

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT *Al-Muddaththir*, 74.

This Sūra dates from about the same time as the last one. Its subject-matter is also similar: Prayer and Praise, and the need of patience in a period of great spiritual stress: the unjust who cause sorrow and suffering now will themselves experience agony in the Hereafter.

Al-Muddaththir, or One Wrapped Up.

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

1. O thou wrapped up⁵⁷⁷⁸
(In a mantle)!
2. Arise and deliver thy warning!
3. And thy Lord
Do thou magnify!
4. And thy garments⁵⁷⁷⁹
Keep free from stain!
5. And all abomination shun!⁵⁷⁸⁰
6. Nor expect, in giving,
Any increase (for thyself)!⁵⁷⁸¹



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُدَّثِّرُ ١

قُمْ فَأَنْذِرْ ٢

وَرَبِّكَ فَكَبِّرْ ٣

وَبِأَبْكَ فَطَهِّرْ ٤

وَالرِّجْزَ فَاهْجُرْ ٥

وَلَا تَمْنُنْ تَسْكَدِرْ ٦

5778. In these wonderful early verses there is a double thread of thought: (1) A particular occasion or person is referred to; (2) a general spiritual lesson is taught. As to (1), the Prophet was now past the stage of personal contemplation, lying down or sitting in his mantle; he was now to go forth boldly to deliver his Message and publicly proclaim the Lord: his heart had always been purified, but now all his outward doings must be dedicated to Allah, and conventional respect for ancestral customs or worship must be thrown aside; his work as a Messenger was the most generous gift that could flow from his personality, but no reward or appreciation was to be expected from his people, but quite the contrary; there would be much call on his patience, but his contentment would arise from the good pleasure of Allah. As to (2), similar stages arise in a minor degree in the life of every good man, for which the Prophet's life is to be a universal pattern.

5779. Possibly, in its immediate application, there is a reference to the dirt and filth which the Pagans used to throw at the Prophet to insult and persecute him.

5780. *Rujz* or *Rijz*: abomination: usually understood to refer to idolatry. It is even possible that there was an idol called Rujz. But it has a wider signification, as including a mental state opposed to true worship, a state of doubt or indecision.

5781. The legal and commercial formula is that you give in order to receive. And usually you expect to receive what is worth *to you* a little more than you give. The spiritual consideration is that you give, but expect nothing from the receiver. You serve Allah and Allah's creatures.

7. But, for thy Lord's (Cause)⁵⁷⁸²
Be patient and constant!

وَلِرَبِّكَ فَاصْبِرْ ﴿٧﴾

8. Finally, when the Trumpet
Is sounded,

فَإِذَا نُفِثَ بِنُفْثَةِ السَّافِرِ ﴿٨﴾

9. That will be—that Day—
A Day of Distress,—⁵⁷⁸³

فَذَلِكَ يَوْمٌ عَسِيرٌ ﴿٩﴾

10. Far from easy
For those without Faith.

عَلَى الْكَافِرِينَ غَيْرُ يَسِيرٍ ﴿١٠﴾

11. Leave Me alone, (to deal)⁵⁷⁸⁴
With the (creature) whom
I created (bare and) alone!—⁵⁷⁸⁵

ذَرْنِي وَمَنْ خَلَقْتُ وَحِيدًا ﴿١١﴾

12. To whom I granted
Resources in abundance,

وَجَعَلْتُ لَهُ مَا لَا مَمْدُودَ ﴿١٢﴾

13. And sons to be
By his side!—⁵⁷⁸⁶

وَبَنِينَ شُهُودًا ﴿١٣﴾

14. To whom I made
(Life) smooth and comfortable!

وَمَهَّدْتُ لَهُ تَمْهِيدًا ﴿١٤﴾

5782. Our zeal for Allah's Cause itself requires that we should not be impatient, and that we should show constancy in our efforts for His Cause. For we have faith, and we know that He is All-Good, All-Wise, and All-Powerful, and everything will ultimately be right.

5783. The Sinner's course is now shown in contrast to the Seeker's. The Sinner may be self-complacent now: but what will be his position when the Reckoning comes? Not easy, indeed a Day of Distress!

