

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

### Chapter 95: AL-TEEN (The Fig)

*“By the fig and the olive; and by Mount Sinai; and by this secure city [Makkah]; We indeed created man in the best stature; then We return him to the lowest of the low; except for those who believe and do righteous deeds, for they will have a reward unfailing; what then causes you to deny the recompense? is not Allah the most just of judges?” (Praise be to Allah, He indeed is.)*

#### Overview:

This is the 28<sup>th</sup> surah revealed in Makkah. It is named after the word ‘al-tin’ (the fig) in the first verse. The surah gives a succinct summary of man’s creation and his upright nature, and the reality of the divine religion.

Qur’an mentions specifically several fruits that modern science has shown to have great health benefits, and preventive and healing effects on many diseases. In addition to rich vitamins and essential nutrients they contain, fruits have most pleasant colors, unique tastes and smells. All fruit trees eat same black mud, but extract from it only the minerals that benefit human health, and yield the most attractive produces. But how could the plant and a piece of wood know what nutrients to choose? Qur’an thus draws attention to the diversity and beauty of fruits, and calls man to ponder upon their miraculous creation. (A short [introduction](#) to health benefits of fruits.)

The immediate theme of this surah, besides his upright physical stature, is man’s spiritual being and the essence of divine religion. All four main themes of the Qur’an are presented in this short surah: it describes the Creator by divine attributes of All-Wise and All-Just, gives a brief account of great prophets, and explains the concept of worship and the veracity of afterlife.

#### Reason of Revelation:

Ibn Abbas reported that the condition of a group of believers who had suffered senility and dotage became a concern in the time of Rasulullah. They were unable to observe and carry out their responsibilities due to old age. Qur’an declared in this surah that their excuse is accepted and their rewards will not cease; they will continue to be rewarded based on their deeds when they had a sound mind and were able. (Zuhayli) This may however be an explanation of the 5<sup>th</sup> verse, rather than a reason of revelation. It is clear that the surah presents strong evidences in response to the denial of the message of Islam, as it consoles Rasulullah against the severity of disbelief. Its content and style suggest that the surah was revealed in Makkah.

#### Style:

The surah starts with three inspiring oaths. For a discussion of Qur’anic oaths and its references to natural phenomena, the handout on chapter al-Shams (the Sun) may be reviewed. The surah ends with a rhetorical question calling the reader to reflection. The Qur’anic questions are studied in somewhat more detail in the handout on chapter al-Fil (the Elephant). The nouns ‘fig’ and ‘olive’ are used in an unspecified, general form. The use of nouns in this manner to help express multitude of vast meanings in brevity of its form (called ‘ejaz’) is further discussed in the handout on chapter al-Buruj (the Constellations).

The whole surah rhymes providing a melodious recitation and a harmonious musical beat. The rhyme of derivation between the words 'asfal-saafil' and 'ahkam-haakim' is noteworthy. The agreement parallelism between verses 4 and 5 is simply beautiful. In particular, the antilogy presented in these verses by the most beautiful stature of man and his degradation to the lowest of low displays an amazing artistic style.

Qur'an often employs a unique rhetorical tool called grammatical shift (or 'iltifat') where there is a sudden change in person, in number (between singular and plural), in addressee, in the tense of the verb, in the case maker, or in using a noun in place of a pronoun. In verses 6 and 7, there is shift from the third person to the second person pronoun to increase effectiveness of the rebuke.

### Noble Meaning:

1-3. (وَالْتِّينِ وَالزَّيْتُونِ - وَطُورِ سَيْنَاءَ - وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ)

*“By the fig and the olive; and by Mount Sinai; and by this secure city.”*

A number of scholars suggested that the fig and the olive may denote the familiar fruits. Others opined that the reference here means the lands of the fig and the olive, as it was a common practice among Arabs to name the lands by specific fruits they produce most abundantly. More specifically, these verses refer to four lands, four mountains, and four sanctuaries with which four great predecessors of prophet Muhammad, upon him be peace and blessings, were associated; namely Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus peace be upon them all. The fig, for example, refers to the land of Damascus (al-Sham, Syria) where Noah was appointed as a prophet, or the mountains upon which Damascus was built, or the mosque Noah had built when his ark landed. Similarly, the olive refers to the land of Palestine where Jesus was appointed as a prophet, or the Mt. Olives where he delivered his famous sermon, or the shrine named Bait al-Maqdis in al-Quds (Jerusalem).

Mount Sinai is known to be the mountain in Sinai Peninsula where Moses received the Torah. Makkah is indicated by the phrase 'this secure city' emphasizing its position as a land of security for centuries, even in the age of ignorance. The oaths therefore set the framework for the main theme of the surah: the upright nature of man and that of the divine religion. These verses bring to mind a verse in the Old Testament: *“The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran.”* (Deuteronomy, 33: 2). The agreement to this surah is most remarkable. (The linked [map](#) shows these locations. The [clip](#) has some live pictures.)

