” does not mean “livelihood” or “sustenance,” but it means “life.” Nevertheless, the three functions of *ma‘āsh* effectively reduce to the same meaning. (Ed.)

² Based on this meaning, the preposition *min* (from, of) conveys the meaning

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لُّخْرِجَ بِهِ حَبًا وَ نَبَاتًا ﴿١٥﴾

(78:15) *that with it We may bring forth grains and plants,*

This verse covers the seeds and plants which feed both humans and other animals.

وَ جَنَّاتٍ أَلْفَافًا ﴿١٦﴾

(78:16) *and luxuriant (alfāfan) gardens.*

The conjunction “and” joins this verse to *grains* (78:15). The verse describes gardens with intertwined (*multaffah*) trees. Some have said that *alfāf* is a plural noun that has no singular form.

Examining Narrations

- (1) There are some narrations which interpret *the great news* (78:2) as Imam ‘Alī.

Author’s comment: This is an esoteric layer of the verse [not its *tafsīr*].

- (2) Once Abū Bakr told the Prophet, “You have aged [so quickly] O Messenger of God!” The Prophet replied, “Chapters 11 (Hūd), 56 (al-Wāqi‘ah), 77 (al-Mursalāt) and 78 (*‘amma yatasā’alūna*) have made me age.”¹
- (3) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Have We not made the earth a resting place?* (78:6): It means humans are cradled, nurtured and fostered in it. *And the mountains as stakes?* (78:6): It means stakes of the earth.
- (4) Imam ‘Alī said: He [God] pegged the earth’s quiver with rocks.²
- (5) Concerning *And We have made the night a covering* (78:10) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: It covers the day.

Author’s comment: Perhaps what is meant is that the night conceals what the day reveals, and covers what the day unveils.

- (6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *And We have made a radiant lamp* (78:13): That is the shining sun. *And We have sent down from*

of the letter *bā’* (by, through, with) [indicating causality and instrumentality]. (Auth.)

¹ *Al-Khiṣāl*, on the authority of ‘Ikrimah, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās.

² *Nahj al-balāghah*.

the rainy clouds (*al-mu'ṣirāt*) (78:14): It means from the clouds;
abundant (*thajjāj*) *water* (78:14): It means pouring successively.

- (7) Concerning the verse, *a year wherein the people will be granted relief and provided with rains* (*ya'ṣirūna*) *therein* (12:49) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: “*Ya'ṣirūna* means *yumṭirūna* (they will be rained).” Then he added: “Haven’t you heard the verse: *And We have sent down from the rainy clouds* (*al-mu'ṣirāt*) *abundant water* (78:14)?”¹

Author’s comment: This means that the word in verse 12:49 should be *yūṣarūna*, in the passive voice, meaning that it will rain upon them. The Imam’s reference to the verse, *And We have sent down from the rainy clouds* (*al-mu'ṣirāt*) (78:14) shows that he interpreted *mu'ṣirāt* as *mumṭirāt* (rainy). The verbs *aṣarat* is used for clouds, synonymously with the verb *amtarat* (it rained).²



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- 1 *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*. A similar hadith is narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq in *Tafsīr al-‘Ayyāshī*, on the authority of ‘Alī b. Ma‘mar, on the authority of his father. Another similar hadith is narrated from Imam ‘Alī in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*.
- 2 The purport of the last two narrations is that verse 78:14 is about the clouds, not the winds. (Ed.)

Verses 17-40

These verses begin by describing the Day of Judgment, which was briefly pointed out in the verse: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). The verses then describe the fate of the transgressors and the rewards of the Godwary, and the chapter ends with an admonition as a conclusion of the discussion.

﴿انَّ يَوْمَ الْفَصْلِ كَانَ مِيقَاتًا﴾

(78:17) *Indeed (inna) the Day of Judgement (al-faṣl) is (kāna) the tryst (mīqātan),*

Majma' al-bayān says:

Mīqāt means “a deadline or due date that is set for something.” It is derived from *waqt* (time), just as *mīād* (time or place of promise) is derived from *wa'd* (promise), and *miqdār* (measured amount) is derived from *qadr* (measure).

The chapter began by informing the audience about the occurrence of *the great news* (78:2), and warning them by saying: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). Then the chapter provided a series of arguments for its occurrence in the verses: *Have We not made the earth a resting place...* (78:6-16). The current verse begins describing that great news. It is called a day of *faṣl* (separation, distinction, differentiation) in the sense that God's judgment on that day will separate the people. Each person will receive what they deserve by the virtue of their deeds. It is an appointed time (*mīqāt*) for the final judgment between the people. The verb *kāna* (was) is used in the past tense to indicate the inevitability and certainty of that day in God's primordial knowledge, as proven by the arguments in the previous verses. For the same reason, the verse is emphasized by the word *inna* (indeed, truly).

The meaning is: “It was in God's knowledge, when He created the heavens and the earth and ordained the governing order of the universe, that the day of decisive judgment will be an end point for this world.” That is, God knew eternally that this world of creation will be incomplete unless it ends with a day of judgment, when all disputes will be settled.

﴿يَوْمَ يُنْفَخُ فِي الصُّورِ فَتَأْتُونَ أَفْواجًا﴾

(78:18) *the day the Trumpet will be blown, and you will come in groups* (afwājan),

We have repeatedly discussed the meaning of blowing into the Trumpet.¹ According to al-Rāghib, *afwāj* is the plural of *fawj*, which means “a group that is moving fast.” The verse reverts to the second person that was employed to reiterate the previous warning in the verse: *Nay! They will soon know* (78:4). Apparently this verse relates to the verse: *The day We shall summon every group of people with their record.* (17:71).