5784. The question of Justice and Punishment to men is for Allah alone. For man at his best can see only one side of truth, and only Allah is All-Knowing. He alone can judge the limits of Justice and Mercy.

5785. Man's adventitious advantages—wealth, power, position, talents—are not due to his own merits. They are gifts from Allah, Who created him. In himself he came bare and alone.

5786. The great ones of the earth may have wealth, a large following, sons by their side to defend them and do their bidding and man-power to help them in their battles. Life may be smooth and agreeable to them. But their responsibility is to Allah.

15. Yet is he greedy—
That I should add
(Yet more),⁵⁷⁸⁷

ثُمَّ يَطْمَعُ أَنْ أَزِيدَ ﴿١٥﴾

16. By no means!
For to Our Signs
He has been refractory!

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ كَانَ لِآيَاتِنَا عَنِيدًا ﴿١٦﴾

17. Soon will I visit him
With a mount of calamities!⁵⁷⁸⁸

سَأَرْهُقُهُ صَعُودًا ﴿١٧﴾

18. For he thought
And he determined;—

إِنَّهُ فَكَّرَ وَقَدَّرَ ﴿١٨﴾

19. And woe to him!⁵⁷⁸⁹
How he determined!—

فَقُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿١٩﴾

20. Yea, woe to him:
How he determined!—

ثُمَّ قُتِلَ كَيْفَ قَدَّرَ ﴿٢٠﴾

21. Then he reflected;

ثُمَّ نَظَرَ ﴿٢١﴾

22. Then he frowned
And he scowled;

ثُمَّ عَبَسَ وَبَسَرَ ﴿٢٢﴾

23. Then he turned back
And was haughty;

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ وَاسْتَكْبَرَ ﴿٢٣﴾

24. Then said he;⁵⁷⁹⁰
“This is nothing but magic,
Derived from of old;

فَقَالَ إِنَّ هَذَا إِلَّا سِحْرٌ مُؤْتَرُ ﴿٢٤﴾

5787. The Sinner takes Allah's gifts as if they were his right. The more he gets, the more is he greedy. Yet to Allah's Signs and revelations he is wilfully deaf or even openly rebellious. But he is only preparing the way for his own undoing.

5788. “A mount of calamities” or disasters: may be understood as a phrase for cumulative disasters.

5789. Cf. li. 10: “Woe to the falsehood-mongers!”

5790. The Commentators understand the reference to be to Walid ibn Mugaira, who was a wealthy Sybarite, Pagan to the core, and an inveterate enemy to the holy Prophet. He and Abū Jahl did all they could, from the beginning of the preaching of Islam, to abuse and persecute the Preacher, to run down his doctrine, and to injure those who believed in it. But the meaning for us is much wider. There are Walids in all ages. They cannot understand divine inspiration, and seek to explain its wonderful influence over the lives of men by some such unmeaning formula as “magic”. The eternal Hope is to them mere human delusion!

25. "This is nothing but
The word of a moral!"

إِنْ هَذَا إِلَّا قَوْلُ الْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٥﴾

26. Soon will I
Cast him into Hell-Fire!⁵⁷⁹¹

سَأُصْلِيهِ سَقَرَ ﴿٢٦﴾

27. And what will explain
To thee what Hell-Fire is?

وَمَا أَذْرِكَ مَا سَقَرٌ ﴿٢٧﴾

28. Naught doth it permit
To endure, and naught!⁵⁷⁹²
Doth it leave alone!-

لَا يُبْقِي وَلَا يَذَرُ ﴿٢٨﴾

29. Darkening and changing
The colour of man!

لَوَاحٍ لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٢٩﴾

30. Over it are Nineteen.⁵⁷⁹³

عَلَيْهَا تِسْعَةَ عَشَرَ ﴿٣٠﴾

31. And We have set none⁵⁷⁹⁴
But angels as guardians
Of the Fire; and We

وَمَا جَعَلْنَا أَصْحَابَ النَّارِ إِلَّا مَلَائِكَةً وَمَا جَعَلْنَا عِدَّتَهُمْ
إِلَّا فِتْنَةً لِلَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لِيَسْتَيْقِنَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ

5791. The Sinner's perversity can only end in the Fire of Punishment. It enters his very being. See next note.

5792. He is in a state in which he neither lives nor dies (lxxxvii. 13). Looked at in another way, the things that in a good man are meant to last and grow, are for the sinner destroyed, and no part of his nature is left untouched. The brightness of his very manhood is darkened and extinguished by sin.

