

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the All-Merciful, the All-Compassionate

Chapter 80: 'ABASA (He Frowned)

Overview:

Revealed in Makkah in the early years of Islam, this surah of 42 verses takes its name from the word, 'abasa' (he frowned) in the first verse. It gives instructions on the etiquette of teaching Qur'an, invites to reflect on works of Allah's power and warns against the day of resurrection.

Reason of Revelation:

Allah's messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, was very eager for Quraish to accept Islam. He paid special attention to their leaders as he knew the chieftain would be followed by their peoples in that tribal community. One day while he was busy with some notables of Quraish, a blind man (Abdullah Ibn Umm Maktum, a cousin of Rasulallah's wife Khadija, may Allah be pleased with her) interrupted him. He called out to Rasulallah saying "Teach me some verses of what Allah has taught you". The Messenger found this behavior distractive. Thereupon this surah was revealed.

Style:

Typical of the revelations in Makkah period, the verses of this surah are short and very powerful. Many forms of literary arts and artistic styles are presented, some of which are unique to Qur'an. The surah displays various kinds of rhymes such as derivational rhyme, internal rhyme, full rhyme, etc. It makes use of questions to stress meanings, employs changes in intonation and rhythm, changes in the subject pronouns (called iltifat), and presents use of similes, analogies, antilogies, metaphors, portrayals, allusion, alliteration and other types of literary arts and artistic styles in the most exquisite form. Just as Allah's creation is beautiful and miraculous, His divine words are also beautiful and miraculous both in multiple layers of broad meanings as well as in their matchless composition and styles. Neither one can ever be imitated.

In particular, in this surah we see that the each passage rhymes within itself, and the rhythm changes as the content of the passage changes. The intonation of each word fits perfectly with the content of its verse. The word 'sakhkhah' (the final cry of the Trumpet) in verse 39, for example, carries such a sharp tone that it almost pierces the ears, and makes one feel as if hearing the cry of the Trumpet. The destinies of two groups of people are put in contrast in a vivid antilogy making use of verbal portraits of their faces and certain metaphors. The imagery of the scenes of dense treed gardens, vegetables, and fruit trees bring out their pictures in full relief. The surah states a number of general principles in each passage and reinforces their significance (by repeating the word 'kalla', for example). The opening and the closing of the surah are in perfect harmony with each other.

Noble Meaning:

*"He frowned and turned away.. when the blind man came to him.. How could you tell?
Perchance he would grow in purity.. or that he might grow mindful, and the reminder might*

benefit him?. but the one who considered himself self-sufficient.. to him you attend.. though you are not accountable if he does not cleanse himself.. as to him who comes to you eagerly.. and fearfully.. from him you are distracted.. no indeed! this is an admonition.. So whoever wills, receives admonition and takes heed.. It is recorded in honored pages.. exalted and purified.. by the hands of scribes (messenger angles).. noble and virtuous..” (Verses 1-16)

Scholars differed in their view on who actually did turn away from the blind man and frowned. Some said the pronoun ‘he’ refers to the Messenger, peace and blessing be upon him. Others thought the verse reproaches a man from the audience who was present at the meeting and disliked the interruption by the blind man. The verse 10 indicates that Rasulullah found Ibn Umm Maktum’s behavior distracting even though he did not turn away from him. It is reported that Rasulullah took every opportunity afterwards to honor him saying ‘Greetings to him on whose account God reproved me!’, and laying down his cloak for him to sit.

This passage instructs several principles and teaches important lessons. Here is a brief overview:

1. First of all, it is important to recall that all prophets are believed to be infallible in Islam. It is an error to think that Allah’s messenger made a mistake on this occasion or elsewhere. When a prophet is presented several options that are good, better and best, it is most fitting to his rank to strive and choose the best option. If it so happens that he chooses the better and not the best, his decision is rectified immediately by revelation. This particular incident is one such example.
2. *Disability*: Qur’an guides Muslims not to leave the disabled in isolation lest they fall prey to despair and psychological ailments. It is a duty to show utmost care to the disabled and deal with them in kindest ways. They enjoy certain privileges in Islam such as special rulings in the legislation and acts of worship. This encourages the community to grant them certain privileges so that they can live with respect. A prophetic tradition reads that “You are given sustenance and support for the virtue of those who are weak amongst you.” Another tradition urges us to “Show mercy to those on earth so that He Who is in the heavens bestows mercy to you.”
3. *Etiquette of Preaching*: The preacher is not responsible for the disbelief of those who reject him. He should keep in mind that the holy Qur’an is in no need of the approval of the arrogant disbeliever. However, the preacher has responsibilities in helping his congregation to achieve spiritual growth and purity. In particular he should attend their questions and requests carefully.
4. *Striving for knowledge of Qur’an*: The human is made vicegerent (khalifa) of Allah, because of his potential to attain superior knowledge. Knowledge and wisdom are lost treasures that Muslims must strive to acquire regardless of where it comes from. A student of Qur’an is so valuable in divine standards that Allah warns His noble prophet about his rights. An authentic tradition states that one who shows diligence in Qur’an will be equal in rank to the scribe angels. Another tradition states that the best among Muslims are those who learn the Qur’an and teach it.
5. This incident furnishes yet another proof for the messengership of Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessing. No one other than a messenger of God would announce to public that he had been given a divine reproach for his action. Qur’an is indeed but divine revelation.

