

## Chapter 108: AL-TAKATHUR (Rivalry in Worldly Gains)

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

“You are obsessed by greed for more and more; until you go down to your graves. Nay, in time you will come to know! Once again, in time you will come to know! Indeed, were you to know [the truth] with certainty!.. You would, most certainly, see the fire of hell. Again, you will, most certainly, see it with an eye of certainty. Then on that day you will certainly be questioned about your joys and comforts.”

### Overview:

This surah of eight verses was revealed in Makkah. It is named after the word at-takathur in its first verse. The surah warns against competition in, and boasting about the possession of ever more worldly gains. It instructs that the worldly riches and comforts are not merely blessings to be enjoyed thoughtlessly, but are in fact a means of trial for which man will be called to account in the Hereafter.

### Reason of Revelation:

According to Ibn Abbas and others this surah was revealed about two tribes of Quraish named Banu Abd Manaf and Banu Sahn. The two tribes had first recounted the glories and illustrious deeds of their living men, and abundance of their wealth and number to boast against each other. Banu Abdu Manaf outnumbered Banu Sahn. To gain the upperhand, Banu Sahn called them to include their deceased in their count as well. They had gone to the graveyard and bragged of the glorious deeds of their dead. Thereupon the divine revelation came down.

According to Amr b. Dinar the surah was revealed about merchants and market dealers.

### Main Themes:

Even though all four recurring themes that prevail in the Qur'an (the unity of Divine Being, the institution of messengership, life after death, and worship and justice) are present in the surah, belief in afterlife and worship and justice are stressed in a forceful and awakening tone.

### Style:

This surah has a rhythm that is both majestic and awe-inspiring; as if it were the voice of a warner standing on a high place, projecting his voice as it rings out in weighty emphasis. He calls out to people who are drowsy, drunken, confused. They approach a precipice with their eyes closed and their feelings numbed. So the warner increases the volume of his voice to the limit. With a deep and grave rhythm the surah then strikes their hearts with the terror awaiting them after they are left in their graves. By repetitions of this warning, it adds to the depth and awe of this assurance, and points out the grave prospect that lies beyond which they do not recognize in their flush of intoxication and rivalry for worldly riches. The style of the surah makes the drunkard sober, the lethargic conscious, the confused attentive and the self-indulgent tremble and feel apprehension at his indulgence in comforts and pleasures. It achieves a perfect harmony between the actual reality and its manner of expression.

Noble Meaning:

1. (أَهْلَاكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ) You are preoccupied by greed for more and more;

The word 'takathur' is derived from the root 'k-th-r', and means emulous desire of abundance; rivalry and vying (in respect of riches) and boasting; vying with one another to excel (in multiplying worldly possessions). The word 'alha' which is from the root 'l-h-a' means to occupy, amuse, distract and divert from (what is worthy and significant).

The phrase 'worldly riches' is unspecified and unrestricted. This generality of the form indicates that vying and boasting in all types of worldly gains are reprimanded by the Qur'an whether that relates to wealth, position, fame, knowledge, power, pedigree, posterity, multitude or others.

There are many traditions (hadith) reported from Allah's Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, showing that takathur is a strong human instinct, and thus Qur'an is warning about deviations from the straight path.

2. (حَتَّى زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرِ) until you go down to your graves.

The word 'zuratum' means 'you visit', and it is interpreted in two different ways: visiting graveyard as explained in the reason of revelation, or the actual death.

In general, visiting a graveyard is not forbidden if done following its proper etiquette. In fact, it is seen as a means that reminds the transient nature of the worldly life and is therefore commanded. Visiting the tombs of awliya (friends of Allah) reminds their illustrious life and legacy, and encourages one to follow their footsteps, and is also in general permissible and commanded. However, it is critical that proper manners should be observed in all such visits. The visit of Rasulullah's masjid is especially recommended and has become a part of the pilgrimage (hajj).

3. (كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ) Nay, in time you will come to know!

4. (ثُمَّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ) Again, in time you will come to know!

Repetition makes the warning stronger emphasizes its urgency. They may also be references to two different instances: The first instance of coming to an understanding of truth will occur when death comes; and the second instance is when one is raised from the dead. Some scholars also thought that the first verse addresses to the disbelievers, and the second to the believers.

There is a reference here for the veracity of punishment in the grave.

5. (كَأَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ) No indeed, were you to know [the truth] with knowledge of certainty...

