

Chapter 113: AL-FALAQ (Daybreak)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

“Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak, (1) from the evil of anything that He has created; (2) from the evil of darkness when it gathers; (3) and from the evil of the blowers in knots; (4) from the evil of the envious when he envies.”

Overview:

This surah of five verses gets its name from the word ‘falaq’ (the daybreak) in the first verse. The period of revelation is disputed. There are various reports supporting both views; that it was revealed in Makkah and in Madinah. In any case, there is a consensus that this surah and the next (al-Nas) were revealed in one occasion, and together they are called ‘mu’awwidhatayn’, the twin shelters or sanctuaries. According to Yazir, the surahs may be taught by Gabriel to Rasulallah, peace and blessings be upon him, as a prayer for his protection in Makkah first, and they may be revealed as a part of the Qur’an later in Madinah. Maududi advances another explanation arguing that on occasion of a particular incident or situation, Rasulallah’s attention was drawn, for a second time, to a surah or a verse which had been revealed previously. This might be the case with these two chapters. Their subject matter also supports that they were sent down in Makkah for the first time when opposition against Rasulallah had grown very intense.

The types of evil specifically noted in the last part of the surah, namely sorcery and envy are both undeniable realities. Those who deny their affect and regard them as superstition are doing so either because they do not believe in anything metaphysical and connected with religion, or because they are unaware of any realities beyond the physical realm. There are many experiences (such as telepathy and hypnosis) that cannot be explained by physical sciences. Lacking a scientific explanation does not necessarily imply the invalidity of the phenomenon.

Sorcery and magic is the production of illusions subject to designs of a magician. The sorcery does not alter the reality and the nature of things, but influences the mind and senses and makes one feel as if the reality had changed. It is a psychological phenomenon. Qur’an speaks about Moses, peace be upon him, breaking the witchcrafts worked by magicians in Pharaoh’s court and rendering them invalid (e.g., 10:81), and the sorcery practiced to cause a rift between spouses (2: 102) by the people of Babylon and severely condemns it. According to Qur’an sorcery and casting spells are as sinful as unbelief.

While breaking a spell may be viewed as a good and meritorious deed, it must not be adopted and practiced as a profession. Rasulallah, peace and blessings be upon him, never explained how to cast or break a spell. However, he taught how to protect against their evil.

The safest way to protect one’s self against such evils is to have a strong loyalty to Allah and His messenger, peace and blessings be upon him. This requires holding fast to the principles of Islam. In addition, one should never give up praying, for prayer is a weapon against hostility, protects from harm, and helps to attain his goals. God Almighty, the All-Hearing and All-Seeing,

answers His servant's prayers and changes the depression of loneliness into the pleasure of His Company.

Allah's messenger loved this surah and the next profoundly, as is clearly apparent in various traditions. A companion, Jabir, said Rasulullah instructed him to continue recitation of these surahs saying "you shall never recite anything equivalent to them". The mother of faithful, A'ishah, may Allah be pleased with her, reported that Allah's messenger would recite the last three surahs of the Qur'an (Ikhlas, Falaq, and Nas) when getting into bed to sleep, breath into his joined palms and would, starting with his head, run his palms over his face and his body as far as he could reach. He repeated this three times.

This sunnah (practice of Rasulullah) indicates, in particular, that the recitation of amulets (supplication formulas) is permissible to help treat illnesses. However the formula should not contain any unknown words or expressions that may not be fitting the pure teachings of Islamic faith. One may recite and blow by means of the holy names of Allah, or the supplications taken from the Qur'an. In addition, one should not rely on the recitation itself, but put his trust completely on Allah who will create by His infinite compassion the cure through recitation of the supplication.

Finally, it should be stressed that making prayers and reciting supplications is not an alternative for medical treatment, and should not lead to ignorance and neglect of material means in attaining specific goals such as success and health. The visiting of a doctor is also a type of prayer, active prayer, for recovery from illness. The believers must certainly seek medical help in case of physical or mental illnesses. Rasulullah himself stated that Allah has created a cure for every disease except old age, and exhorted his followers to seek for medicine. (Gulen)

Reason of Revelation:

'Uqbah bin 'Amir reports that Rasulullah said to him: "Have you not heard the unique, matchless verses that were revealed last night: 'Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of the daybreak' and 'Say, I seek refuge in the Lord of mankind.'" This tradition is usually cited to support the view of scholars who thought the chapters are of Madinah, since 'Uqbah had become muslim in Madinah after the hijrah.

Another (somewhat unreliable) tradition which added strength to this view is that the surahs were revealed when a Jewish man named Labid bin A'sam and his sisters put a magic spell on Allah's messenger in Madinah, and he had felt unwell under its effect for several days. He thought he had done a thing whereas, in fact, he had not done it. According to these reports, he was released from the influence of the spell by reciting these two surahs. This story is questioned on the basis that it is not possible for Rasulullah to feel ill due to spells for he was under the protection of Allah. However, scholars argued that he was affected only in his personal capacity (which could happen to a prophet as seen in the case of Moses in his encounter with magicians), and he felt absolutely no influences which might run counter to his office as a messenger of Allah.