وَ فُتِّحَتِ السَّمَاوَاتِ فَكَانَتْ أَبْوَابًا ﴿١٩﴾

(78:19) *and the heaven will be opened and become gates,*

This would connect the world of humans to the world of angels. Two suggested interpretations are:

- (1) There is an omission in the verse. The implied meaning is: “It becomes possessed with gates” [where the word *dhāt* (possessing, having) is omitted].
- (2) There will be paths that emerge in the heaven.

Comment: Both interpretations involve unwarranted impositions on the verse. The reader should reflect on this.

وَ سُرِّيَتِ الْجِبَالُ فَكَانَتْ سَرَابًا ﴿٢٠﴾

(78:20) *and the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage (sarāban).*

Sarāb (mirage) is an illusory pool of glittering water that appears to exist at a distance in a desert. It is used metaphorically for anything that is imagined to have some truth while it does not in reality. Apparently it is meant in its metaphorical sense in this verse.

Setting the mountains in motion and demolishing them will naturally result in their total disintegration and the loss of their form. This is mentioned in several places in the Qur'an, where it describes “the quake of the Hour” [22:1] and its aftermath, such as: *and the mountains move with an awful motion* (52:10); *and the earth and the mountains are lifted and*

¹ See volume 30, pp. 244ff of the English translation, under verse 27:87; volume 13, p. 190, under verse 6:73; volume 27, p. 293, under verse 20:102; volume 29, p. 103, under verse 23:101. (Ed.)

levelled with a single leveling (69:14); and the mountains will be like dunes of running sand (73:14); and the mountains will be like carded wool (101:5); and the mountains are ground to powder (56:5); and when the mountains are scattered [like dust] (77:10). Based on these verses, setting the mountains in motion and pounding them will make them shatter, scatter, turn into running sand, and become like carded wool. However, this process is not congruent with the mountains turning into mirage, in the sense of appearing to be a pool of water that reflects light. This sense of mirage is not relevant here.

What is relevant is that the movement of the mountains will result in their annihilation. That is, they will lose their identity and existence as *mountains*. The mountains which appear to be stationary structures with a firm reality will transform—through being set in motion—into a mirage, meaning an empty label that is devoid of any reality. This can be compared to what God says concerning the nations that He obliterated and uprooted: *So We turned them into folktales (34:19); so We made them follow one another [to extinction] and We turned them into folktales (23:44).* Similarly, He says with regard to the false gods: *These are but names which you have coined—you and your fathers (53:23).*

Therefore, the current verse is similar to the verse: *And you see the mountains, which you suppose to be stationary, while they drift like passing clouds (27:88)*, based on the assumption that this verse [27:88] is also about “the quake of the Hour.”

﴿٦﴾ إِنَّ جَهَنَّمَ كَانَتْ مِرْصَادًا

(78:21) *Indeed hell lurks in ambush (mirsādan).*

Al-Mufradāt says:

Rasād means “being alert on guard.”

Marṣad (lookout) means the position of *raṣad* (ambush, observation) as God says: *and lie in wait for them at every ambush (marsad) (9:5).* *Mirsād* is similar to *marṣad*, with the difference that it is used for a place that is specifically and deliberately meant for observation and watching. God says: *Indeed hell lurks in ambush (78:21), implying that people will pass over it, as He says elsewhere: There is none of you but will come to it (19:71).*

﴿٦﴾ لِلَّطَّاغِينَ مَا بَأَ

(78:22) [It is] a resort (ma'āban) for the transgressors (lil-tāghīn).

Tāghūn are those who are characterized by *tughyān*, which means “violating and exceeding the limits.” *Ma'āb* (place of return, end point) is a locative noun that is derived from *awb*, which means “return.” The transgressors have made hell a place of resort and recourse for themselves [through their deeds]. That is why once they are cut off from this life, they will return and resort to it [as the place where they belong].

لَا يَشْئُنَ فِيهَا أَحْقَابًا ﴿٢﴾

(78:23) Abiding therein for ages (ahqāb),

Ahqāb means “consecutive periods of time and long ages, without any specified limit.” The verse suggests that the transgressors referred to in the last verse (78:22) are hostile and deliberate disbelievers. This can be confirmed by the subsequent verses: *Indeed they did not expect any reckoning. And they denied Our signs with such a denial* (78:27-28).

Some exegetes have interpreted “ages” (*ahqāb*) in this verse as “one age after another.” The meaning would be: “Hell will be a resort for the transgressors, who will be abiding there for one age after another, without any termination or limit.” Hence, the verse does not contradict other verses which explicitly affirm the eternal abidance of the disbelievers in hell.

Another suggested view is that the next two verses—*they will taste in it neither...* (78:24-25)—qualify *ages* in this verse. The meaning would be: “They will abide therein for ages without tasting any coolness or any drink, except boiling water and pus. After that, they will undergo another set of circumstances, and this process continues indefinitely.” This is a plausible interpretation, as long as it can be shown to be compatible with the context.

Ahqāb is a plural noun, and there is a disagreement on its singular form. Here are some views about the term:

- (1) *Ahqāb* is the plural of *huqb* or *huqub*, as used in the verse: *or I spend a long time* (*huquban*) (18:60).
- (2) Both *ahqāb* (78:23) and *huqub* (18:60) are plural, where the singular of the former is *haqb*, and the singular of the latter is *hiqbah*.
- (3) Al-Rāghib says, “*Hiqbah* means an unspecified span of time.”
- (4) Each *huqb* [or *huqb*] is 80 or 80-odd years.
- (5) Some have added that each of these years consists of 360 days, where each day equals 1,000 years [on the earth].

