

Sura 53: Al-Najm (The Star)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 62:

1. *By the Star when it goes down,*
2. *Your companion has neither strayed, nor has he erred.*
3. *Nor does he speak of (his own) whims.*
4. *It is nothing but a revelation that is revealed,*
5. *It was taught to him by one of mighty powers,*
6. *One vigorous; and he rose to (his) true form;*
7. *When he was on the uppermost horizon;*
8. *Then he approached and came closer,*
9. *And was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer;*
10. *And He revealed to His servant that which He revealed.*
11. *The heart did not lie about what it saw.*
12. *Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?*
13. *For indeed he saw him at another descent,*
14. *Near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass.*
15. *Near it is the Garden of refuge.*
16. *As there covered the Lote-tree what covered it.*
17. *(His) sight never swerved, nor did it exceed the limit.*
18. *Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.*
19. *Have you considered Al- Lat and Al- Uzza,*
20. *And Manat, the third, the other one?*
21. *Are yours the males and His are the females?*
22. *This indeed is unfair division.*
23. *These are nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which God has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.*
24. *Or shall humankind have what he wishes?*
25. *But to God belong the Hereafter, and the first (life).*
26. *And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails nothing save after God gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts.*
27. *Those who do not believe in the Hereafter name the angels with female names.*
28. *But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against the truth.*
29. *Therefore, turn away from whoever turns away from Our Message and desire nothing except the life of this world.*
30. *Such is their sum of knowledge. Your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and He knows best who follows guidance.*
31. *And to God belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, that He may recompense those who do evil with that which they have done, and reward those who do good with goodness.*

32. *Those who avoid major sins and immoral acts - except minor offences - (for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness. He knows you well (from the time) when He created you from the earth, and when you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. Therefore, do not claim yourselves to be pure. He knows best who is conscious of Him.*
33. *Did you see the one who turned away?*
34. *And gave a little, then held back.*
35. *Does he have knowledge of the unseen so that he can foresee?*
36. *Or has he not been informed of what is in the Scriptures of Moses?*
37. *And of Abraham who fulfilled his obligations?*
38. *That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another;*
39. *And that humankind can have nothing but what he strives for;*
40. *And that his effort will be seen.*
41. *Then he will be rewarded with the fullest reward.*
42. *And that to your Lord is the finality;*
43. *And that it is He who makes (one) laugh and weep,*
44. *And that it is He who causes death and gives life;*
45. *And that He created the two mates, the male and the female,*
46. *From a sperm drop when emitted;*
47. *And that He has ordained the second creation;*
48. *And that it is He who enriches and suffices;*
49. *And that He is the Lord of the Sirius;*
50. *And that it is He Who destroyed the (powerful) ancient (tribe of) 'Ad,*
51. *And (the tribe of) Thamud He did not spare;*
52. *And before them, the people of Noah, for that they were (all) most unjust and most insolent transgressors,*
53. *And He destroyed the overturned cities;*
54. *And covered them by that which He covered.*
55. *Then which of the favors of your Lord will you dispute about?*
56. *This is a warner, of the (series of) former warners.*
57. *The threatened Hour is near.*
58. *None beside God can disclose it.*
59. *Do you then wonder at this statement?*
60. *And you laugh and not weep,*
61. *while you amuse yourselves?*
62. *Rather prostrate yourselves before God and worship Him. (53: 1 – 62)*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca and it deals with the same issues that the Meccan Suras dealt with: the fundamentals of the doctrine, the revelation, the Oneness of God, and the Hereafter. The Sura approaches the topics from a specific angle. The Sura builds an argument to support the veracity of the revelation, and to show the lame basis for the concept of polytheism.

