

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Al-Lail*, 92.

This was one of the first Sūras to be revealed,—within the first ten; and may be placed in date close to S. lxxxix and S. xciii. Note that in all these three Sūras the wonder and the contrast as between Night and Day are appealed to for the consolation of man in his spiritual yearning. Here we are told to strive our utmost towards Allah, and He will give us every help and satisfaction.

Al-Lail, or The Night.

*In the name of Allah, Most Gracious,
Most Merciful.*

1. By the Night as it
Conceals (the light);⁶¹⁵⁹
2. By the Day as it
Appears in glory;
3. By ⁶¹⁶⁰ the creation of male
And female;—⁶¹⁶¹
4. Verily, (the ends) ye
Strive for are diverse.⁶¹⁶²
5. So he who gives
(In charity) and fears (Allah),

سُورَةُ اللَّيْلِ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا يَغْشَى ①

وَالنَّهَارِ إِذَا تَجَلَّى ②

وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنثَى ③

إِنْ سَعَيْكُمْ لَشِقَى ④

فَأَمَّا مَنْ أَعْطَى وَاتَّقَى ⑤

6159. The evidence of three things is invoked, viz., Night, Day, and Sex, and the conclusion is stated in verse 4, that men's aims are diverse. But similarly there are contrasts in nature. What contrast can be greater than between Night and Day? When the Night spreads her veil, the sun's light is hidden, but not lost. The sun is in his place all the time, and will come forth in all his glory again in his own good time. Cf. xci. 3, 4, and n. 6149. Man pursuing diverse aims may find, owing to his own position, Allah's light obscured from him for a time, but he must strive hard to put himself in a position to reach it in all its glory.

6160. *Mā maḍariya* as in xci. 5-7; see there n. 6151.

6161. The wonder of the sexes runs through all life. There is attraction between opposite; each performs its own functions, having special characters, primary and secondary, within limited spheres, and yet both have common characteristics in many other spheres. Each is indispensable to the other. Love in its noblest sense is the type of heavenly love and the highest good; in its debasement it leads to the lowest sins and the worst crimes. Here, then, striving is necessary for the highest good.

6162. There are wide contrasts in the nature and aims of men. These may be broadly divided into two classes, good and evil. As night replaces day on account of certain relative position, but does not annihilate it, so evil may for a time obscure good but cannot blot it out. Again, night in certain circumstances (e.g. for rest) is a blessing; so certain things, which may seem evils to us, may be really blessings in disguise. Whatever our aims or positions, we must seek the highest truth from the light of Allah. Considering these contrasts, do not be surprised or depressed. Men's immediate aims may be different. The duty of all is to seek the one true Light.

6. And (in all sincerity)
Testifies to the Best,—⁶¹⁶³

وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنِ ﴿٦﴾

7. We will indeed
Make smooth for him
The path to Ease.⁶¹⁶⁴

فَسَيَسِّرُهُ لِيُيسِّرَ ﴿٧﴾

8. But he who is
A greedy miser
And thinks himself
Self-sufficient,

وَأَمَّا مَنْ يُخَلِّ وَأَسْتَفْنَى ﴿٨﴾

9. And gives the lie
To the Best,—⁶¹⁶⁵

وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنِ ﴿٩﴾

10. We will indeed
Make smooth for him
The Path to Misery;

فَسَيَسِّرُهُ لِّلْعُسْرَى ﴿١٠﴾

11. Nor will his wealth
Profit him when he
Falls headlong (into the Pit).⁶¹⁶⁶

وَمَا يَنْفَعِي عَنْهُ مَالُهُ إِذَا تَرَدَّى ﴿١١﴾

6163. The good are distinguished here by three signs: (1) large-hearted sacrifices for Allah and men: (2) fear of Allah, which shows itself in righteous conduct for *Taqwā*, (see n. 26 to ii. 2) includes just action as well as a mental state: and (3) truth and sincerity in recognising and supporting all that is morally beautiful, for *Husn* is the good as well as the beautiful.

6164. So far from there being any hardship in a good life, the righteous will enjoy their life more and more, and Allah will make their path smoother and smoother until they reach eventual Bliss.

6165. The evil are distinguished here by three signs: (1) selfish greed and denial of other people's rights; (2) arrogance and self-sufficiency (xcvi. 6-7); and (3) knowingly dishonouring Truth out of spite, or seeing ugliness where there is beauty. Such men's downward progress gathers momentum as they go, and their end can be nothing but Misery. Where will be their boasted wealth and possessions, or their self-confidence?