- (6) Each *huqub* [or *huqb*] is 40 years.
- (7) Each *huqub* [or *huqb*] is 70,000 years.

Comment: There is more to the list, but there is no evidence from the Qur'an to support any of these views. Nor are they established in the lexicons.

لَا يَذُوقُونَ فِيهَا بَرْدًا وَ لَا شَرَابًا ﴿٢٤﴾

(78:24) *they will taste in it neither any coolness nor any drink,*

Given the verse's contradistinction between *coolness* and *drink*, apparently *coolness* means any means of cooling other than a drink, such as a shadow where one may rest. This would mean that "taste" (*dhawq*) is used in a general sense, meaning any form of enjoyment or access.

إِلَّا حَمِيمًا وَ غَسَاقًا ﴿٢٥﴾

(78:25) *except boiling water (hamīman) and pus (ghassāghan).*

Hamīm means "scalding water." *Ghassāq* means "pus" that exudes from the dwellers of hell.

جَزَاءً وِفَاقًا ﴿٢٦﴾

(78:26) *[That is] a fitting (wifāqan) requital.*

This verse implies a perfect correspondence and correlation between one's requital and one's actions. This is because what motivates one to perform an act [voluntarily] is to reap its reward and consequence. Accordingly, being given the reward is the same as being given the action itself [because the two are identical]. Thus the Qur'an says: *O faithless ones! Do not make any excuses today. You are only being requited for what you used to do* (66:7).¹

¹ *Wifāq* (lit. fitness, accordance) is a *māṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund). There are three possible interpretations for its usage here: (1) It serves as an *ism al-fā'il* (nominative substantive, active participial noun). The meaning is: "Their requital will be *muwāfiq* (fitting, appropriate, proportionate) to their deeds." (2) There is an implied omission in the verse: "That is a requital that *has* fitness" [where the word *dhāt* (possessing, having) is omitted]. (3) A verbal noun is used instead of an adjective or an active participial noun for emphasis and exaggeration. This would be like the statement. "Zayd is justice" [implying that

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا لَا يَرْجُونَ حِسَابًا ۝ وَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كِذَّابًا ۝

(78:27-28) *Indeed they did not expect any reckoning. And they denied Our signs with such a denial (kidhdhāban).*

The word *kidhdhāban* (78:28) is added to show surprise at their insistence in denial. These two verses explain and justify why their punishment will be fitting and in accord to their deeds. They did not anticipate the Day of Reckoning, had no hopes of the next life to come, and denied the signs which establish its truth. Thus they rejected monotheism and prophethood, and transgressed the limits of servitude by their acts. Since they disregarded God, God also disregarded them and deprived them of eternal bliss. Now what awaits them is nothing but wretchedness. What they shall find in the next world is only what is unpleasant to them, and will cause them torment. This is what God says below: *So [now] taste! We shall increase you in nothing but punishment* (78:30).

وَ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ كِتَابًا ۝

(78:29) *And We have recorded (ahṣaynāhu, from iḥṣā') everything in a book (kitāban).*

There are two possible interpretations for the word *kitāban* (a book, such a book): (1) It is the object *where* everything is recorded. The meaning is: "We have clearly recorded everything—including all actions—in a sublime book." This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *and We have recorded everything in a manifest register* (36:12). (2) It is a *ḥāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) which describes the condition of *what* is figured. The meaning is: "We have recorded everything *while* it is written." In this case, the writing would be either in the Preserved Tablet or in the individual records of deeds.

It is permissible to interpret *iḥṣā'* (figuring, enumerating) as *kitābah* (writing) or vice versa, since both have a common element of recording and preserving. Therefore, the verse can be interpreted in two ways: (1) "We have recorded everything, such a recording." (2) "We have written everything, such a writing." Either way, the verse complements the justification in the last two verses. The meaning is: "Their requital is in accord with their deeds because they had the above mentioned qualities. And

he is very just]. (Auth.)

since We have recorded all that, We shall compensate them in accordance.”

فَذُوقُوا فَلَنْ نَرِيدَكُمْ إِلَّا عَذَابًا ﴿٣٠﴾

(78:30) So [now] taste! We shall increase you in nothing but punishment!

The letter *fā'* (so, then, therefore) at the beginning of this verse indicates that this statement is drawn as a conclusion to the elaborate account of their punishment in the previous verses. The verse's theme and message is to disappoint them from any hopes of being delivered from their doom, and tasting any comfort. The transition from the third person to the second person in this verse implies that they are considered to be present. Thus they are reprimanded and blamed directly.

... *We shall increase you in nothing but punishment:* This means that once you endure a punishment, what comes next is another punishment. You will undergo a series of torments heaping one on another. There will be a new punishment added to your previous one forever. Thus you should despair from ever tasting anything that you like and desire. This verse clarifies that what we read above—*Abiding therein for ages* (78:23)—implies eternal punishment without termination.

إِنَّ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ مَفَازًا ﴿٣١﴾

(78:31) Indeed such a triumph (mafāzan, from fawz) awaits the Godwary:

According to al-Rāghib, *fawz* means “achieving good in security.” This implies two elements: (i) deliverance from evil; (ii) attaining good.¹ There are two possible interpretations for *mafāz*: (1) It is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund).² (2) It is a locative noun.³ The verse can convey either

¹ While *felāḥ* (salvation, deliverance) and *fawz* (success, felicity, triumph) are synonymous, their difference is that the first term emphasizes the element of immunity from pain, but the latter emphasizes the element of enjoying pleasures. The former highlights the negative aspect, and the latter the positive. (Ed.)