The Sura starts with an oath, “*By the Star when it goes down,*” which takes us to the environment in which Muhammad (PBUH) lived when he was receiving the revelation. The bright star eventually sets which is very much in tandem with the movement of Gabriel (PBUH) when he appeared first at the highest horizon then he drew near to deliver the revelation. The star may be Sirius which is mentioned later on in the Sura because of its importance to the Arabs. The oath

also alluded to the fact that every star will eventually set. Stars are transient phenomena; they are not worthy of being worshipped. The oath affirmed the credibility of the Prophet (PBUH), *“Your companion has neither strayed, nor has he erred. Nor does he speak of (his own) whims. It is nothing but a revelation that is revealed.”* He did not go astray nor did he err. More importantly, he did not speak out of his own accord. He is the deliverer of a revelation. The revelation is the truth revealed by the Truth. The revelation was delivered to the Prophet (PBUH) by a strong messenger, Gabriel (PBUH). He appeared to the Prophet (PBUH) at the highest horizon, then he drew near to him and gave him the revelation from his Lord, *“It was taught to him by one of mighty powers, one vigorous; and he rose to (his) true form; when he was on the uppermost horizon; then he approached and came closer, and was at a distance of but two bow-lengths or (even) nearer; and He revealed to His servant that which He revealed.”* This is the undisputed truth, the Prophet (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH) and received the revelation from him, *“The heart did not lie about what it saw. Will you then dispute with him concerning what he saw?”* Seeing by the heart is more certain than seeing by the eyes because the eye may be deceived by what it sees. The Prophet (PBUH) was certain of what he saw and certain of what he received.

This was not the only time Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH), *“For indeed he saw him at another descent, near the Lote-tree beyond which none may pass. Near it, is the Garden of refuge. As there covered the Lote-tree what covered it. (His) sight never swerved, nor did it exceed the limit. Certainly he saw of the greatest signs of his Lord.”* This was during the Israa and Mi’raj. During Israa and Mi’raj Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) saw Gabriel (PBUH) in the form in which he was created. The Garden of Abode may be a reference to the final destination for the trip of Mi’raj. This is where the Prophet (PBUH) and Gabriel (PBUH) parted company, when Muhammad (PBUH) continued his trip into heaven and Gabriel (PBUH) stayed behind. These are all matters of the unseen. The Prophet’s (PBUH) sight was not swerved nor did it exceed the limit. He (PBUH) did certainly see the greatest of the signs of God. The revelation delivered to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) is a fact. The Prophet (PBUH) did not only see Gabriel (PBUH) and receive the revelation from him, but he also felt in his heart the certainty and truth of the revelation.

The previous paragraph explored the truth from God. The following verses juxtapose the truth of the revelation against the falsehood of polytheism, *“Have you considered Al- Lat and Al- Uzza, and Manat, the third, the other one? Are yours the males and His are the females? This indeed is unfair division. These are nothing but names which you have named, you and your fathers, for which God has sent down no authority (whatever). They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.”*

The verses refer to three of the idols which the Arabs used to worship. Al-Lat was a white rock covered with certain decorations. It was located in the city of Taif and was housed in a temple designated for it. It was the pride of the people of Taif. It is thought that its name is the feminine of the word God in Arabic. Al-Uzza on the other hand was a tree housed in a building and it was located at a place on the road between Mecca and Taif. This was worshiped by Quraish. It is thought that its name was derived from the feminine of the Arabic word for the eminent. The third idol, Manat was located on the road between Mecca and Medina. This was worshiped by the tribes of Medina. It is narrated that these idols were considered females and they represented angels. The idolatrous Arabs claimed that they were God’s daughters. The verses questioned the

rationale behind worshipping these idols and then posed a rhetorical question which showed the absurdity of the assumption that these idols represented God's daughters. The Arabs used to prefer sons over daughters. So, how could they ascribe to God daughters and keep the sons for themselves. The truth is that these claims are all lies which were fabricated by them and their forefathers. There was nothing to support these conjectures. Now, that they received guidance they should rectify the situation.