‘Yaqeen’ is generally translated as certainty, but is also used to mean death in the Qur’an. The conditional sentence is not completed in the text. This is acceptable as a refined form of Arabic. The immediate inference here is that had they known what they should know for certain, they would not have indulged in such rivalry for petty gain, and would not disorder priorities. However, leaving the main clause open the verse adds to the feeling of awe generated by the surah, and allows the reader to realize that he or she would do much much more for prosperity in the eternal life. Indeed, one would do all in his power to succeed.

Attaining certainty is a summit in a believer’s spiritual perfection. The degrees of certainty is usually explained in three stages: namely, certainty of knowledge (ilm al-yaqen), certainty of sight (ayn al-yaqen), and the absolute certainty (haqq al-yaqen). The first level of certainty is pointed out in this verse.

Let’s listen to Bediuzzaman as he listed some observations [in the Tenth Word] that would lead to the knowledge of conviction and certainty for afterlife:

Is it at all possible that the Glory of God's Dominicality and His Divine Sovereignty should create a cosmos such as this, in order to display His perfections, with such lofty aims and elevated purposes, without establishing a reward for those believers who through faith and worship respond to these aims and purposes? Or that He should not punish those misguided ones who treat His purposes with rejection and scorn?

Is it at all possible that the Lord of Glory, Who demonstrates His Dominical sovereignty in the wisdom and order, the justice and equilibrium that pervade all things, from the atom to the sun, should not bestow favour on those believers who seek refuge beneath the protective wing of His Dominicality, who believe in His Wisdom and Justice, and whose acts are for the purpose of worshipping Him?

Is it at all possible that a Lord possessing infinite compassion and mercy, Who most compassionately fulfils the smallest need of His lowliest creatures in the most unexpected fashion, Who heeds the muffled plea for help of His most obscure creature, and Who responds to all the petitions He hears, whether vocal or mute -is it at all possible that such a Lord should not pay heed to the greatest petition of the foremost among His servants, the most beloved among his creatures, that He should not hear and grant his most exalted prayer?

In similar terms, Bediuzzaman invites us to contemplate the manifestation of all Divine names and attributes in this world and understand the reality of life after death based on their observed realities. In particular, he points out the manifestations of the Divine names including the Truth, the All-Wise, the Generous, the Just, the Merciful, the All-Living, the Self-Subsistent, the Giver of Life and the Giver of Death, the Beautiful, the Glorious, the Preserver, the Guardian, the Eternal, the Answerer of Prayer, the Compassionate, the Merciful and the Sustainer.

6. (لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ) You would, most certainly, see the fire of hell.

7. (ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ) Again, you will, most certainly, see it with certainty of sight!.

The same explanation for the repetition of verses is also valid here. It is established by Qur'an that all will see the Hell-fire: the believers will come to the sight of it but will be saved from it by Allah's mercy. However, the disbelievers will see it and will be left in there for their punishment.

According to scholars, the first verse is a warning in this world and the second explains the sight of hell-fire in the Plane of Gathering or on the Bridge. It may also be a reference for the disbeliever to their vision of the fire first, and (May Allah protect us) their entering in it next. Still some others thought that the first vision follows from the knowledge of certainty for believers in this world by the sight of the heart, and the second will occur in the Hereafter.

8. (ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ نَعِيمِ) Then on that day you will certainly be questioned about your joys and comforts.

The blessings which Allah has bestowed on man are unlimited and countless including his creation in the best stature with perfect spiritual faculties and physical form, his health, his sustenance, and other provisions and special favors. Man will be questioned for all the personal comforts and pleasures he enjoyed except what he used to satisfy his basic needs. There are certain duties concerning all other boons and bounties. One should not be proud because of them and their abundance; rather, he should be grateful to Allah, earn and spend his wealth lawfully with the intention of using it in a way pleasing to Allah.

There are several traditions (hadith) reported from Allah's Messenger, peace and blessings be upon him, indicating that both believers and disbelievers will have to account for the blessings granted by Allah. However, the grateful will come out successfully from the questioning, whereas the thankless and the ingrate will emerge as failures.

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May Allah give us a vision that shows the true reality of this world and its pleasures and comforts as well as its misfortunes; help us see the truth and adhere to it and help us see the falsehood and stay away from it. May Allah increase us in faith and knowledge so that we have complete certainty of afterlife, the same level of certainty that we will attain when we are actually raised up and gathered in the Plain of Gathering. May Allah help us offer genuine gratitude that He would accept as sufficient for His countless blessings and favors on us, and would be pleased with it. May Allah protect us from the Blazing Fire, and bless us to be among the fortunate who will drink from the water of Kawthar river in Paradise in the company of Allah's Messenger. May Allah shower His infinite mercy on him and his family and companions, and on all his brothers in messengership and on theirs.