

Sura 79: Al-Nazi'at (The Snatchers)

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

Verses 1 to 46:

1. *By those who snatch violently;*
2. *And those who remove gently;*
3. *And those who glide smoothly;*
4. *And those who overtake swiftly;*
5. *Then those who regulate the affairs.*
6. *The day on which the quaking one shall quake,*
7. *There will follow it the subsequent one;*
8. *On that day hearts will beat painfully;*
9. *While eyes will be downcast.*
10. *They say, "Will we indeed be returned to (our) former state?*
11. *Even after we have become rotten bones?"*
12. *They say, "This is indeed a losing proposition."*
13. *But it will be only a single cry,*
14. *And they will be awake.*
15. *Has the story of Moses reached you?*
16. *When his Lord called upon him in the Holy valley, Tuwa,*
17. *"Go to Pharaoh for he has indeed transgressed all bounds;*
18. *And say to him, 'Do you want to purify yourself?*
19. *And I guide you to your Lord, so that you should fear Him?'"*
20. *And he showed him the tremendous sign.*
21. *But he denied and disobeyed,*
22. *Then he turned away in haste,*
23. *Then he gathered and proclaimed.*
24. *He said, "I am your lord, most high."*
25. *So God seized him (and made him) an example for the Hereafter and for the former life.*
26. *In this is indeed a lesson for him who fears.*
27. *Are you more difficult to create, or is the heaven that He built?*
28. *He raised its height, then He perfected it.*
29. *And He made its night dark, and He brought out its bright morning.*
30. *And after that He spread the earth,*
31. *And produced from it its water and its pasture.*
32. *And the mountains, He made them firm;*
33. *A provision for you and for your cattle.*
34. *But when the overwhelming calamity comes,*
35. *The day when man will remember (all) that he endeavored;*
36. *And Hell will be made visible to him who sees.*
37. *Then as for him who transgressed,*
38. *And preferred the life of this world,*
39. *Hell will be his refuge.*

40. *But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from following its whims,*
41. *The Garden will be his refuge.*
42. *They ask you about the Hour, “When will be its appointed time?”*
43. *How can you tell?*
44. *Only your Lord knows its time.*
45. *You are only a warner for those who fear it.*
46. *The day they see it, (It will be) as if they had tarried but a single evening, or (at most till) the following morning.*

Hawwa indicates that the first fourteen verses of the Sura serve as an introduction. There are two main sections that follow. The first is comprised of the verses 15 to 26; and the second is comprised of the verses 27 to 41. The closure is given in verses 41 to 46.

Ibn Abbas (RA) indicated that it was revealed after Surat al-Naba. Its introduction sounds like a detailed explanation of the last verse in Surat al-Naba.

The main objective of this Sura is to remind the human heart of the Hereafter and its enormity. It stresses the fact that the Hereafter is an integral part of God's plan for humankind who were created to live on earth, die, and then resurrected to account for their deeds.

“By those who snatch violently; and those who remove gently; and those who glide smoothly; and those who overtake swiftly; then those who regulate the affairs.” One of the interpretations of these verses is that they refer to the angels who remove the souls violently, they move energetically and swiftly, they glide in the higher spheres, they hasten to obedience, and they perform all the commands of God. Another interpretation indicated that these verses refer to the stars. A third interpretation mentioned that the first four verses refer to the stars and the last one refers to the angels.

Whatever interpretation we consider, the verses were meant to awaken the heedless and to alert them to the inevitability of the enormous event, the event that is described in the following verses, *“The day on which the quaking one shall quake there will follow it the subsequent one. On that day hearts will beat painfully; while eyes will be downcast.”* The quaking refers to the shaking earth. It was mentioned that the “subsequent one” refers to the sky, which will be rent asunder. It was also mentioned that these two verses refer to the first and second blasts on the Day of Judgment. Either way they will cause the hearts to tremble and to beat painfully; the eyes will be downcast. People will rise from their graves and they will ask, *“Will we indeed be returned to (our) former state? even after we have become rotten bones?”* They will ask will we return back to our first life? They will realize that they are going to a different life. Those who disbelieved in the Hereafter will then express their disappointment, *“This is indeed a losing proposition.”* Only one blast will sound and they will find themselves awake on the land of the assembly, *“But it will be only a single cry, and they will be awake.”* These are all matters of the unseen which we will not try to delve into its details.

