

Sura 44: Al-Dukhan (Smoke)

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

This is a Meccan Sura. Its quick and strong rhythm is like a hammer that strikes the taught strings of the human heart. The main objective of the Sura is to evoke the sense of belief in the Oneness of God in the human psyche. It uses scenes from the Day of Judgment, stories of ancient nations, and citations of cosmic phenomena to achieve its goal.

Verses 1 to 59:

1. *Ha. Mim.*
2. *By the Book that makes things clear;*
3. *We revealed it on a blessed night - We are ever warning;*
4. *Therein every wise command is made clear;*
5. *As a command from Our presence - We are ever sending;*
6. *Mercy from your Lord. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.*
7. *The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you have certitude.*
8. *There is no god but He. It is He who gives life and gives death; your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.*
9. *Yet they are in doubt, playing.*
10. *Then you should watch for the day when the sky will produce visible smoke;*
11. *That will envelop the people. This will be a painful torment.*
12. *(They will say), "Our Lord, relieve us of the torment. Surely, we are believers."*
13. *How can there be a reminder for them, when a messenger making (the truth) clear had already come to them,*
14. *But they had turned away from him and said, "He was taught (by others), (he is) a madman."*
15. *We shall indeed remove the torment a little, (but) you will surely return (to disbelief).*
16. *On the day when We shall seize them with the greater seizure, (then) We shall exact revenge.*
17. *We did, before them, put the people of Pharaoh to trial. There came to them a noble messenger.*
18. *Saying, "Deliver the servants of God to me, surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you.*
19. *And do not be arrogant against God; for I come to you with a clear authority.*
20. *I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord, lest you stone me to death.*
21. *But if you do not believe in me, then leave me alone."*
22. *And (finally) he called to his Lord, (saying), "These are guilty people."*
23. *Then (his Lord commanded), "Take away My servants by night. You will be followed,*
24. *And leave the sea behind at rest, for they are a drowned host."*
25. *How many were the gardens and springs they left behind?*
26. *And corn-fields and noble buildings,*
27. *And pleasant things wherein they took delight?*
28. *Thus (was their end) and We made other people inherit (those things).*
29. *And neither heaven nor earth shed a tear over them; nor were they given a respite.*
30. *And We delivered the Children of Israel from the humiliating torment,*

31. *Inflicted by Pharaoh, for he was arrogant and given to excesses.*
32. *And We chose them, purposely, above (all) nations.*
33. *And gave them revelations in which there was a clear test.*
34. *These people say,*
35. *"There is nothing beyond our first death, and we shall not be raised again.*
36. *Then bring (back) our forefathers, if what you say is true."*
37. *Are they better, or the people of Tubba' and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty.*
38. *And We did not create the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in jest.*
39. *We did not create them except with truth, but most of them do not know.*
40. *Assuredly the Day of Decision is the appointed term for all of them,*
41. *A Day when no friend can avail a friend, nor can they be helped,*
42. *Except him on whom God bestows mercy. He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*
43. *Verily the tree of Zaqqum,*
44. *Will be the food of the sinner.*
45. *Like molten brass; it will boil in their bellies,*
46. *Like the boiling of scalding water.*
47. *(And it will be said), "Take him and drag him to the midst of hell,*
48. *Then pour over his head the torment of boiling water,*
49. *(Saying), 'Taste this, you powerful, respected man!'"*
50. *This is what you disputed about.*
51. *Surely those who remained God conscious will be in a secure place,*
52. *Amid gardens and water springs,*
53. *Dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, facing one another.*
54. *And We shall wed them to fair women with wide, lovely eyes.*
55. *There, they can call for every kind of fruit in peace and security;*
56. *They will not taste death therein, save the first death. And He has saved them from the torment of Hell,*
57. *As an act of grace from your Lord. That is the supreme achievement.*
58. *Verily, We have made this (Quran) easy, in your tongue, in order that they may become mindful.*
59. *So, wait then (Muhammad). They (too) are waiting. (44: 1 – 59)*

The Sura starts with the two letters, "*Ha. Mim.*" The second verse is an oath with, "*By the Book that makes things clear.*" The oath by the letters is similar to the oath by the Book, because each letter represents one of the signs of God. He created the human being in such a way to understand these letters, to pronounce them, and to use them to gain knowledge. The oath emphasizes the fact that the Book was revealed in a blessed night, "*We revealed it on a blessed night*" This night is the night of Power. This is the night on which the revelation of the Book started. It is one of the nights of the month of Ramadan. It is a blessed night because it marks the beginning of the process of the revelation of the Quran, which came to guide humanity to the straight path. This path is aligned with the initial natural disposition of humankind. It leads to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter. The Quran also educates humankind about the rules that govern the universe.

