

Sura 87: Al-A'la (The Most High)

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

Verses 1 to 19:

1. *Glorify the name of your Lord Most-High,*
2. *Who created in due proportion;*
3. *He who measures and guides;*
4. *He who produces the pasture,*
5. *And then turns it into black debris.*
6. *We will make you recite (Muhammad) so that you do not forget;*
7. *Except what God wills. He knows what is manifest and what is hidden.*
8. *And We will ease your way to the state of ease.*
9. *Therefore, remind, if the reminder should benefit.*
10. *He who fears will be reminded.*
11. *But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones,*
12. *Who will enter the great Fire,*
13. *Then therein he shall neither live nor die.*
14. *He will be successful who purifies himself,*
15. *And glorifies the name of his Lord and prays.*
16. *But you prefer the life of this world;*
17. *Although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.*
18. *This is in the former Scriptures,*
19. *The Scriptures of Abraham and Moses.*

This Sura has been revealed in Mecca. It has been reported by Imam Ahmed that Imam Ali (RA) narrated that the Messenger of God (PBUH) loved this Sura. Imam Muslim reported that the Messenger used to recite this Sura in the prayers on Fridays and Eid. It is most fitting that the Messenger (PBUH) should love this Sura because it transforms the whole universe to a temple in which God is glorified. The Sura gave the Messenger of God (PBUH) glad tidings of God's guarantee that the Messenger (PBUH) will not forget the Qur'an that is recited to him and will ease his way to the easy state. The Sura summarizes the fundamental principles of faith: the belief in the oneness of God, the affirmation of the truth of the revelation, and the inevitability of the accountability in the Hereafter.

“Glorify the name of your Lord Most High, who created in due proportion; He who measures and guides; He who produces the pasture, and then turns it into black debris.” The opening of the Sura sends a universal call to glorify God which turns the whole universe into a temple in which God is glorified. In this temple the unique attributes of God are exhibited. God's glorification does not only mean uttering the words which glorify God but also implies the remembrance and understanding of God's unique attributes.

The main attribute of God that emerges from these verses is the attribute of God as the Lord. The Lord is the Educator and the Sheppard; two attributes which reflect God's kindness. The attribute

Most High opens wide horizons for reflections and contemplations. The command in the verse is directed to the Messenger (PBUH) first then to the believers. Every time the Prophet (PBUH) would recite this verse he would say, *“Glory be to my Lord Most High.”* When this verse was revealed the Prophet (PBUH) commanded the believers saying, *“Recite this while you are prostrating in the prayer.”* God created everything and perfected it. God assigned to each one of His creatures its mission and prepared it to accomplish that mission. One can see this fact clearly in all the creations of God.

God produced all plants and made each one of them to benefit some of His creatures. This verse is more encompassing than just the pasture for cattle. It encompasses all the plants that God made to feed each and every creature that God created. Plants start first having green color then they shrivel and become darker in color. In either case it could be useful as a food for some creatures. The mention of the plants alludes to the fact that each sowing has a harvest and each life has an end, which fits with the verses, *“But you prefer the life of this world; although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.”* The life of this world is like a pasture and it will eventually shrivel but the Hereafter is the eternal life.

God gave His Messenger (PBUH) this great glad tidings, *“We will make you recite (Muhammad) so that you do not forget; except what God wills. He knows what is manifest and what is hidden. And We will ease your way to the state of ease.”* The glad tidings started by the removal of the responsibility for memorizing the Qur’an off the shoulders of the Prophet (PBUH). He only needs to recite, and God will ensure that the Qur’an is committed to the Prophet’s memory. It is also a glad tidings to the Muslims because it reassures them that the Qur’an has been protected by God. In this verse as well as in any other place in the Qur’an where a firm promise or a perpetual law is mentioned, a reference is made to the will of God, *“except what God wills.”* Everything is controlled by the will of God. God knows everything and therefore decides when the exception should take place.

The second piece of glad tidings is, *“And We will ease your way to the state of ease.”* It is a glad tidings for the Prophet (PBUH) and to the Muslims as well. The verse confirms the essence of the religion of Islam. It came to harmonize the life of the human being with the whole universe. The two words in Arabic which have been translated as, *“And We will ease your way to the state of ease.”* Embody one of the fundamental facts of the doctrine of Islam and the universe. It connects the disposition of the Messenger (PBUH) with the essence of the Message and the reality of the universe. God created the universe with ease and made it move forward with ease until it reaches its end with ease.

When God eases someone’s way to the state of ease, he will live his life with ease moving in harmony with the whole universe approaching God. He will experience ease in all aspects of his life. ‘Aisha (RA) said that whenever the Prophet (PBUH) had the chance to choose between two things, he always chose the easier of the two. The sayings of the Prophet (PBUH) which urges ease, tolerance, and gentleness in handling all affairs are countless. Even in naming names he would chose the easy names. These things show that he was truly created in a state of ease. The Prophet (PBUH) was created this way so that he would be able to convey the Message to the world in an easy way, so that ease would be one of the characteristics of this Message.

The Qur'an describes the Prophet (PBUH) saying, "*We have not sent you except as a mercy to the worlds.*" (21: 107) "*Those who follow the Messenger, the unlettered prophet, whom they find written in what they have of the Torah and the Gospel, who enjoins upon them what is right and prohibits them from what is wrong and makes lawful for them what is good and forbids them from what is evil and relieves them of their burden and the shackles which were upon them.*" (7: 157) Thus, indicating that the Prophet (PBUH) was sent to make things easy for people. The easy nature of the Message was also described, "*We have certainly made the Qur'an easy for remembrance, so is there any who will remember?*" (54: 22) "*God does not intend to make difficulty for you, but He intends to purify you.*" (5: 6) "*On no soul does God place a burden greater than it can bear*" (2: 286) The message of Islam came to make life easy for people not to make it difficult. Thus, the essence of the Message connects with the disposition of the Messenger in promoting ease.

The Prophet (PBUH) was then commanded, "*Therefore remind, if the reminder should benefit.*" The reminder is always of benefit to someone. There will always be someone who would listen and benefit from the reminder. So this was the task of the Prophet (PBUH). He should remind, but it is up to the people to benefit from the reminder, "*He who fears will be reminded. But it will be avoided by those most unfortunate ones, who will enter the great Fire, then therein he shall neither live nor die. He will be successful who purifies himself, and glorifies the name of his Lord and prays.*" Those who have hearts looking for guidance and fear the wrath of their Lord will benefit from the reminder. But the wretched will turn away from the reminder. He will not listen and will not benefit. His end will be in Hell. He will be wretched because death will not relieve him of the torment, and life will be full of agony. On the other side we find the successful who purified himself; who remembered the name of his Lord, and prayed.

The reason for unhappiness is then given, "*But you prefer the life of this world, although the Hereafter is better and more lasting.*" Preferring the life of this world over the Hereafter is the source of all evils because it turns people away from the remembrance of God.

The Sura is concluded by referring to the authenticity and continuity of the Message, "*This is in the former Scriptures, the Scriptures of Abraham and Moses.*" The verses of this Sura stated the fundamentals of the Message which have been mentioned in the early Scriptures of Abraham (PBUH) and Moses (PBUH). This indicates that there is only one truth and one Message both came from a single source, your Lord Most High, who created in due proportion.