5793. The figure nineteen refers to angels appointed to guard Hell. See verse 31 below and the corresponding note.

5794. Cf. lxvi. 6, and n. 5540.

There was a great volume of angelology in the religious literature of the People of the Book (i.e., the Jews and Christians) to whom (among others) an appeal is made in this verse. The Essenes, a Jewish brotherhood with highly spiritual ideas; to which perhaps the prophet Jesus himself belonged, had an extensive literature of angelology. In the Midrash also, which was a Jewish school of exegesis and mystical interpretation, there was much said about angels. The Eastern Christian sects contemporary with the birth of Islam had borrowed and developed many of these ideas, and their mystics owed much to the Gnostics and the Persian apocalyptic systems. In the New Testament the relation of the angels with Fire is referred to more than once. In Rev. ix. 11 we have "the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon". In Rev. xiv. 18 there is an "angel which had power over fire", and in Rev. xvi. 8 an angel has "power...given unto him to scorch men with fire". In the Old Testament (Daniel vii. 9-10) the essence of all angels is fire: thousand thousands of them issued as a fiery stream from before the Ancient of Days, whose "throne was like the fiery flame, and His wheels as burning fire".

Have fixed their number⁵⁷⁹⁵
 Only as a trial
 For Unbelievers,—in order
 That the People of the Book
 May arrive at certainty,
 And the Believers may increase
 In Faith,—and that no doubts
 May be left for the People
 Of the Book and the Believers,
 And that those in whose hearts
 Is a disease and the Unbelievers
 May say, "What
 Doth Allah intend by this?"⁵⁷⁹⁶
 Thus doth Allah leave to stray
 Whom He pleaseth, and guide
 Whom He pleaseth: and none
 Can know the forces
 Of thy Lord, except He,⁵⁷⁹⁷
 And this is no other than
 A Reminder to mankind.

وَرَدَّدَ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِلَيْنَا وَلَا يَرْتَابَ الَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ
 وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَلِيَقُولَ الَّذِينَ فِي قُلُوبِهِمْ مَرَضٌ وَالْكَافِرُونَ
 مَاذَا أَرَادَ اللَّهُ بِهَذَا مَثَلًا كَذَلِكَ يُضِلُّ اللَّهُ مَن يَشَاءُ وَيَهْدِي
 مَن يَشَاءُ وَمَا يَعْلَمُ جُودَ رَبِّكَ إِلَّا هُوَ وَمَا هِيَ إِلَّا ذِكْرٌ
 لِلْبَشَرِ ﴿٧٤﴾

5795. The significance of numbers is a favourite theme with some writers, but I lay no stress on it. In Christian theology the number of the Beast, 666, in Rev. xiii. 18 has given rise to much controversy, and may refer only to the numerical value of the letters in the name of the Roman Emperor Nero. In our own literature I think that we ought to avoid too much insistence on speculative conjectures.

5796. There are four classes of people mentioned here. (1) The Muslims will have their faith increased, because they believe that all revelation is from Allah Most Merciful, and all His forces will work in their favour. (2) The People of the Book, those who had received previous revelations of an analogous character, the Jews and Christians, had numerous sects disputing with each other on minute points of doctrine; but they will now, if they believe, find rest from controversies in a broad understanding of scripture. (3) Those in whose hearts is a disease (see ii. 8-10, notes 33-34), the insincere ones, the hypocrites, will only be mystified, because they believe nothing and have rejected the grace and mercy of Allah. (4) The Unbelievers have frankly done the same and must suffer similar consequences.

5797. It is a necessary consequence of moral responsibility and freedom of choice in man, that he should be left free to stray if he chooses to do so, in spite of all the warning and the instruction he receives. Allah's channels of warning and instruction—his spiritual forces—are infinite, as are His powers. No man can know them. But this warning or reminder is addressed to all mankind.

All things are referred to Allah. But we must not attribute evil to Him. In iv. 79 we are expressly told that the good comes from Allah, and the evil from ourselves.