6. In addition, these great principles could have never been produced by rationality based on any earthly factors in the backward society of 'jahiliyyah'. This was a society where social status, power and wealth were most important. Such principles could only issue from Divine speech.

7. Rasulallah's effort for winning the heart of the blind man is noteworthy. He appointed Ibn Umm Maktum as his deputy governor in Madinah twice when he himself had to be away.

The scrolls referred to in verses 13 and 14 are the heavenly pages on which Qur'anic revelations are recorded, and the envoys (called 'safarah') are the angel aides of Gabriel who accompanied him while carrying the revelation to the messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him. Qur'an is the divine message flawless and luminous in every respect, noble and full of light. It has been kept pure and secure from any tinge of intervention. Man stands in sheer need of the guidance of Qur'an. Submit to its message humbly in order for the Qur'an to grab your hand and raise you to the utmost horizons that is in reach of any mortal.

"Perish man! How disbelieving and ungrateful he is!. of what has Allah created him?. of a drop of sperm. He has created him and fashioned him in measured proportions.. then made his path smooth for him.. then causes him to die, and buries him.. then whenever He wills, He raises him up again to life.. No indeed! Man has not fulfilled the duty He had assigned him.." (Verse 17-23)

The admonition is given in general terms using the word 'man' so as to be more effective. Even though most men have a share in this admonition, the reproach is directed primarily to the disbelievers and the ungrateful.

The Arabic verb 'qaddara' denotes precise and meticulous proportioning, and setting a destiny. It also denotes bestowing weight and value. This is how man has been created by all his physical qualities and spiritual endowments favored by the merciful Creator. He has been honored and raised from his humble origins to a high position in which the whole world has been put at his disposal. God also honors him by instructing the burial of his corpse, rather than leaving him as a food for wild beasts. The phrase 'smoothing his path' is viewed as an allusion to his physical birth as well as spiritual guidance he is given through messengers. Man, however, does not simply do justice in showing gratitude for these infinite blessings.

The video clip below is about the ultimate design in human reproduction:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Sg6NhnYbqUQ&feature=related>

"Then let man reflect on his food.. We poured down water in abundance.. then We split the earth in clefts.. and so We enable grain to grow therein.. and grapes, and fresh vegetation.. and olive-trees and date-palms.. and dense-treed gardens.. and (diverse other) fruits and herbage.. as a means of sustenance for you and your cattle." (Verses 24-32)

Man regards his food ordinary, and does not consider it a great blessing from All-Merciful Creator. These verses therefore remind that just as the creation of man is a great miracle, so is the creation of his sustenance. It is Allah who sustains the water cycle that is vital for life. It is He who created countless species of plants, fruits and vegetables from simple and similar seeds. He

made the earth a womb for all grains and seeds to grow. He created sustenance both for man and his cattle from which he gains other benefits, and items of food such as meat, milk, etc.

It is also possible that this passage is referring to stages in the creation of earth. At some point in time, the elements that made up water were in gaseous form, the oceans were in the sky. Water, having formed in the outer atmosphere, fell towards the earth but could not reach it as the temperature near the earth was much higher. A time came when the deluge reached the earth which may be described as water pouring in torrents. Similarly, cleaving of the earth so that it became suitable for vegetation may have taken place a long time ago. The Qur'anic statement may refer to multiple break-ups of the earth's surface rocks caused by great floods and various climatic factors which contributed to the formation of a soil layer where vegetation could grow.

Another video clip about harvesting date trees: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bf9JXZIJP6w>

“At last, when the deafening blast is sounded.. that day shall man flee from his brother.. and his mother and his father.. and his wife and his children. each one of them, on that day, shall have enough to occupy him so as to make him heedless of others.. some faces on that day shall be shining, rejoicing and joyful.. and some faces on that day shall be covered with dust, and veiled with darkness.. these will be the disbelievers and the wicked ones..” (Verses 33-42)

The word ‘sakhkhah’ refers to the final piercing cry of the Trumpet at which all dead men shall be resurrected to life. The ties between a person and his nearest family members cannot be severed in the normal course of events. Yet the stunning blast destroys all such links and throws them up into the air. Everyone will flee the consequences of misleading one another, doing harm to one another heedlessly of the hereafter. Everyone will be occupied completely by his or her own account. It is also said that one will flee his nearest kindred if he sees them in a grievous condition as he will not have authority to help.

The destiny of the groups of believers and disbelievers are put in contrast, establishing a strong hope and a great fear in the heart of the reader. The ambition for acquiring knowledge of Qur'an, the fear of God, and gratefulness for His innumerable bounties are characteristics of a sincere believer that will lead him to a successful and happy ending. This is characterized by a beaming smile on a shining face. The pride, self-conceit and ingratitude are characteristics of the disbeliever and the wicked that ruin his afterlife. This is portrayed by a darkened gloomy face.

Notes:

It is written in some sufi books that reciting this surah 7 times would lead the believer to attain the level of certainty in faith.

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May Allah help us be steadfast in striving for the knowledge of Qur'an, help us observe His infinite blessings, offer genuine gratitude for them, and attain certainty of faith. May Allah make our faces shining and bright in the hereafter, and the faces of all our beloved ones. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, his pure family and companions, and his noble brothers in the office of messengership.

A praise for the merciful Creator: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NB3u0mqggV4>