² The meaning would be: “The Godwary will have such a triumph and success.” (Ed.)

³ The meaning would be: “The Godwary will be in such a place of triumph and success.” (Ed.)

meaning.

٢٣ حَدَائِقٍ وَأَغْنَابًا

(78:32) *gardens (hadā'iq) and vineyards (a'nāban),*

Hadā'iq is the plural of *hadīqah*, which means “an enclosed orchard, a walled garden.” *A'nāb* is the plural of *'inab* (grape), which is the fruit of vine. Sometimes it is used for the vine plant itself.

٢٤ وَ كَوَاعِبَ أَثْرَابًا

(78:33) *and buxom maidens (kawā'ib) of a like age (atrāban),*

Kawā'ib is the plural of *kā'ib*, which means “a young girl whose breasts have protruded slightly into a round shape.” *Atrāb* is the plural of *tirb* (of the same age), which means “similar to another being.”

٢٥ وَ كَأْسًا دِهَاقًا

(78:34) *and brimming (dihāqan) cups.*

Dihāq (fullness, repletion) is a *māṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-fā'il* (nominative substantive, active participle noun) here. It means “brimming with drink.”

٢٦ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَ لَا كِذَابًا

(78:35) *Therein they shall hear no vain talk nor any denial (kidhdhāban).*

In paradise they will not hear any vain or futile speech. Nor will any of them deny the speech of another one.¹ This means that their talk will be according to the truth, and will bear its intended effect.

٢٧ جَزَاءً مِنْ رَبِّكَ عَطَاءً حِسَابًا

(78:36) *[That is] a reward (jazā'an) from your Lord, a bounty ('aṭā'an) reckoned (hisāban).*

¹ *Kidhdhāb* could also be an exaggerated form of *kadhib* (lie, lying), as understood by most translators. The meaning would be: “They will hear no pointless talk, let alone false speech.” (Ed.)

There are three possible functions for the word *'atā'an* (bounty, gift, grant): (1) It is a *hāl* (circumstantial qualifier, participial phrase) for *jazā'an*, which is itself a *hāl* for an omitted verb. The implied meaning is: "What is done to the Godwary is done to them while being a reward from your Lord, while that is a measured bounty."¹ (2) It is a *tamyīz* (specification, discrimination, clarification) [for *'atā'an*].² (3) It is an absolute object (*maf'ūl mutlaq*) [for an omitted verb].³

It is said that the verse honors the Prophet by referring to God as *your Lord*. It is also part of the Qur'an's glorification of God that it does not ascribe the requital of the transgressors to Him [in verse 78:26]. The description of their retribution shows that they are the cause of their ill fate. The Qur'an says: *That is because of what your hands have sent ahead, and because Allah is not tyrannical to the servants* (3:182, 8:51).

The word *hisāb* (reckoning) appears both after the retribution of the transgressors [78:27], and after the reward of the Godwary [78:36]. This affirms the theme of *the Day of Judgment* (78:17) that was introduced previously.⁴

رَبُّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَمَا بَيْنُهُمَا الرَّحْمَنُ لَا يَمْلِكُونَ مِنْهُ خِطَابًا

(78:37) *The Lord of the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them, the All-Merciful, Whom they will not be able to address.*

This verse interprets *your Lord* in the last verse. It clarifies that God's

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- 1 In simpler terms: "They receive this treatment as a reward from your Lord, as a bounty that is reckoned [or ample]." (Ed.)
 - 2 The meaning would be: "They receive this as a reward from your Lord—that is, a reckoned [or ample] bounty." This would clarify that their reward is due to God's grace and bounty, and/or a result of reckoning their deeds. (Ed.)
 - 3 The meaning would be: "They are granted this as a reward from your Lord: such a reckoned [or ample] grant." This emphasizes the significance and abundance of their reward. (Ed.)
 - 4 The word *hisāb* (reckoned, fitting) is an adjective for *'atā'* (bounty, gift, grant). It is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-maf'ūl* (accusative substantive, passive participle noun) here. (Auth.)
The author has interpreted *hisāb* (reckoning, measurement) as "measured, calculated, proportionate." It could also be interpreted as "sufficient, ample," as many translators have done. (Ed.)

Lordship encompasses everything in existence. *Your Lord*—that is, the Lord that the Prophet believes in and calls to—is the Lord of all things. This is contrary to what the polytheists believed: that every set of beings has its own lord, and God is the Lord of the lords—or He is the Lord of the heavens [only].¹

Al-Rahmān (the All-Merciful) is an intensified and exaggerated derivation from *rahmah* (mercy, compassion). It is used here as an attribute of God's Lordship, meaning that His Lordship embraces everything with mercy. Hence, nothing is left out of His mercy unless that thing deprives itself from it due to its insufficiency and wrong choice. It is a sign of utmost wretchedness for the transgressors to have disqualified themselves from God's infinite mercy by opting out of His servitude.

... *Whom they will not be able to address*: The first part of the verse describes God with two qualities: (1) He is the Lord, which means that He directs the affairs of the creation. (2) He is the All-Merciful, which indicates His perpetual mercy. Given these two qualities, the final expression in the verse would pertain to the possibility of holding God accountable for His actions. His servants will not be able to ask Him, “Why did You do this?” or “Why did you not do that?” as we would ask one another. Hence, this statement—*Whom they will not be able to address*—is equivalent to the verse: *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23). We discussed its meaning under the verse.²

Meanwhile, to understand this expression accurately, we must interpret it in its full context, including the next verse: *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38). The verse clearly shows that the clause, *they will not be able to address* (78:37) pertains to the Day of Judgment in particular. This can be confirmed by the previous context of the verses, which was an elaborate account of the punishments of the transgressors and the rewards of the Godwary, as a requital from God on the Day of Judgment. Therefore, what is meant [by *they will not be able to address* (78:37)] is that no one will have the right or ability to address God with respect to how He would compensate His servants. They can neither intercede for them, nor raise any objections to God's judgment.