SECTION 2

32. Nay, verily:
By the Moon,⁵⁷⁹⁸
33. And by the Night⁵⁷⁹⁹
As it retreateth,
34. And by the Dawn
As it shineth forth,-
35. This is but one⁵⁸⁰⁰
Of the mighty (Portents),
36. A warning to mankind,-

كَلَّا وَالْقَمَرِ

وَاللَّيْلِ إِذَا دُبِّرَ

وَالصُّبْحِ إِذَا أَفْجَرُ

إِنِّهَا لِأَحَدَى الْكُبَرِ

نَذِيرًا لِلْبَشَرِ

5798. An oath in human speech calls in evidence something sacred in the heart of man. In Allah's Message, also, when delivered in human language, solemn emphasis is indicated by an appeal to something striking among the Signs of Allah, which will go straight to the human heart which is addressed. In each case the symbol of the appeal has reference to the particular point enforced in the argument. Here we are asked to contemplate three wonderful phenomena, and they lead up to the conclusion in verse 38. (1) The moon, next after the sun, is the most striking luminary to our sight. Its reflected light has for us even a greater mystery than the direct light of the sun, which looks to us like pure fire. The moon was worshipped as a deity in times of darkness. But in reality, though she rules the night, her rays are only reflections, and are wanting in warmth and vitality. So every soul which looks up to a mere creature of Allah for a sort of vicarious salvation is in spiritual darkness or error; for the true source of spiritual light and life is Allah, and Allah alone. For (2) the Night and (3) the Dawn, see the following note.

5799. (2) The Night when it is illuminated by the Moon is light in a sense, but it is really dark and must give place to (3) the Dawn when it comes, as the harbinger of the Sun. So in spiritual matters, when every soul realises its own responsibility, it will look less and less to reflected lights, and through the beauty of a dawn-like awakening, will be prepared more and more for the splendour of the light of Allah Himself, the goal of the Heaven of our dreams.

5800. "This is but one," etc. There are numerous Signs of Allah, of which Judgment is one, and one of the mightiest portents. Or the reference may be to the waning of the Moon, the decline of the night, and the glorious sunrise, as tokens or symbols of the world renewed when the present transitory world passes away. According to some commentators "This" here refers to Hell.

37. To any of you that
Chooses to press forward,
Or to follow behind;⁵⁸⁰¹

لِمَنْ شَاءَ مِنْكُمْ أَنْ يَتَقَدَّمَ أَوْ يَتَأَخَّرَ ﴿٣٧﴾

38. Every soul will be (held)
In pledge for its deeds.⁵⁸⁰²

كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ رَهِينَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

39. Except the Companions
Of the Right Hand,⁵⁸⁰³

إِلَّا أَصْحَابَ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٩﴾

40. (They will be) in Gardens
(Of Delight): they will
Question each other,

فِي جَنَّاتٍ يَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

41. And (ask) of the Sinners:

عَنِ الْمُجْرِمِينَ ﴿٤١﴾

42. "What led you
Into Hell-Fire?"

مَا سَلَكَكُمْ فِي سَقَرٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

43. They will say:
"We were not of those
Who prayed;

قَالُوا لَوْ أَنَّا كُنَّا مِنَ الْمُصَلِّينَ ﴿٤٣﴾

5801. Three interpretations are possible. (1) Those pressing forward may be the Righteous, and those following behind may be the laggards, the Unbelievers, who reject Allah's love, care, and mercy. (2) Men of two kinds of temperament may be referred to: those who are always in the van and those who are always in the rear. Allah's Message is open to both. But there may be a danger to both: in the one case, over-confidence, or hope in wrong things: in the other case missing great opportunities so that their spiritual lives may be "bound in shallows and in miseries". Extremes should be avoided. (3) Or it may mean that the warning is effective only for those willing to move forwards or backwards, as the case may be, but is lost on the inert or the lethargic. For our moral and spiritual progress, we have in some cases to go forwards, but in some cases we have to retreat from false positions. The hopeless case is that of the obstinate man, whose heart is so dead that he dares not advance to the right or withdraw from the wrong.