“They follow nothing but conjecture and what their own souls desire; even though there has already come to them guidance from their Lord.” These claims were not based on concrete evidence but they were motivated by human whims and desires. But matters of the doctrine should be based on evidence not on conjecture. Now, they have received guidance based on evidence, so they have no excuse not to follow it. However, since they are motivated by their whims and desires, there is no hope that they will follow the right path, *“Or shall humankind have what he wishes?”* But they should realize the truth, *“But to God belong the Hereafter, and the first (life). And how many angels are in the heavens whose intercession avails nothing save after God gives leave to whom He chooses and accepts.”* To God belongs everything in heaven and on earth. The verses refute the claims made by idolaters Arabs that they only worship the angels because they will intercede on their behalf. These are unfounded claims. God decides everything.

Not only they made unfounded claims but they also invented myth based on conjectures. Conjectures cannot stand against the truth, *“Those who do not believe in the Hereafter name the angels with female names. But they have no knowledge thereof. They follow nothing but conjecture; and conjecture avails nothing against the truth.”*

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded to ignore the disbelievers to show how unimportant they were, *“Therefore turn away from whoever turns away from Our Message and desire nothing except the life of this world. Such is their sum of knowledge.”* The command was issued to the Messenger (PBUH) in the first place but it extends to all believers. They should also ignore those who do not believe in the Hereafter and are only interested in the pleasures of this life. God knows best who is guided and who has gone astray, *“Your Lord knows best who strays from His path, and He knows best who follows guidance.”* Faith is a fundamental value in the life of people because it shapes the standards of life and ethics. No sound relationship can exist between the believers and the disbelievers because the two groups have different standards and norms. To God belongs the decision He will reward each group according to their deeds. Since God owns everything He is the One who decides the reward in the Hereafter, *“And to God belong whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth, that He may recompense those who do evil with that which they have done, and reward those who do good with goodness.”*

The traits of the doers of good are then detailed, *“Those who avoid major sins and immoral acts-except minor offences - (for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness.”* Several traditions were narrated to explain the meaning of minor offences. Abu Hurairah (RA) narrated that the Prophet

(PBUH) said, *“God has decreed that each human being would commit his share of adultery and it is certain that it will happen. Adultery may be committed by the eyes, by the tongue, by desires harbored by the soul. It may stop at that (these are considered minor offences) or it may progress to an actual adulterous act (that is considered a major sin.)”*

There are also other narrations which indicate that when a person repents, his sins become minor offences. We argue that this opinion is more appropriate since the verse makes a reference to the vast forgiveness of God, *“(for them) your Lord is vast in forgiveness.”* God forgives those who commit sins then repent quickly and go back to the straight path and do not insist on pursuing the path of sin. This opinion is also supported by the verse, *“And those who, having done something to be ashamed of, or wronged themselves, remember God, and ask for forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except God? - and they never persist knowingly in doing whatever wrong they may have done.”* (2:135) God called them the God conscious and promised them forgiveness and a paradise the width of which is as large as the width of the heavens and earth.

God’s knowledge is encompassing. He knows people even before they were created from dust, *“He knows you well (from the time) when He created you from the earth, and when you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. Therefore, do not claim yourselves to be pure. He knows best who is conscious of Him.”* He knows what they do not know about themselves. He knows how they were created, their nature, and who they truly are. He knows their actions before they act and their thoughts before they think. So no one should claim being virtuous in front of God, because He knows everything about them.

“Did you see the one who turned away? And gave a little, then held back?” The verse describes the kind of people who would give a little charity while being able to give more. The fear of becoming poor prevents them from giving more. The verse may have been revealed in reference to a particular incident but it also applies to the general behavior of human beings. It describes a common model of human behavior. It refers to those people who do not persevere in doing good deeds. The Quran berates these people for their lack of commitment, *“Does he have knowledge of the unseen so that he can foresee?”* No one is able to predict the future and find out what will happen to him. One can guarantee security by doing good and hoping in the forgiveness of God.