The preferred view, however, is that these surahs were sent down in Makkah around the time when the hostility against Rasulullah touched its extreme limits as the Makkan chiefs were frustrated by the spread of Islam. They were filled with hatred against him, holding secret

consultations to kill him, working magic and casting charms on him for his destruction, whisper evil thoughts into the minds and hearts of the people of their tribes against him and the Qur'an so that they become suspicious of him and flee him. Moreover, some chiefs of Quraish were burning with jealousy against him due to their personal and tribal arrogance and rivalry. On this occasion the two surahs were revealed instructing Rasulallah and his companions how to seek refuge in Allah and protect against such evils.

Main Themes:

By the infinite mercy of Allah, Qur'an offers care and shelter to the faithful through this surah. Rasulallah is instructed to teach how to seek refuge in Allah from every evil to which one may be exposed. This is essential for a healthy spiritual life. It emphasizes complete reliance on Allah who has control over all His creation. Therefore, the three of the four main themes of the Qur'an (tawhid, nubuwah, and 'ibadah except hashr) are evidently represented in the surah.

Style:

This surah along with the following one contains a directive from Allah primarily to His messenger and through him to all believers to take refuge in Him and seek His protection in the face of any source of fear, subtle or apparent, known or unknown. It is as if God is unfolding His world of care, and embracing the believers in His guard. He is kindly and affectionately calling on them to resort to His care through which they will feel safe and at peace. It is as if He is saying to them: I know that you are helpless and surrounded by foes and fears. Come to Me for safety, contentment and peace. Hence, the surah starts with, "Say: I seek refuge in the Lord of the Daybreak." The wording of the verses is in full harmony with these meanings of affection and power as seen in the choice of the divine name 'Rabb' (Lord), for example.

The same word 'sharr' (evil) is used four times, but referring to different types of evils. The first instance is a general reference to all types of evils, whereas the remaining ones point to particular significant cases. The words 'falaq' and 'khalaq' that occur in the first two verses present a perfect rhyme as they differ only in their first letters. The words 'haased' and 'hasad' both occur in the last verse are derived from the same root 'h-s-d' (to envy) which is an example of an internal rhyme and a rhyme of derivation. The surah as a whole rhymes beautifully as the last words in each verse end in a letter (q, b, and d) in the same sound group called 'qalqala' letters. These letters make strong sounds that are pronounced by imprisonment of the running of the sound to complete the reliance on the articulation point. The sound 'q' in particular is repeated throughout the surah providing a charming example of what is called alliteration. The strength and forcefulness of the pronunciation together with the repetition of certain words and letters helps make one realize the magnitude of the potential harms and risks, and gives the sense of urgency to seek a strong refuge. It is as if these repeated forceful sounds provide a mysterious key for invalidating the spells cast by sorcerers who blow into knots, and driving away the harms of envy and evil eye.

The beautiful antilogy presented by the contrast between the daybreak with its light (which is used as a symbol of guidance) and the darkness of the night (which is used figuratively to mean evil) should also be noted. The perfect harmony between the meaning and the wording, all the literary arts and artistic styles add a captivating beauty to the recitation of this surah.

Noble Meaning:

1. (قُلْ أَعُوذُ بِرَبِّ الْفَلَقِ) “Say: I seek refuge with the Lord of the dawn,”

The word ‘qul’ (say) indicates that the primary addressee of the surah is Rasulullah himself, but every believer is also an addressee through him.

The word ‘falaq’ means to split and to pierce through. It is commonly used to mean bringing out the light of dawn by splitting the darkness of night. The actual meaning, however, is much more comprehensive. It appears that every being is created by splitting something. All vegetation sprouts by splitting open the seed and the soil. All animals come out either from the womb of the mother or by breaking open the egg, or some other obstruction. All springs gush out by splitting open the rock or soil. The day appears by piercing through the curtain of the night. The drops of rain pierce through the clouds and fall on the earth. In short, everything in the world comes into being as a result of breaking and splitting another one. In fact ‘falaq’ may be taken to mean ‘create’ for every creature is brought into being by the power of Allah piercing through the curtain of nonexistence. According to this interpretation, this verse would mean: “I seek refuge with the Lord of all creation.”

The verse therefore consoles the believer that the One whose refuge is sought has the power over all things. That the One who kindles the light of day, brings out the light by piercing darkness has the power to bring the believer out to safety from the dangers and harms of all evils.

The name ‘Rabb’ (meaning the Lord, Master, Sustainer and Provider) used in this verse is most relevant as it indicates both the affection and the power to provide a shelter.