6166. Wealth amassed in this world will be of no use at the Day of Final Judgment, nor will any material advantages of this life bring profit by themselves in the Hereafter. What will count will be a life of truth and righteousness, and of goodness to all the creatures of Allah.

12. Verily We take⁶¹⁶⁷

Upon Us to guide,

13. And verily unto Us

(Belong) the End

And the Beginning.⁶¹⁶⁸

14. Therefore do I warn you

Of a Fire blazing fiercely;

15. None shall burn therein⁶¹⁶⁹

But those most unfortunate ones

16. Who give the lie to Truth

And turn their backs.

17. But those most devoted

To Allah shall be⁶¹⁷⁰

Removed far from it,--

إِنَّا عَلَيْنَا لِلْهُدَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾

وإِنَّا لِلْآخِرَةِ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾

فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلْتَظُنَّ ﴿١٤﴾

لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾

الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَقَتَلَنَّا ﴿١٦﴾

وَسَيُجَنَّبُهَا الْأَتْقَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

6167. Allah in His infinite mercy has provided full guidance to His creatures. All through His creation there are sign-posts indicating the right way. To man He has given the five senses of perception, with mental and spiritual faculties for co-ordinating his physical perceptions and leading him higher and higher in thought and feeling. He has besides sent inspired men as prophets for further teaching and guidance.

6168. In the End man will return to Allah, and even from the beginning of man's life Allah's mercies and loving care surround him. In the probationary period of man's life, he has a measure of free-will, and he is expected to use it in such a way as to bring his whole being into harmony with the universal Will and Law. For he will have to answer for the right use of his talents and opportunities. If man's will has any meaning, he has the choice of accepting Allah's guidance or rejecting it, and in the latter case he must take the consequences. Hence the warning of the future "Fire" in the next verse.

6169. The Fire of Punishment will not reach any except those who have deliberately sinned against their conscience and rejected Allah's Truth. The term used for them is "*Ashqā*" (superlative degree). Cf. lxxxvii. 11. The corresponding idea in Christian theology is expressed in the following sentence. "All manner of sin and blasphemy shall be forgiven unto men: but the blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men" (Matt. xii. 31).

6170. "Those most devoted to Allah": the *Atqā*, the Allah-fearing men who live lives of purity, and seek only for the "Face of their Lord Most High". See the verses following.

18. Those who spend their wealth⁶¹⁷¹
For increase in self-purification,⁶¹⁷²

19. And have in their minds
No favour from anyone
For which a reward
Is expected in return,⁶¹⁷³

20. But only the desire
To seek for the Countenance
Of their Lord Most High;⁶¹⁷⁴

21. And soon will they
Attain (complete) satisfaction.

الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى

إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِهِ الْأَعْلَى

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَى

6171. The spending may be for charity, or for good works, such as advancing the cause of knowledge or science, or supporting ideals, etc. "Wealth" must be understood not only for money or material goods, but also for any advantage or opportunity which a man happens to enjoy, and which he can place at the service of others.

6172. The Arabic root word *zakā* implies both increase and purification, and both meanings may be understood to be implied here. Wealth (understood both literally and metaphorically) is not for selfish enjoyment or idle show. It is held on trust. It may be a trial in itself, from which a man who emerges successfully is a man all the purer in his life; and even if he was a good man before, his proper use of his wealth increases his position and dignity in the moral and spiritual world.

6173. The good man does not give in charity or do his good deeds with the motive that he is returning someone else's favour and compensating and rewarding someone for some service done to him or expecting some reward in return for his own good deed: the sole motive in his mind is that he desires the Countenance or Good Pleasure of Allah Most High. This "Countenance" or "Face" (Arabic, *Wajh*) implies good pleasure or approval; but it implies something more. It also means the Cause,—either the "final cause" or the "efficient cause" of Aristotelian philosophy. For the *Atqā* would refer everything, backwards in origin and forwards in destiny, to Allah. Allah is the source of their goodness, as well as its goal or purpose.

6174. The definition of Righteousness, Charity, or Self-sacrifice, becomes thus highly spiritualised. The *Atqā* are so completely identified with Allah's Will that everything else is blotted out to them. What would seem to be sacrifice from other points of view, becomes their own highest pleasure and satisfaction. Every virtuous man will have his own bliss, for there are degrees in virtue and bliss. This supreme bliss is the portion—not the prize—of supreme virtue.