

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAT 'Abasa, 80.

This is an early Makkan Sūra, and is connected with an incident which reflects the highest honour on the Prophet's sincerity in the Revelations that were vouchsafed to him even if they seemed to reprove him for some natural and human zeal that led him to a false step in his mission according to his own high standards.

He was once deeply and earnestly engaged in trying to explain the holy Qur-ān to Pagan Quraish leaders, when he was interrupted by a blind man, 'Abdullāh ibn Umm-i-Muktūm, one who was also poor, so that no one took any notice of him. He wanted to learn the Qur-ān. The holy Prophet naturally disliked the interruption. Perhaps the poor man's feelings were hurt. But he whose gentle heart ever sympathised with the poor and the afflicted, got new Light from above, and without the least hesitation published this revelation, which forms part of the sacred scripture of Islam, as described in verses 13-16. And the Prophet always afterwards held the man in high honour.

The incident was only a passing incident, but after explaining the eternal principles of revelation, the Sūra recapitulates the Mercies of Allah to man, and the consequences of a good or a wicked life here, as seen in the world to come, in the Hereafter.

'Abasa, or He Frowned.

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

1. (The Prophet) frowned
And turned away,⁵⁹⁵⁰
2. Because there came to him
The blind man (interrupting).
3. But what could tell thee
But that perchance he might
Grow in purity?
4. Or that he might receive
Admonition, and the Reminder
Might profit him?⁵⁹⁵¹
5. As to one who regards
Himself as self-sufficient,⁵⁹⁵²
6. To him dost thou attend;
7. Though it is no blame
To thee if he grow not⁵⁹⁵³
In purity.

سُورَةُ عَبَسَ

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى ①

أَن جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى ②

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكَّى ③

أَوْ يَذَكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى ④

أَمَّا مَنِ اسْتَعْتَى ⑤

فَأَن تَلَهُ تَصَدَّى ⑥

وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزَكَّى ⑦

5950. See the Introduction to this Sūra for the incident to which this refers. The lesson is that neither spiritual worth nor the prospect of effective spiritual guidance is to be measured by a man's position in life. The poor, or the blind, the halt, or the maimed, may be more susceptible to the teaching of Allah's Word than men who are apparently gifted, but who suffer from arrogance and self-sufficiency.

5951. It may be that the poor blind man might, on account of his will to learn, be more likely to grow in his own spiritual development or to profit by any lessons taught to him even in report than a self-sufficient leader. In fact it was so. For the blind man became a true and sincere Muslim and lived to become a governor of Madinah.

5952. Such a one would be a Pagan Quraish leader, whom the holy Prophet was anxious to get into his fold, in order that the work of preaching Allah's Message might be facilitated. But such a Message works first amongst the simple and lowly, the poor and despised folk, and the mighty ones of the earth only come in when the stream rushes in with irresistible force.

5953. Allah's Message is for all, but if the great ones arrogantly keep back from it, it is no fault of the preacher, so long as he has proclaimed the Message. He should attend to all, and specially to the humble and lowly.

8. But as to him who came
To thee striving earnestly,

وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَى ﴿٨﴾

9. And with fear
(In his heart),⁵⁹⁵⁴

وَهُوَ يَخْشَى ﴿٩﴾

10. Of him wast thou unmindful.

فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّى ﴿١٠﴾

11. By no means
(Should it be so)!
For it is indeed
A Message of remembrance.⁵⁹⁵⁵

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذْكِرَةٌ ﴿١١﴾

12. Therefore let whose will,
Keep it in remembrance.

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكِّرْهُ ﴿١٢﴾

13. (It⁵⁹⁵⁶ is) in Books
Held (greatly) in honour,

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكَرَّمَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

14. Exalted (in dignity),
Kept pure and holy,

مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ ﴿١٤﴾

15. (Written) by the hands
Of scribes—

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾

16. Honourable and
Pious and Just.

كِرَامٍ بَرَرَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾

5954. The fear in the blind man's heart may have been two-fold. (1) He was humble and God-fearing, not arrogant and self-sufficient; (2) being poor and blind, he feared to intrude; yet his earnest desire to learn the Qur-ān made him bold, and he came, perhaps unseasonably, but was yet worthy of encouragement, because of the purity of his heart.

5955. Allah's Message is a universal Message, from which no one is to be excluded,—rich or poor, old or young, great or lowly, learned or ignorant. If anyone had the spiritual craving that needed satisfaction, he was to be given precedence if there was to be any question of precedence at all.

5956. At the time this Sūra was revealed, there were perhaps only about 42 or 45 Sūras in the hands of the Muslims. But it was a sufficient body of Revelation of high spiritual value, to which the description given here could be applied. It was held in the highest honour; its place in the hearts of Muslims was more exalted than that of anything else; as Allah's Word, it was pure and sacred; and those who transcribed it were men who were honourable, just and pious. The legend that the early Sūras were not carefully written down and preserved in books is a pure invention. The recensions made later in the time of the first and the third Khalīfas were merely to preserve the purity and safeguard the arrangement of the text at a time when the expansion of Islam among non-Arabic-speaking people made such precautions necessary.

17. Woe to man!

What hath made him
Reject Allah?

قُلْ لِلَّهِ الْإِسْلَامُ مَا أَكْفَرَهُ ﴿١٧﴾

18. From what stuff

Hath He created him?

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ﴿١٨﴾

19. From a sperm-drop:⁵⁹⁵⁷

He hath created him, and then
Mouldeth him in due Proportions;

مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ ﴿١٩﴾

20. Then doth He make

His path smooth for him;

ثُمَّ السَّيْلَ يَسِّرُهُ ﴿٢٠﴾

21. Then He causeth him to die,
And putteth him in his Grave;⁵⁹⁵⁸

ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ ﴿٢١﴾

22. Then, when it is

His Will, He will
Raise him up (again).

ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنشَرَهُ ﴿٢٢﴾

23. By no means hath he

Fulfilled what Allah
Hath commanded him.⁵⁹⁵⁹

كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَا أَمَرَهُ ﴿٢٣﴾

5957. Cf. lxxvi. 2, and n. 5832. The origin of man as an animal is lowly indeed. But what further faculties and capacities has not Allah granted to man? Besides his animal body, in which also he shares in all the blessings which Allah has bestowed on the rest of His Creation, man has been granted divine gifts which entitle him to be called the Vicegerent on earth: ii. 30. He has a will; he has spiritual perception; he is capable of divine love; he can control nature within certain limits, and subject nature's forces to his own use. And he has been given the power of judgment, so that he can avoid excess and defect, and follow the middle path. And that path, as well as all that is necessary for his life in its manifold aspects, has been made easy for him.

5958. Cf. xx. 55. Death is an inevitable event after the brief life on this earth, but it is also in a sense a blessing,—a release from the imperfections of this world, a close of the probationary period, after which will dawn the full Reality. "The Grave" may be understood to be the period between physical death and immortal Life, whatever may be the mode of disposal of the dead body. This intermediate period is the *Barzakh* or Partition: see n. 2940 to xxiii. 101.

5959. Though all these blessings and stages have been provided by Allah's Grace for the good of man, yet unregenerate man fails in carrying out the purpose of his creation and life.

24. Then let man look
At his Food,⁵⁹⁶⁰
(And how We provide it):

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَى طَعَامِهِ ﴿٢٤﴾

25. For that We pour forth
Water in abundance,

أَنَّا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا ﴿٢٥﴾

26. And We split the earth
In fragments,⁵⁹⁶¹

ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا ﴿٢٦﴾

27. And produce therein⁵⁹⁶² grain,

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا ﴿٢٧﴾

28. And Grapes and
The fresh vegetation,

وَعِنَبًا وَقَضْبًا ﴿٢٨﴾

29. And Olives and Dates,

وَزَيْتُونًا وَنَخْلًا ﴿٢٩﴾

30. And enclosed Gardens,⁵⁹⁶³
Dense with lofty trees,

وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا ﴿٣٠﴾

31. And Fruits and Fodder,--

وَفَلَكَهَ وَأَنَابًا ﴿٣١﴾

32. A provision
For you and your cattle.⁵⁹⁶⁴

مَنْعًا لَّكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

5960. After a reference to man's inner history, there is now a reference to just one item in his daily outer life, his food: and it is shown how the forces of heaven and earth unite by Allah's Command to serve man and his dependants. "A provision for you and your cattle" (verse 32 below). If that is the case with just one item, food, how much more comprehensive is Allah's beneficence when the whole of man's needs are considered!

5961. The water comes from the clouds in plentiful abundance; the earth is ploughed, and the soil is broken up in fragments, and yields an abundant harvest of cereals (Corn), trellised fruit (Grapes), and vegetable food (nutritious Plants), as well as fruit that can keep for long periods and serve many uses, like olives and dates.

5962. *Therein:* i.e., from within the earth or the soil.

5963. We not only get field crops such as were mentioned in n. 5961 above, but we have the more highly cultivated garden crops, both in the way of lofty trees, and in the way of carefully tended fruits like the fig; and then we have grass and all kinds of fodder.

5964. The same verse occurs at lxxix. 33, where no. 5940 explains the wider meaning in that context.

33. At length, when there
Comes the Deafening Noise,—⁵⁹⁶⁵

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاحَّةُ ﴿٣٣﴾

34. That Day shall a man
Flee from his own brother,

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ ﴿٣٤﴾

35. And from his mother
And his father,

وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ ﴿٣٥﴾

36. And from his wife
And his children.⁵⁹⁶⁶

وَصَحْبِهِ وَبَنِيهِ ﴿٣٦﴾

37. Each one of them,
That Day, will have
Enough concern (of his own)
To make him indifferent
To the others.⁵⁹⁶⁷

لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ يُؤْمِرُ بِهِ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ ﴿٣٧﴾

38. Some Faces that Day
Will be beaming,

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

39. Laughing, rejoicing.

صَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

5965. Preliminary to the establishment of the Final Judgment.

5966. Even those who were nearest and dearest in this life will not be able or willing to help each other on that awful Day. On the contrary, if they have to receive a sentence for their sins, they will be anxious to avoid even sharing each other's sorrows or witnessing each other's humiliation; for each will have enough of his own troubles to occupy him. On the other hand, the Righteous will be united with their righteous families: lii. 21; and their faces will be "beaming, laughing, rejoicing" (lxxx. 38-39).

5967. Cf. lxx. 10-14. Nor friend will ask after a friend that Day. On the contrary the sinner will desire to save himself at the expense even of his own family and benefactors.

40. And other faces that Day
Will be dust-stained;⁵⁹⁶⁸

وَوُجُوهُ يُوسِذُ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

41. Darkeness will cover them:

تَرْهَقُهُمْ ظِلْمَةٌ ﴿٤١﴾

42. Such will be
The Rejecters of Allah,
The Doers of Iniquity.

أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجَرَةُ ﴿٤٢﴾

5968. The dust on the faces of the sinners will be in contrast to the beaming light on the faces of the righteous; and the blackness in contrast to the "laughing, rejoicing" faces of the righteous. But the dust also suggests that being Rejecters of Allah, their faces and eyes and faculties were choked in dust, and the blackness suggests that being Doers of Iniquity they had no part or lot in Purity or Light. Another contrast may possibly be deduced: the humble and lowly may be "in the dust" in this life, and the arrogant sinners in sunshine, but the roles will be reversed at Judgment.