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- 1 This is almost a verbatim translation of the *shema* in Judaism, as expressed in Deuteronomy 6:4. (Ed.)
 - 2 See volume 28, pp. 39-46 of the English translation. Also see volume 15, pp. 70-80, under verses 7:10-25. (Ed.)

The angels (78:38) are also among those who *will not be able to address* (78:37). Nevertheless, they are free from objecting God, as the Qur'an says: *Rather they are [His] honored servants. They do not venture to speak ahead of Him, and they act by His command* (21:26-27). The same holds for the Spirit (78:38) because: (1) It is the speech and word of God (16:40). (2) God's word is the truth (6:73). (3) God Himself is the *Manifest Truth* (24:25). Evidently, the truth would not oppose or contradict the truth.¹

Given the above discussion, what is meant by *address* in this verse (78:37) is intercession—or other similar means of saving one from evil, such as ransom, bargaining, friendship, supplication and petition. The Qur'an says: *before there comes a day on which there will be no bargaining, neither friendship, nor intercession* (2:254); *neither shall any ransom be accepted from it, nor shall any intercession benefit it* (2:123); *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105).

To summarize, the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is all beings who will be gathered on the Day of Judgment, including the angels, the Spirit, the humans and the jinn. This is commensurate with the theme of the verse, which is about the manifestation of God's glory and grandeur on that day. Some exegetes have suggested that the antecedent of the pronoun "they" is the transgressors. This is unlikely given the wide gap between their last mention and this verse. Nor is it the angels and the Spirit, since there was no previous mention of them. Finally, as we said above, what is meant by *address* is intercession and other similar means [of relief and deliverance].

يَوْمَ يَقُومُ الرُّوحُ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ صَفًا لَا يَتَكَلَّمُونَ إِلَّا مَنْ أَذِنَ لَهُ الرَّحْمَنُ وَ
قالَ صَوَابًا

٣٨

(78:38) *On the day (yawm) when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array. They will not speak except whom the All-Merciful permits and who speaks right.*

The word *yawm* (On the day) identifies the time when *they will not be able...* (78:37). This interpretation is preferred to the suggested view that *yawm* identifies the time when *They will not speak* [in the current verse],

¹ This is self-evident: the truth does not oppose itself. The author's point is that the Spirit would not raise any objection to God's command, for it is itself *of the command of my Lord* (17:85). (Ed.)

because a temporal container would primarily pertain to an event that is mentioned *before* it [not *after* it].

What is meant by *the Spirit* here is the being that is created through the divine command, as mentioned in the verse: *The Spirit is of the command of my lord* (17:85). Here are some other suggested interpretations for *the Spirit* in this verse:

- (1) The higher orders of the angels.
- (2) The guards of the angels.
- (3) An angel who is in charge of all angels.
- (4) Gabriel.
- (5) The spirits of the people, which will *stand* alongside the angels between the first and the second blows of the Trumpet, before they enter their bodies [again].
- (6) The Qur'an, which will *stand* in the sense that its teachings and predictions—about the felicity of the believers and the wretchedness of the disbelievers—will manifest and come into effect.

Comment: There is Qur'anic evidence for calling the last three items spirit (*rūh*). For instance, the Qur'an says [with reference to Gabriel]: *Brought down by the Trustworthy Spirit* (al-*rūh al-amīn*) (26:193); *Say, the Holy Spirit* (*rūh al-qudus*) *has brought it down* (16:102); *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (*rūhanā*) (19:17). And it says [concerning the human soul]: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (*rūhi*) (15:29, 38:72). And it says [about the Qur'an]: *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (*rūhan min amrinā*) (42:52). However, as one can see, in these verses the word *rūh* is always annexed or qualified with another term, but in the current verse it is used in an unqualified way. Moreover, the last two views involve an unwarranted imposition on the verse.

... *in an array* (*saffan*)...: This describes the condition of the angels and the Spirit [as they will stand]. The meaning is: "They will stand while they will be arraying." Given the juxtaposition of the Spirit with the angels, we may infer that the Spirit will be in one array, and all the angels will form another array.¹

... *They will not speak*...: This statement interprets and elaborates what we read above: *Whom they will not be able to address* (78:37). Based on this

¹ *Saff* (array, arraying) is a *maṣdar* (infinitive noun, gerund) which serves as an *ism al-fā'il* (nominative substantive, active participle noun). (Auth.)

Chapter 78, Verses 17-40

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context, the pronoun “they” in the current verse refers to all beings that will be gathered, including the Spirit, the angels, the humans and the jinn. Two alternative views suggested by the exegetes are:

- (1) The pronoun refers to the Spirit and the angels.
- (2) It refers to the people.

Comment: The clause, *They will not speak* is used in the same context as *they will not be able* (78:37). And given our interpretation of that expression [*they will not be able to address* (78:37)], neither of these two meanings is plausible.¹

... except whom the All-Merciful permits...: This phrase qualifies the pronoun “they” in the clause, *They will not speak*. It is meant to clarify that only those who are permitted by God will be able to speak on that day. This part of the verse has an unqualified meaning, which can be compared to the verse: *The day it comes, no one shall speak except by His leave* (11:105).