The Quran came to communicate a warning to humankind, *“We are ever warning;”* because God knows the limitations of humankind and the need to remind him continuously. The night that witnessed the start of the process of the revelation of the Quran is a milestone in the history of humanity, *“Therein every wise command is made clear;”* The Quran made everything clear. This was all by God’s decree, *“As a command from Our presence - We are ever sending;”* The Quran is a major sign of God’s mercy, because it guides humankind to the way for salvation, *“Mercy from your Lord. He is the All-Hearing, the Omniscient.”* God is also, *“The Lord of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, if you have certitude. There is no god but He. It is He who gives life and gives death; your Lord and the Lord of your forefathers.”*

The narrative turns to the disbelievers chastising them for their recklessness, *“Yet they are in doubt, playing.”* And a warning is issued, *“Then you should watch for the day when the sky will produce visible smoke; That will envelop the people. This will be a painful torment. (They will say), ‘Our Lord, relieve us of the torment. Surely, we are believers.’ How can there be a reminder for them, when a messenger making (the truth) clear had already come to them, But they had turned away from him and said, ‘He was taught (by others), (he is) a madman.’ We shall indeed remove the torment a little, (but) you will surely return (to disbelief). On the day when We shall seize them with the greater seizure, (then) We shall exact revenge.”* There are different interpretations of this verse. Does the verse refer to one of the scenes on the Day of Judgment? Or does the verse refer to an event that has already happened before? We chose the interpretation that this is a smoke that will occur on the Day of Judgment. This opinion has been supported by Ibn Abbas (RA). It is also more reasonable since the verses indicate that their request for forgiveness will not be accepted.

The following verses narrate one of the episodes of the story of Moses (PBUH) and Pharaoh, *“We did, before them, put the people of Pharaoh to trial.”* Trials can be administered with adversity as well as felicity. God tested Pharaoh and his people by giving them wealth and power. Then he sent them his messenger, *“There came to them a noble messenger. Saying, ‘Deliver the servants of God to me, surely I am a trustworthy messenger to you. And do not be arrogant against God; for I come to you with a clear authority. I have sought refuge in my Lord and your Lord lest you stone me to death. But if you do not believe in me, then leave me alone.’”* Moses (PBUH) came to ask them to submit to God, however, if they chose not to listen to him they should leave him alone. But in their arrogance they rejected his call and also moved to persecute him. His only recourse was to ask for God’s help, *“And (finally) he called to his Lord, (saying), ‘These are guilty people.’”* God commanded Moses (PBUH) to go forward with his people and leave Pharaoh and his people to receive the punishment that God decreed, *“Then (his Lord commanded), ‘Take away My servants by night. You will be followed, and leave the sea behind at rest, for they are a drowned host.’”* Then the verses detail the wealth that God gave them; the wealth which they lost because of their obstinacy, *“How many were the gardens and springs they left behind, and corn-fields and noble buildings, and pleasant things wherein they took delight?”* God bestowed this wealth on other people, *“Thus (was their end) and We made other people inherit (those things).”*

They were arrogant tyrants. They reveled in comfort and wealth; however, all of this vanished in a blink of an eye. No one felt sorry for them. Not even a drop of tears was spilled over their demise, “*And neither heaven nor earth shed a tear over them; nor were they given a respite.*” God saved the Children of Israel, “*And We delivered the Children of Israel from the humiliating torment, inflicted by Pharaoh, for he was arrogant and given to excesses. And We chose them, purposely, above (all) nations. And gave them revelations in which there was a clear test.*” Not only the Children of Israel were saved by God, but they were also chosen by Him. They were tested with trials.

The narrative then turns to the disbelieving Arabs, “*These people say, ‘There is nothing beyond our first death, and we shall not be raised again. Then bring (back) our forefathers, if what you say is true.’*” They declared that they did not believe in the resurrection after death. Their argument which they used to challenge the Prophet (PBUH) with was that, if this was true; then bring back our dead forefathers. They did not understand that God made this life a testing ground for people. People will be resurrected and will be held accountable for what they have done during their lives on earth. Those who did good will be rewarded and those who did evil will be punished. God then reminded them with other nations which were destroyed before them, “*Are they better, or the people of Tubba’ and those before them? We destroyed them, for surely they were guilty.*” The verse commanded them to reflect on the creation of the heavens and earth, “*And We did not create the heavens and the earth, and all that is between them, in jest. We did not create them except with truth, but most of them do not know. Assuredly the Day of Decision is the appointed term for all of them, a Day when no friend can avail a friend, nor can they be helped, except him on whom God bestows mercy. He is the Eminent, the Giver of Mercy.*” The connection between the resurrection after death and the creation of the heavens and earth is mentioned to underline the fact that there is a purpose behind the creation of this universe. This huge and highly complex universe has been created with great care and is managed in a very meticulous and accurate way. This indicates that there is a purpose behind this creation and it was not simply done as a game.

The verses then take us on a tour of the scenes of the Day of Judgment, “*Verily the tree of Zaqqum will be the food of the sinner. Like molten brass; it will boil in their bellies, like the boiling of scalding water. (And it will be said), ‘Take him and drag him to the midst of hell, then pour over his head the torment of boiling water, (Saying), ‘Taste this, you powerful, respected man!’*” It is a horrible scene for the torment that will be administered to the sinners. They will be told, now you cannot dispute the veracity of this torment as you used to do in the worldly life, “*This is what you disputed about.*”

Contrast this with the reward for those who remained conscious of God, “*Surely those who remained God conscious will be in a secure place, amid gardens and water springs, dressed in fine silk and in rich brocade, facing one another. And We shall wed them to fair women with wide, lovely eyes. There they can call for every kind of fruit in peace and security. They will not taste death therein, save the first death. And He has saved them from the torment of Hell, as an act of grace from your Lord. That is the supreme achievement.*” This is certainly the supreme triumph.

The Sura ends by reminding the disbelievers with the blessings of God embodied in the Quran and warning them of the consequences of rejecting this blessing, *“Verily, We have made this (Quran) easy, in your tongue, in order that they may become mindful. So, wait then (Muhammad). They (too) are waiting.”*