

INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SÚRAT *Al-A'la*, 87.

This is one of the earliest of the Makkan Sūras, being usually placed eighth in chronological order, and immediately after S. lxxxi.

The argument is that Allah has made man capable of progress by ordered steps, and by His Revelation will lead him still higher to purification and perfection.

Al-A'lā, or The Most High.

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

1. Glorify the name
Of thy Guardian-Lord⁶⁰⁸⁰
Most High,
2. Who hath created,⁶⁰⁸¹
And further, given
Order and proportion;
3. Who hath measured.⁶⁰⁸²
And granted guidance;
4. And Who bringeth out⁶⁰⁸³
The (green and luscious) pasture,
5. And then doth make it
(But) swarthy stubble.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى ١

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى ٢

وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى ٣

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى ٤

فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى ٥

6080. The word "Lord" by itself is an inadequate rendering here for *Rabb*. For it implies cherishing, guarding from harm, sustaining, granting all the means and opportunities of development. See n. 20 to i. 2. For shortness, perhaps "Guardian-Lord" will be sufficient in the Text.

6081. The story of Creation is wonderful and continuous. There are several processes which we contemplate in glorifying Allah's name. First, He brings us into being. Secondly, He endows us with forms and faculties exactly suited to what is expected of us, and to the environments in which our life will be cast, giving to everything due order and proportion.

6082. Thirdly, He has ordained laws and decrees, by which we can develop ourselves and fit ourselves into His whole scheme of evolution for all His Creation. He has measured exactly the needs of all, and given us instincts and physical predispositions which fit into His decrees. Fourthly, He gives us guidance, so that we are not the sport of mechanical laws. Our reason and our will are exercised, that we may reach the higher destiny of man.

6083. Fifthly, after maturity comes decay. But even in that decay, as when green pasture turns to stubble, we subserve other ends. In so far as we are animals, we share these processes with other forms of material Creation, animal, vegetable, and even mineral, which all have their appointed laws of growth and decay. But man's higher destiny is referred to in subsequent verses.

6. By degrees shall We
Teach thee⁶⁰⁸⁴
(The Message), so thou
Shalt not forget,⁶⁰⁸⁵
7. Except as Allah wills:⁶⁰⁸⁶
For He knoweth
What is manifest
And what is hidden.
8. And We will make it
Easy for thee (to follow)
The simple (Path).⁶⁰⁸⁷

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى

إِلَّا مَا شَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّهُ يَعْلَمُ الْجَهْرَ وَمَا يَخْفَى

وَنُبَيِّنُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى

6084. The soul, as it reaches the Light of Allah, makes gradual progress, like a man going from darkness into light. So the Qur-ān was revealed by stages. So all revelation from Allah comes by stages.

As usual, there are two parallel meanings: (1) that connected with the occasion of direct inspiration to the holy Prophet; and (2) the more general Message to mankind for all time. Everyone who understands the Message must declare it, in words, and still more, in his conduct.

6085. The particular occasion was an assurance to the Prophet, that though he was unlettered, the Message given to him would be preserved in his heart and in the hearts of men. The more general sense is that mankind, having once seized great spiritual truths, will hold fast to them, except as qualified in the following verse.

6086. There can be no question of this having any reference to the abrogation of any verses of the Qur-ān. For this Sūra is one of the earliest revealed, being placed about eighth according to the most accepted chronological order. While the basic principles of Allah's Law remain the same, its form, expression, and application have varied from time to time, e.g., from Moses to Jesus, and from Jesus to Muhammad. It is one of the beneficent mercies of Allah that we should forget some things of the past, lest our minds become confused and our development is retarded. Besides, Allah knows what is manifest and what is hidden, and His Will and Plan work with supreme wisdom and goodness.

6087. The Path of Islam is simple and easy. It depends on no abstruse mysteries or self-mortifications, but on straight and manly conduct in accordance with the laws of man's nature as implanted in him by Allah (xxx. 30). On the other hand, spiritual perfection may be most difficult, for it involves complete surrender on our part to Allah in all our affairs, thoughts, and desires: but after that surrender Allah's Grace will make our path easy.

9. Therefore give admonition
In case the admonition⁶⁰⁸⁸
Profits (the hearer).

فَذَكِّرْ إِنْ نَفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

10. He will heed
Who fears:

سَيَذَكِّرْ مَنْ يَخْشَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

11. But it will be avoided
By the most unfortunate one,

وَيَنْجَنِيهَا الْأَشْقَىٰ ﴿١١﴾

12. Who will enter
The Great Fire,⁶⁰⁸⁹

الَّذِي يَصِلُ النَّارَ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾

13. In which he will then
Neither die nor live.⁶⁰⁹⁰

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾

14. But he will prosper⁶⁰⁹¹
Who purifies himself.⁶⁰⁹²

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٤﴾

15. And remembers the name
Of his Guardian-Lord,
And prays.

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّىٰ ﴿١٥﴾

6088. This is not so strong as the Biblical phrase, "Cast not pearls before swine" (Matt. vii. 6). The cases where admonition does produce spiritual profit and where it does not, are mentioned below in verses 10 and 11-13 respectively. Allah's Message should be proclaimed to all: but particular and personal admonitions are also due to those who attend and in whose hearts is the fear of Allah; in the case of those who run away from it and dishonour it, such particular and personal admonition is useless. They are the unfortunate ones who prepare their own ruin.

6089. The Great Fire is the final Penalty or Disaster in the Hereafter, as contrasted with the minor Penalties or Disasters from which all evil suffers from within in this very life.

6090. A terrible picture of those who ruin their whole future by evil lives here below. They introduce a discord into Creation, while life should be one great universal concord. And their past clings to them as part of their own will. They are not even like the dry swarthy stubble mentioned in verse 5 above, which grew naturally out of the luscious pasture, for they have grown harmful, in defiance of their own nature. "Neither die nor live": Cf. xx. 74.

6091. *Prosper*: in the highest sense; attain to Bliss or Salvation; as opposed to "enter the Fire".

6092. The first process in godliness is to cleanse ourselves in body, mind, and soul. Then we shall be in a fit state to see and proclaim the Glory of Allah. That leads us to our actual absorption in Praise and Prayer.

16. Nay (behold), ye prefer
The life of this world;
17. But the Hereafter
Is better and more enduring.
18. And this is
In the Books
Of the earliest (Revelations),⁶⁰⁹³
19. The Books of
Abraham⁶⁰⁹⁴ and Moses.⁶⁰⁹⁵

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ﴿١٦﴾

وَالْآخِرَةَ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى ﴿١٧﴾

إِنَّ هَذَا فِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى ﴿١٨﴾

صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى ﴿١٩﴾

6093. The law of righteousness and godliness is not a new law, nor are the vanity and short duration of this world preached here for the first time. But spiritual truths have to be renewed and reiterated again and again.

6094. No Book of Abraham has come down to us. But the Old Testament recognises that Abraham was a prophet (Gen. xx. 7). There is a book in Greek, which has been translated by Mr. G.H. Box, called the Testament of Abraham (published by the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, London, 1927). It seems to be a Greek translation of a Hebrew original. The Greek Text was probably written in the second Christian century, in Egypt, but in its present form it probably goes back only to the 9th or 10th Century. It was popular among the Christians. Perhaps the Jewish Midrash also refers to a Testament of Abraham.

6095. The original Revelation of Moses, of which the Present Pentateuch is a surviving recension. See Appendix II.

The present Gospels do not come under the definition of the "earliest" Books. Nor could they be called "Books of Jesus": they were written not by him, but about him, and long after his death.