... and who speaks right (ṣawāban): There is an implied omission here: “who speaks the right speech.” *Sawāb* means “a truth that is not mixed by any falsehood or error.” This phrase qualifies God’s permission in the last part of the verse. The effective meaning is: “None shall speak except those whom the All-Merciful permits—and He would only permit those who speak what is right.” This makes the verse comparable to the verse: *Those whom they invoke besides Him have no power of intercession, except those who are witness to the truth and who know [for whom to intercede]* (43:86).

Another suggested interpretation is: What is meant by *except whom...* are those who are *spoken about* [not the speakers], and what is meant by *right* is holding monotheistic beliefs—that is, acknowledging that “There is no god but God” (*lā ilāh illā Allāh*). The meaning is: “They will not speak in favor of anyone except one who meets two conditions: (1) The All-Merciful approves of the person being spoken about. (2) The person spoke right in this world, meaning that they were a monotheist and testified that there is no god but God.” Hence, the verse is comparable to the verse: *and they do not intercede except for someone He approves of* (21:28).

This interpretation is not plausible because it implies that the verse allows speaking in general, but restricts whom can be spoken about. This

¹ The author’s stance is in part based on taking *On the day* (78:38) to be a temporal container for *they will not be able* (78:37). Otherwise, the first suggested view is quite apparent and plausible because *On the day* can be a container for *They will not speak* in the same verse. (Ed.)

is not true, because the negation in these verses applies to any speech whatsoever on that day. Therefore, the exception would introduce those who are permitted to speak, not those who can be *spoken about*.

Discussion on the Meaning of Spirit in the Qur'an

The word spirit (*rūh*) has appeared repeatedly in the Qur'an. What springs first to the mind from this term is the life principle. However, this is neither restricted to humans, nor to animals. Rather, the Qur'an talks about other forms of spirit, as in these verses: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (42:52). Therefore, there are both human and non-human instances of the spirit.

The best Qur'anic definition for the spirit can be found in the verse: *They question you concerning the Spirit. Say, "The Spirit is of the command of my Lord"* (17:85). The spirit is mentioned in an unconditional form in this verse, and is described as being from [or of] God's command. Elsewhere God defines His command as follows: *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it "Be," and it is. So immaculate is He in whose hand is the dominion of all things* (36:82-83). Therefore, God's command (*amr*) is the existentiating word of God.¹ Existentiatiion (*ijād*) is the existence (*wujūd*) of something in the sense that it is related to God, not in the sense that it is related to the apparent causes and instruments. It is based on this very criterion that God calls Prophet Jesus His word and spirit: *The Messiah, Jesus son of Mary, was only a messenger of Allah, and His Word that He cast toward Mary and a spirit from Him* (4:171). This is because Mary conceived Jesus not through ordinary means. This idea is reflected in the verse: *Indeed the case of Jesus with Allah is like the case of Adam: He created him from dust, then said to him, "Be," and he was* (3:59).

In most verses, the word spirit is annexed or qualified with another term, such as: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72); *and breathed into him of His Spirit* (32:9); *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *and a spirit from Him* (4:171); *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). Yet, there are some instances where the word appears in an absolute form, without any qualification, such as: *In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command* (97:4). This verse apparently suggests that the Spirit is an ethereal being that is distinct

¹ That is, God's command has the quality of giving existence to an event. It signifies a direct, immediate and non-temporal process of generation. (Ed.)

from the angels. The same idea can be drawn from the verse: *The angels and the Spirit ascend to Him on a day whose span is fifty thousand years* (70:4).

The Qur'an has three types of expression about the spirit in humankind: (1) There is a spirit which is found in all humans: *when I have breathed into him of (min) My spirit* (15:29, 38:72); *and breathed into him of (min) His Spirit* (32:9). The preposition *min* (of, from) indicates the source and origin where the spirit comes from. The verb used here is *nafkh* (blowing, breathing). (2) There is a spirit that is found in the believers specifically: *and He supported them with a spirit* (*bi-rūh*) *from Him* (58:22). The letter *bā* (with, by) indicates causality. The verb used here is *ta'yid* (supporting, strengthening). (3) There is a spirit which is found in the prophets exclusively: *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). The verb used here is again *ta'yid* (supporting, strengthening). This spirit is qualified by the term *qudus*, which means "holiness, purity, immaculateness."¹

If we consider these verses in conjunction with the verse in Sūrah al-Qadr [97:4], we can deduce that the relation between these two spirits—that is, the qualified spirit in the above verses, and the unqualified spirit in Sūrah al-Qadr—is that of emanation to the emanator, or that of shadow to the body. Of course, the emanation and the casting of the shadow is by God's leave.²

In like manner, the spirit that is ascribed to the angels is an emanation or diffusion of the Spirit by God's leave. However, in the case of angels, the Qur'an does not use the verb *nafkh* (blowing, breathing) as it does in the case of humans. Instead, they are simply called spirit: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit* (19:17); *The Holy Spirit has brought it down* (16:102); *brought down by the trustworthy spirit* (26:193). This is because angels are purely spiritual beings, although they have their own range of proximity

¹ Although "Holy Spirit" is perhaps the best translation for *rūh al-qudus*, it is not linguistically accurate since *qudus* is not an adjective for *rūh*. A more literal translation would be "Spirit of Sanctity." (Ed.)