Finally, the abjad value of this verse is 1354 which corresponds to 1935 in solar calendar years. One suggested meaning of the verse miraculously points to the great massacres and damages of the World War II that are on the way, and commands the believers and the ummah of that era to seek refuge in Allah from its evils and avoid participating in the war. (Badiuzzaman)

2. (مِنْ شَرِّ مَا خَلَقَ) “from the evil of what He has created,”

The word ‘sharr’ (evil) is used for loss, trouble and affliction as well as for the means which cause losses, injuries and afflictions. For example, hunger, disease, injury in an accident, being burnt by fire, being stung by a scorpion are evils in the first sense, for they are by themselves troubles and afflictions. On the other hand, unbelief, polytheism and every kind of sin and wickedness cause loss and affliction and are evils in the second sense. Seeking refuge from the evil of all creatures comprises all such meanings. In fact, it includes a more general supplication for protection from not only the evils of this world but also from every evil of the Hereafter.

Allah is the creator of all things, including the deeds and actions of His servants. It should be noted that that evil has not been attributed to the creation of Allah in this verse, but to the creatures. This is so because, as Badiuzzaman explains “creating evil is not evil; rather, earning the evil is evil.”

The abjad value of this verse is 1361 which corresponds to the year 1942 (World War II).

3. (وَمِن شَرِّ غَاسِقٍ إِذَا وَقَبَ) “and from the evil of darkness when it settles,”

After the general prayer given in the previous verse, seeking refuge from three particular evils are cited specifically due to their greater evil.

The word ‘ghasiq’ in the verse literally means dark, and ‘waqab’ means to enter or to overspread. Prayer has been taught to seek refuge from the evil of the darkness of night, for most of the crimes and acts of wickedness are committed at night, harmful animals also come out at night. Furthermore, the verse issues a warning against the evil that may be done secretly, and to which one may be exposed in darkness, and which may be done by invisible beings.

As pointed out above, Makkan chiefs were plotting against the life of Rasulullah. They were making plans to attack him at night so that the murder could not be detected. Therefore, the command was sent to seek Allah’s refuge from the evils and calamities which descend at night. For a believer, this verse may thus imply seeking refuge with Allah from the evils planned and practiced secretly and by secret enemies, such as foreign agents or intelligence services. (Unal)

The abjad value of the third verse is 1971 (the year of a military coup d’etat in Turkey).

4. (وَمِن شَرِّ النَّفَّاثَاتِ فِي الْعُقَدِ) “and from the evil of the blowers in knots,”

The word ‘uqad’ is the plural of ‘uqdah’ which means a knot that is tied on a string or piece of thread. ‘Nafath’ means to blow, and ‘naffathat’ is in plural form which may indicate femininity or exaggeration or both. That is, it may mean the men who blow much, or women who blow (much). The verse specially refers to a form of witchcraft carried out in Arabia at the time when sorcerers tied knots in cords and blew upon them with an imprecation. It may point to various types of magic, whether by deceiving people’s physical senses or by influencing their will-power and projecting ideas onto their emotions and minds.

Typically, in the practice of sorcery a magician seeks help of satans, evil spirits or stars to influence the subject. It is therefore called ‘kufr’ (unbelief) in the Qur’an (2:102). Even if it does not contain any elements of unbelief, it is still forbidden as Allah’s messenger counted it among the seven heinous sins in a tradition.

According to some modern commentators, the verse may also be pointing to the use of radio for war propaganda and spreading evil. The radio broadcasting was made possible for the first time around the year 1910 (somewhere between 1906-1910). Note also that the abjad value of this verse is 1328 which corresponds to the year 1910. (This is also about the time when Balkan wars and Russian war broke in the aftermath of World War I.)

5. (وَمِن شَرِّ حَاسِدٍ إِذَا حَسَدَ) “and from the evil of an envier when he envies.”

The word ‘hasad’ (envy) means that a person feels discontent and resentment at the better fortune, superiority or good quality that Allah has granted to another, and wishes that it should be taken away from the other person and given to him, or at least the other one should be deprived

of it. If one desires a similar blessing from Allah without any ill intentions towards the other, that is called 'gipta' and may be acceptable. However, one should be aware of the fine line between the two, and be careful not to cross it. A believer should also take measures not to incite envy (or gipta) in his brothers and sisters.

It is possible that some harm to the envied may result from such a baseless grudge. This may either be the outcome of direct physical action (in words or deeds) by the envier, or from suppressed feelings alone perhaps through casting the evil eye (which may be unintentional). Little is known about the mysteries of envy and its influence, and the little that is known has often been uncovered by chance and coincidence. In any case, there is in envy an evil from which the refuge and protection of God must be sought. The All-Knowing has directed His messenger and his followers to seek His refuge from such evil. It is unanimously agreed by all Islamic schools of thought that Allah will always protect His servants from such evils, should they seek His protection as He has directed them to do.

Besides seeking refuge in Allah, one should do a good turn to the envious whether this good behavior mitigates the jealousy or not.

The abjad value of this verse is 1347 which corresponds to the year 1928-29.

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May Allah protect us from the evils of sorcery, envy, evil eye, all types of darkness and every evil. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, on his pure family and companions, and on all his noble brothers in messengership.