5802. Cf. lii. 21. Man cannot shift his responsibility to vicarious saviours or saints. His redemption depends upon the grace of Allah, for which he should constantly and whole-heartedly strive by means of right conduct. If he does so he will be redeemed and he will join the Companions of the Right Hand.

5803. Cf. n. 5223 to lvi. 3, and see lvi. 27-38. The Companions of the Right Hand will be the Righteous or the Blessed in the Hereafter. Their grounds of merit will be Prayer, Charity, Earnestness, and Faith in Allah's just Judgment: all of which are within the reach of the humblest Seeker. They are not separate acts or virtues, but are all interconnected. At Judgment, the pledge of their soul will be redeemed by Allah's Grace at the Taking of the Account.

44. "Nor were we of those
Who fed the indigent;
45. "But we used to talk
Vanities with vain talkers;
46. "And we used to deny
The Day of Judgment,
47. "Until there came to us
(The Hour) that is certain."⁵⁸⁰⁴
48. Then will no intercession
Of (any) intercessors
Profit them.
49. Then what is
The matter with them
That they turn away
From admonition?⁵⁸⁰⁵
50. As if they were
Affrighted asses,
51. Fleeing from a lion!
52. Forsooth, each one of them
Wants to be given⁵⁸⁰⁶
Scrolls (of revelation) spread out!
53. By no means! But
They fear not the Hereafter.

وَلَمْ نَكُ نَطْعِمُ الْمِسْكِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

وَكُنَّا نَخُوضُ مَعَ الْفَافِضِينَ ﴿١٥﴾

وَكُنَّا نَكْذِبُ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ ﴿١٦﴾

حَتَّىٰ آتَانَا الْيَقِينَ ﴿١٧﴾

فَمَا نَفْعُهُمْ شَفْعَةُ الشَّافِعِينَ ﴿١٨﴾

فَمَا لَهُمْ عَنِ التَّذْكَرَةِ مُعْرِضِينَ ﴿١٩﴾

كَأَنَّهُمْ حُمُرٌ مُسْتَنْفِرَةٌ ﴿٢٠﴾

فَرَّتْ مِنْ قَسْوَرَةٍ ﴿٢١﴾

بَلْ يَرِيدُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُؤْتَىٰ صُحُفًا مُنشَرَةً ﴿٢٢﴾

كَلَّا بَلْ لَا يَخَافُونَ الْآخِرَةَ ﴿٢٣﴾

5804. Cf. xv. 99, and n. 2018. The Hour that is Certain is usually taken to the Death.

5805. If the Day of Judgment is inevitable, it is strange that men should not heed a plain warning, but go on as if they were thoughtless and obstinate asses stampeding from a lion. Instead of heeding the warning, they try to avoid it. They are frightened at Allah's Word.

5806. Cf. xvii. 93: "Until thou send down to us a book, that we could read." The Unbelievers pretend in ridicule that they would believe if a special message written on open scrolls and addressed to them severally were brought to them by a miracle! There is a disease in their hearts and understandings. The Teacher's warning is plain, and enough for any reasonable man who has the will to seek Allah.

54. Nay, this surely
Is an admonition:

55. Let any who will,⁵⁸⁰⁷
Keep it in remembrance!

56. But none will keep it
In remembrance except
As Allah wills: He⁵⁸⁰⁸
Is the Lord of Righteousness,
And the Lord of Forgiveness.

كَلَّا إِنَّهُ تَذْكِرَةٌ ﴿٥٤﴾

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَّرْهُ ﴿٥٥﴾

وَمَا يَذْكُرُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ هُوَ أَهْلُ النَّفْيِ

وَأَهْلُ الْغَفْرِ ﴿٥٦﴾

5807. The Qur-ān itself is the admonition—the latest among the revealed Books of Allah. If man has the will to learn, he will keep the Message always before Him, and Allah's grace will help him to carry it out in his conduct.

5808. Righteousness as well as Forgiveness have their source in Allah's Will. Man's Righteousness has no meaning except in relation to the universal Will. For *Taqwā* see n. 26 to ii. 2. If we take the word here in the sense of "the fear of Allah", the translation would be: "He alone is worthy to be feared, and He alone is entitled to grant Forgiveness."