² In other words, there is a *causal* relation between them in its metaphysical sense. In the shadow metaphor, nothing is reduced from an object to form its shadow. Nor does an object gain anything as its shadow diminishes or disappears. Yet the shadow is tightly dependent on the object for its existence and appearance. In the same manner, the fragmented, particularized and qualified spirits are shadows and effects of the absolute Spirit, which is a transcendent and a temporal creation of God. This resembles the relationship between *atman* and *Atman*. (Ed.)

and distance to God. And if they appear with a body, that is only a *tamaththul* (appearance, resemblance, representation), as mentioned in the verse: *whereupon We sent to her Our Spirit and he became incarnate for her as a well-proportioned human* (19:17). We explained the meaning of *tamaththul* under that verse.¹ In the case of humans, however, it makes sense to talk about “the blowing of spirit” because they are composed of a lifeless body and a living soul. Thus the Qur'an says: *So when I have proportioned him and have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72).

These verses use “blowing” for the human spirit because human creation differs from that of the angels. Similarly, while the spirit is a source of life, there are several degrees of life. The different levels of life that manifest in a being are a basis for the usage of *nafkh* (blowing, breathing) or *ta'yid* (supporting, strengthening) in the verses quoted above. In other words, there are different degrees of spirit according to the kind and intensity of life that ensues from it. For instance, one level of spirit is the spirit that is blown into all humans: *I have breathed into him of My spirit* (15:29, 38:72). Then there is another level of spirit, which support the believers: *and He supported them with a spirit from Him* (58:22). Compared to the universal spirit that is found in all humans, this spirit is at a superior existential position, has a higher rank, and has stronger effects. We can deduce this from the verse: *Is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?* (6:122). This verse considers a believer as having a light to walk with, and that is a result of their spirit [of faith]. A disbeliever, on the contrary, is deemed to be dead, even though they possess the blown spirit [of all humans]. Hence, it follows that the believers have a certain kind of spirit—with its special effects—which the disbelievers lack.²

Based on this analysis, we can say that there is also a degree of spirit

¹ See volume 27, pp. 45ff of the English translation. (Ed.)

² In other words, the spirit is a “graded” being, much like light which comes in different intensities and frequencies across a wide spectrum. Believers have a spirit of a higher intensity (more luminous light), while disbelievers have a spirit of lower intensity (less luminous). Ultimately, all are rays of *the Light of the heavens and the earth* (24:35), but they differ in terms of their proximity and distance from that Colorless Source. Some spirits are more diluted and veiled from the Absolute due to engagement and immersion in the particulars. Otherwise, every living being has only one life principle (one spirit). (Ed.)

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which is found in plants, since they too have some share of life. We can infer this from verses which talk about the revivification of the earth after its death.¹

Another level of spirit is that which supports the prophets: *and We supported him with the Holy Spirit* (2:87, 2:253). The theme and context of these verses indicate that this spirit is at a higher degree than the other types of spirit found in humans.

Another sense of spirit is mentioned in these verses: *He casts the Spirit of His command upon whomever of His servants that He wills, that he may warn [people] of the Day of Encounter* (40:15); *Thus have We revealed to you the Spirit of Our command* (42:52). The Spirit in these verses can be matched with either the spirit of faith [in all believers] or the Holy Spirit [in the prophets]. God knows best. We had some useful discussions pertaining to this topic under the verses quoted here.²



ذِلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الْحُقُّ فَمَنْ شاءَ اتَّخِذَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ مَآبًا

(78:39) *That (dhālika) is the day of truth. So let anyone who wills take resort with his Lord.*

The demonstrative pronoun “that” (*dhālika*) refers to the Day of Judgment, which was mentioned in the chapter [78:17] and discussed thoroughly. The word *dhālika* is used for objects at a distance. Its usage here indicates the immensity and magnificence of that day. The day is *haqq* (true, truth), meaning that its occurrence is certain and inevitable.

That is the day of truth....: This sentence marks the ending of the chapter and wraps up the discussion by referring back to its beginning.

... So let anyone who wills take resort (ma'āb) with his Lord: *Ma'āb* is synonymous with *marja'* (place of return). One should seek a point of return with one's Lord, where they will attain the reward of the Godwary, and will be secure from the punishments of the transgressors. This sentence is a conclusion that is made from the previous discussion about the

¹ See verses 2:164, 16:65, 29:63, 30:19, 30:24, 30:50, 35:9, 36:33, 41:39, 45:5, 57:17. (Ed.)

² See volume 14, pp. 144ff of the English translation, under verse 6:122; volume 25, pp. 266ff, under verse 17:85. (Ed.)

Day of Judgment, the proofs for its occurrence, and its description. The meaning is: "Given what We said, now whoever wishes to return to his Lord, let them do so."

إِنَّا أَنذَرْنَاكُمْ عَذَابًا قَرِيبًا يَوْمَ يَنْظُرُ الْمَرءُ مَا قَدَّمَتْ يَدَاهُ وَيَقُولُ
الْكَافِرُ يَا لَيْتَنِي كُنْتُ تُرَابًا ﴿٧٨﴾

(78:40) Indeed We have warned you of a punishment near at hand—the day when man will observe what his hands have sent ahead, and the faithless one will say, “I wish I were dust!”

The *punishment* mentioned in this verse is the punishment in the hereafter. It is *near at hand* in the sense that it is inevitable and there is no doubt about its occurrence. "Anything that is bound to come is [practically] near."¹ Moreover, the deeds for which one will be requited are currently *with* the person and most closely tied to them.

... the day when man will observe what his hands have sent ahead...: One will anticipate the consequence of the deeds that they have acquired with their hands and sent ahead [for themselves]. Another suggested meaning is: "One will see the deeds that they have sent ahead as actions will appear before their doer," as God says: *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and as to whatever evil it has done* (3:30).