The following verses relate briefly the encounter between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh. The verses start by a question to the Prophet (PBUH), “*Has the story of Moses reached you?*” This is a rhetorical question which is used to introduce the story, “*When his Lord called upon him in the Holy valley, Tuwa.*” This must have been a majestic moment: God addresses one of His servants. This is part of the divine mysteries; how does God communicate with His creatures. Then the story continues, God commanded Moses (PBUH) to go to Pharaoh, “*Go to Pharaoh for he has indeed transgressed all bounds.*” Transgression and tyranny are unacceptable. They spread corruption in the land. God does not love tyranny, transgression, or corruption. So, God chose one of His servants to stop Pharaoh’s tyranny.

God taught Moses (PBUH) how to approach this tyrant, “*Say to him, ‘Do you want to purify yourself? and I guide you to your Lord, so that you should fear Him?’*” The first step that Moses (PBUH) was commanded to take was to invite Pharaoh to purify himself from the sin of transgression so that he would know the way to his Lord. Upon knowing his Lord, Pharaoh would become awed by his Lord and would abstain from displeasing Him. The verses move quickly from the scene of communicating God’s command to Moses (PBUH) to the end of the story. The scene of the confrontation between Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh has been omitted, only the final result is outlined, “*And he showed him the tremendous sign. But he denied and disobeyed.*” Pharaoh denied and disobeyed.

The next scene in the story is the scene that demonstrates Pharaoh’s stubbornness and his obstinate refusal to follow the guidance, “*Then he turned away in haste. Then he gathered and proclaimed. He said, ‘I am your lord, most high.’*” He gathered his people and the magicians and displayed his arrogance and ignorance. The people listened to him either out of ignorance or out of fear. God seized him and made him an example so that people would learn the lesson, “*So God seized him (and made him) an example for the Hereafter and for the former life. In this is indeed a lesson for him who fears.*”

The narrative then addressed the idolaters of Mecca, “*Are you more difficult to create, or is the heaven that He built? He raised its height, then He perfected it.*” The One who created the heaven and perfected it is the most powerful; He is able to resurrect you after death. He made its night dark and its day bright. “*And after that He spread the earth, and produced from it its water and its pasture. And the mountains, He made them firm; a provision for you and for your cattle.*” He spread the earth so that people can use it for travel and to grow crops. He made the mountains firm to stabilize the earth. God produced water from springs so that people can live, plant, and raise cattle.

Raising the heaven, making its night dark and its day bright; spreading the earth, producing its water and its pasture are all signs of the divine power. These are all signs that are apparent to all human beings at any place and at all times.

The narrative moves to the Day of Judgment, “*But when the overwhelming calamity comes, the day when man will remember (all) that he endeavored, and Hell will be made visible to him who sees, then as for him who transgressed, and preferred the life of this world, Hell will be his*

abode. But as for him who feared to stand before his Lord and restrained his soul from following its whims, the Garden will be his refuge." The life of this world is a transient pleasure. Only God knows how long it will continue. When it ends, the overwhelming calamity will strike. On that day people will remember what they have done during their lives. They will see Hell in front of their eyes. Those who transgressed will find their abode in Hell. But those who controlled their desires and whims because they knew they will be accountable for what they do will end up in paradise.

"They ask you about the Hour, 'When will be its appointed time?'" This is the question that the idolaters of Mecca used to ask the Prophet (PBUH). The answer is, "*How can you tell?*" It is an answer which indicates how tremendous the Hour will be. Only God knows when it will happen, *"Only your Lord knows its time. You are only a warner for those who fear it. The day they see it, (It will be) as if they had tarried but a single evening, or (at most till) the following morning."*