4-6. (لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ - ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ - إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ جِزَاءٌ غَيْرٌ مَّمْنُونٍ)

*“We indeed created man in the finest form; then We brought him down to the lowest of the low; except for those who believe and do good deeds, for theirs shall be an unfailing recompense.”*

This is the conclusion for which the oaths were sworn. The humankind is endowed with the best physical and spiritual form. Man is a tiny miniature of the universe, the seed of the tree of creation. All there exist in universe also exist in each human being albeit in a small scale. He is a polished mirror reflecting manifestation of all divine names and attributes at utmost level. In one respect, he resembles angels; in another, he is equipped with basic drives and faculties such as lusts and anger to carry on his worldly life. In addition to his angelic qualities and faculty of reason, human is given free will which enables him to do both good and evil. His potentials are unrestricted. Man can excel above angels, or sink down even below the animals. The use of his

powers in accord with their purpose of creation is possible through faith and regular worship. The true humanity lies in exercising free will and acquiring distinction in faith, worship and high virtues. The prophets, peace be upon them all, are luminous examples showing that man has the potential to excel above all creation, and be a friend of Allah as the opening oaths indicated.

On the other hand, if man abuses his powers after having been created in the finest of molds, Allah will deprive him of guidance which will cause him to sink down to the most ignoble state as commonly observed in this world, and will lead him to the lowest abyss of hell in the hereafter. The faithful worshiper however will not be degraded to this stage in either worlds. To the contrary, he will have an unending and unfailing reward beyond measures.

The verse is also interpreted as mental and physical degradation to senility of old age after the firmness and the health of youth. In this case the exception made in verse 6 is understood as an excuse for a believer suffering such conditions from his duties. In fact, he will continue to be rewarded based on his past deeds as explained in authentic traditions. In connection with the beginning of the surah, we would like to suggest here that the fig and the olive may possibly be used to help cure senility. In addition, positive effects of climate in high altitude, mountainous regions should also be investigated. The WHO [website](#) contains information suggesting there may be merits in such projects. Reciting Qur'an and regular worship also helps reduce the risks. There are reports from Ibn Abbas, for example, stating that "one who recites Qur'an regularly will not suffer senility."

Badiuzzaman explains that, in spite of his upright nature, the disbelief drags man down to a rank lower than animals. In fact, his excellent faculties such as intellect, imagination, and ability to acquire knowledge become the sources of misfortune for him. Unlike animals, the plights of past and the worries of future make his present moment miserable, and render him less than a wretched animal. Faith is the light that comes to his rescue and completely illuminates his world.

The terms faith (iman) and righteous deeds ('amal-i saleh) almost always occur together in the Qur'an. They are used in unspecified form which indicates fullness and breadth of meanings. Faith refers to all essential principles of Islamic creed, and righteous deeds comprehend all virtuous and beneficial acts carried out solely for the purpose of gaining the pleasure of Allah. Faith may be seen as a deed of heart; and the righteous deeds, on the other hand, may be viewed as faith in action. One is incomplete without the other. They are the two sides of the same reality, two wings that the man of upright nature needs to ascend to the pleasure of Allah.

7-8. (فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ - أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمِ الْحَاكِمِينَ) *"Who, then, can henceforth cause you to deny the last judgment? Is not God the most just of judges?"*

The verse 7 may be interpreted in two different ways: Addressing to the disbeliever, it states "then what causes you, after this, to deny the recompense?" It is also understood as a solace given to Allah's messenger saying "then what shall belie you, after this, about the recompense?"

Badiuzzaman often listed the content of the surah as a major evidence for the veracity of the principles of faith. Indeed, the most luminous members of humankind, all the prophets and their companions, and all the saints confirmed, based on the revelation they received and spiritual experiences they had, that there is an afterlife where every individual will be resurrected and held

accountable for his deeds. What is there, after such a universal proof, then to support the denial of the day of recompense? ([Words](#), Risale-i Nur Collection)

The same root 'h-k-m' is used to make two nouns 'hakeem' (the wise) and 'haakem' (the judge, the ruler). Both meanings apply to these verses. Allah is the most just of all judges, and He is the wisest of all judges. His infinite wisdom and justice are manifest in every aspect of existence. A purpose is determined for everything and every being in the universe. Everything and every being submit to the rules of the creation.

Is it at all conceivable that every being, no matter how insignificant, is created for many purposes, but the most perfect form of existence is created by the All-Wise in vain? Even a tiny seed is not left in the darkness of earth, and destined to grow into a beautiful plant. Does it make any sense that the human being is designed without a purpose, to be left in the darkness of the grave to rot away, and will not be resurrected to grow into a higher life form? By no means!

Every ruler and every state reward responsible citizens, and punish culprits who break the laws. The industrious gets his wages, and the idle does not succeed even in our imperfect world. How, then, can one conceive that the All-Just Ruler would not do justice? If the corrupt is not punished and the virtuous is not rewarded, if the worshiper and the negligent are treated the same, wouldn't that contradict the manifest justice observed in the Kingdom of God? It indeed does.

#### Notes:

In an authentic tradition Bera Ibn Azib reported that Rasulullah recited this surah on a trip. He said he has never heard anyone with a more beautiful voice and recitation than Allah's messenger, peace and blessing be upon him.

Ibn Arabi interprets the surah symbolically (called ta'wil) in a different context. The fig refers to comprehensive meanings and realities conceived by heart, and the olive signifies particular meanings conceived by the self. Mt. Sinai refers to the faculty of hearing where divine speech is heard, and the secure city refers to the heart. The oaths are sworn on both types of meaning and realities and their spiritual receptors, the heart and the self. The rest of the surah is interpreted in a similar manner. Allah knows best. (Click to listen to [Mountains of Makkah](#))

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May Allah help us develop our potentials and reach the level of the friends of Allah, the companions and the great prophets in certainty of faith and sincerity of worship. May peace and blessings of Allah be upon His messenger, his pure family and companions, and his noble brothers in the office of messengership.