The Message that was revealed to Muhammad (PBUH) is the same message that was revealed to other prophets, *“Or has he not been informed of what is in the Scriptures of Moses? And of Abraham who fulfilled his obligations?”* The verse stresses Abraham’s (PBUH) absolute dedication and fulfillment of duty in juxtaposition to those who lack commitment. The Message established fundamental principles, *“That no bearer of burden shall bear the burden of another; And that man can have nothing but what he strives for; and that his effort will be seen. Then he will be rewarded with the fullest reward.”* Everyone is responsible for his own deeds. No one will carry the burden of another. Then God will reward people according to their deeds. No good deed will be wasted. The reward will be paid in full. The final destination is to God, *“And that to your Lord is the finality.”* There is no escape and there is no refuge except with God.

The following verses explore the power of God in all aspects of life, “*And that it is He who makes (one) laugh and weep.*” God gave the human being the ability to laugh and weep. No one knows how these complicated systems work. What are the physiological and psychological processes that produce laughter and crying? Different people laugh and cry at the same events. Even the same person may laugh today for something that made him cry yesterday.

“*And that it is He who causes death and gives life.*” God created life and death. These are familiar phenomena but no one knows their secrets. What is life? And what is death? Where does life come from and how does it vanish?

“*And that He created the two mates, the male and the female, from a sperm drop when emitted.*” This phenomenon happens every minute but we do not think about it. A sperm drop is the origin of life of a human being. How can a sperm drop develop into a human being? How can it become a male or a female? How are the characteristics of the human being obtained?

“*And that He has ordained the second creation.*” The second creation is part of the unseen. He who created humankind in the first place is able to recreate him again. The second creation is inevitable because without it there will be no accountability.

“*And that it is He who enriches and suffices.*” It is God who bestows His bounty on people. God’s bounty is limitless in quantity and in type. He is the Provider that people should ask. He gives whom He wishes, what He wishes, and when He wishes.

The following verses make a quick and brief reference to previous peoples who rejected the truth and were destroyed, “*And that it is He Who destroyed the (powerful) ancient (tribe of) ‘Ad, and (the tribe of) Thamud He did not spare; and before them, the people of Noah, for that they were (all) most unjust and most insolent transgressors, and He destroyed the overturned cities; and covered them by that which He covered.*”

“*Then which of the favors of your Lord will you dispute about?*” The destruction of these people was then a favor done to humanity because evil was destroyed, and signs were left behind to remind people of the fate of those who reject the truth.

Then a warning is issued, “*This is a warner, of the (series of) former warners. The threatened Hour is near. None beside God can disclose it.*” The Day of Judgment could be very close. The Prophet (PBUH) came to give you guidance and to lead you to salvation. Salvation is only achieved through God’s guidance.

“*Do you then wonder at this statement? And you laugh and not weep, while you amuse yourselves?*” This is a serious talk; people should pay heed to it. There is no time for laughter and amusement. There are great tasks to be achieved before it is too late. They should heed the command, “*Rather prostrate yourselves before God and worship Him.*”

It has been narrated that when the idolaters of Mecca heard this last verse they prostrated themselves together with the believers. They were still idolaters and they disputed the truth of the revelation and the Quran but nevertheless they prostrated themselves. This must have been an extraordinary event. Many stories are narrated about how the idolaters were moved by the Quran when it was recited to them. We have heard many stories about how idolaters were overwhelmed with emotions when they listened to the Quran. However, their arrogance and stubbornness prevented them from accepting Islam.

It has been narrated that ‘Utebbah ibn Abi Rabiyy’ah, one of the chiefs of Quraish was delegated by the rest of the chiefs to negotiate with Muhammad (PBUH). They were willing to give him what he wanted if he stops calling people to Islam. ‘Utebbah came to the Messenger (PBUH) and offered him money, status, and power. The Prophet (PBUH) asked him to listen first to the Quran and ‘Utebbah agreed. The Prophet (PBUH) started to recite Surat Fussilat (Chapter 41) until he reached the verse, “*But if they turn away, then say, ‘I have warned you of a thunderbolt like the thunderbolt that struck ‘Ad and Thamud.’*” (41: 13) At this point ‘Utebbah was visibly shaken and he begged the Prophet (PBUH) to stop. So it is clear that the Quran had an overwhelming effect on the disbelievers as on the believers.