... and the faithless one will say, “I wish I were dust!”: The intensity of that day will make the disbeliever wish that they were dust. Had they been devoid of intelligence and will like dust, acting [out of volition] and meting the consequences of those actions would not be applicable to them.

Examining Narrations

- (1) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *and the heaven will be opened and become gates* (78:19): The gates of paradise will open. *And the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage* (78:20): The mountains will become similar to mirages which shine in the deserts.
- (2) Concerning *Abiding therein for ages* (*ahqāban*) (78:23) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says: *Ahqāb* means several years. *Huqub* [or *huqb*] is

¹ This is a famous Prophetic narration and proverb that is reported in several Sunni and Shia sources. See hadith number 4 under verses 76:23-31. (Ed.)

one year—a year which equals 360 days, where each day *is like a thousand years of your reckoning* (22:47).

- (3) The Messenger of God said: Anyone who enters the fire will not come out unless they abide there for at least *ahqāb*. Every *huqub* [or *huqb*] is 60-odd years, where every year consists of 360 days, and each day *is like a thousand years of your reckoning* (22:47). Hence, let no one rely on the idea of [eventually] coming out of the fire.¹
- (4) The Messenger of God said: A *huqub* [or *huqb*] is 40 years.²
- (5) Once Imam al-Bāqir was asked about verse 78:23. He replied: This verse is about those who will leave hell [eventually].³
- (6) *Tafsīr al-Qummī* says concerning *Indeed such a triumph* (mafāzan) *awaits the Godwary* (78:31): It means they will triumph (*yafūzūna*). *And buxom maidens of a like age* (78:33): There will be damsels (*jawār*)⁴ of similar age for the inhabitants of paradise.⁵
- (7) Imam al-Bāqir said concerning *Indeed such a triumph* (mafāzan) *awaits the Godwary* (78:31): It [mafāz] means noble graces and blessings [from God] (*karāmāt*). *And buxom maidens of a like age* (78:33): It means young damsels with rounded breasts.⁶
- (8) The Prophet said: “The Spirit is one of the hosts of God. They are not angels. They have heads, hands and feet.” Then he recited the verse: *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38) and added: “This [the Spirit] will be a host, and they [the angels] will be another host.”⁷

¹ *Majma‘ al-bayān*, on the authority of Nāfi‘, on the authority of Ibn ‘Umar. The same hadith is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, with 80 instead of 60, and at the end it says: “Ibn ‘Umar said: Hence, let no one rely...”

² *Al-Durr al-manthūr*.

³ *Majma‘ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-‘Ayyāshī, via its chain of narration, on the authority of Ḥumrān. A similar account is narrated on the authority of al-Aḥwal.

⁴ This is the plural of *jāriyah*, which can mean either a girl, or a bond maid. Apparently what is meant here is that they will be young, and/or virgin. (Ed.)

⁵ Another possible, though less likely, interpretation is: “They will be similar in age to the inhabitants of paradise.” (Ed.)

⁶ *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, on the authority of Abū al-Jārūd.

⁷ *Al-Durr al-manthūr*, on the authority of Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Abū al-Shaykh’s

Author's comment: In our previous discussions about the Spirit, we quoted a hadith saying that the Spirit is a creature which is greater than Gabriel and Michael. We also quoted a hadith where Imam ‘Alī argues that the Spirit is different from the angels based on the verse: *He sends down the angels with the Spirit of His command to whomever of His servants He wills* (16:2).¹

- (9) Imam al-Ṣādiq said: The Spirit is an angel that is greater than Gabriel and Michael. It was with the Messenger of God, and has been with the Imams.²

Author's comment: Perhaps what is meant by “angel” in this hadith is a celestial being in general. Another possibility is that the word was added later by some transmitters who were concerned with only the gist of the hadith. There is no evidence to hold that angels are the only celestial beings—which are created by God’s command [immediately, and not through a gradual process]. Rather, there is evidence to the contrary, as we can deduce from God’s speech to Iblīs when he refused to prostrate before Adam unlike all angels: *O Iblīs! What keeps you from prostrating before that which I have created with My [own] two hands? Are you arrogant, or are you [one] of the exalted ones?* (38:75). We discussed this point under the verse.

- (10) Muḥammad b. Fudayl said: I mentioned the verse, *On the day when the Spirit and the angels stand in an array* (78:38). Imam al-Kāzim said, “By God! We [Ahl al-Bayt] are those who will be permitted to speak and those who speak right.”

“What will you say when you speak?” I asked.

“We will glorify our Lord,” he said, “will send peace upon our Prophet, and we will intercede [with God] for our followers. And our Lord will not turn us down...”³

Author's comment: This hadith offers some examples and applications of the verse. Otherwise, there will also be other intercessors on that day who will be permitted to speak, such as the angels, the prophets and the

al-Azamah, and Ibn Mardawayh, on the authority of Ibn ‘Abbās.

¹ See volume 25, p. 291 of the English translation. Also see the author’s exposition and examination of narrations under verse 16:2. (Ed.)

² *Tafsīr al-Qummi*, on the authority of Abū al-Baṣīr.

³ *Al-Kāfi*, via its chain of narration. This is also narrated from Imam al-Ṣādiq, on the authority of Mu‘āwiyah b. ‘Ammār, in *Majma‘ al-bayān*, on the authority of al-‘Ayyāshī, via an unconnected chain of transmission (*marfū‘*).

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believers. There will also be witnesses from various nations who will have permission to speak, as mentioned explicitly in the Qur'an and hadith.



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