

Sura 80: ‘Abasa (He Frowned)

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

Verses 1 to 42:

1. *He frowned and turned away,*
2. *When the blind man came to him.*
3. *But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified;*
4. *Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him?*
5. *But for him who was indifferent,*
6. *You gave him your attention;*
7. *Though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself.*
8. *And as to him who comes to you striving hard,*
9. *And he fears,*
10. *From him you were distracted.*
11. *By no means! Indeed, it is an admonition.*
12. *Therefore, let whoso wills remember it.*
13. *(It is recorded) on honored sheets,*
14. *Exalted, purified,*
15. *(Written) by the hands of scribes,*
16. *Noble and righteous.*
17. *Woe to man! How ungrateful is he?*
18. *From what thing did He create him?*
19. *From a sperm-drop, He created him, and then fashioned him in due proportions;*
20. *Then He made the path easy for him;*
21. *Then He put him to death, and buried him.*
22. *Then, when it is His will, He will raise him up (again).*
23. *By no means has he fulfilled what God has commanded him.*
24. *Then let man look at his food;*
25. *How We pour water down in abundance,*
26. *And We split the soil open,*
27. *And produce therein grain,*
28. *And grapes and green fodder,*
29. *And olives and palm-trees,*
30. *And thick gardens,*
31. *And fruits and fodder,*
32. *Provision for you and your cattle.*
33. *But when the Deafening Blast comes;*
34. *On the day man will flee from his brother,*
35. *And from his mother and his father,*
36. *And from his wife and his children.*
37. *Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others.*
38. *Some faces that Day will be beaming,*
39. *Laughing, rejoicing.*
40. *And other faces that Day will be dust-stained,*
41. *Blackness will cover them.*

42. *Those are the disbelievers, the wicked.*

This Sura was revealed in Mecca. It comes after Surat al-Nazi'at. Hawwa points to the similarities between the two Suras. The last sections in the two Suras talk about the Day of Resurrection. These sections start with, "*But when the overwhelming calamity comes,*" in al-Nazi'at and, "*But when the Deafening Blast comes,*" in 'Abasa. The two Suras have verses which point to the power of God in creating suitable conditions on earth which enable human life to continue; the plants, the fruits, and the fodder. Hawwa also points to the theme which starts with the verse, "*You are only a warner for those who fear it,*" in Surat al-Nazi'at which is picked up in the beginning of Surat 'Abasa, "*Though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears.*"

The Sura is divided into four sections. The first section is comprised of the first ten verses. This section describes the interaction between the Prophet (PBUH) and Ibn Um Maktoum (RA). This event was used to establish one of the fundamental principles in Islam: people are not to be judged according to their material status but rather according to their level of God consciousness. The second section is comprised of the subsequent six verses. It talks about the Qur'an as a reminder and a source of guidance for those who seek guidance. The third section is comprised of the subsequent sixteen verses. It restates the principle that human life on earth is only transient. It reminds the human being of the simple miracles that enable human life to continue on earth. Finally, the last section, which is comprised of verses thirty-three to the end, describes some of the events of the Day of Judgment.

"He frowned and turned away, when the blind man came to him. But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified. Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him? But for him who was indifferent, you gave him your attention; though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears, from him you were distracted. By no means! Indeed, it is an admonition. Therefore let whoso wills remember it. (It is recorded) on honored sheets, exalted, purified, (written) by the hands of scribes, noble and righteous." This directive which was issued to the Prophet (PBUH) is a very serious issue; more serious than it would seem on the surface. A fundamental principle which establishes the worth of human beings. The relationships between people in any social setting are governed by many social, political, economical factors. These relationships are colored by the way society attaches status to individuals. It is customary, even in the so called classless societies, to classify people according to their social, political, and economical worth. Islam came to abolish these standards; a new standard was established, "*The most noble of you in the sight of God is the most conscious of God.*" (49: 13)

The incident referred to in these verses was used by the Qur'an as a platform to emphasize this fundamental principle. People should be classified according to God's standard not according to people's standard. One day, the Prophet (PBUH) was busy talking to some of the chiefs of Quraish about Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) sensed that the chiefs may be interested in knowing more about Islam. He was hoping that if they adopt Islam, many of their followers would follow suit. Ibn Um Maktoum (RA), a blind, poor man, came to the Prophet (PBUH) to ask him about Islam. The chiefs of Quraish were resisting Islam and persecuting Muslims. They prevented their followers from accepting Islam and also barred people from other cities from approaching the Prophet (PBUH) to learn about Islam. The Prophet (PBUH) was hoping to change this situation by convincing them to accept Islam. Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) came to the Prophet (PBUH) while

he was busy talking to the chiefs of Quraish and wanted to learn from the Prophet (PBUH). The Prophet (PBUH) was not happy with the interruption of his critical discussion with the chiefs of Quraish, so he turned away from him. However, Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) was persistent in his request. The Prophet (PBUH) frowned and ignored Ibn Um Maktoum (RA). These verses were then revealed to settle this issue. The Qur'an came to reprimand the Prophet (PBUH) for his behavior with Ibn Um Maktoum (RA).

The Sura starts by stating what the Prophet (PBUH) did, *"He frowned and turned away, when the blind man came to him."* The speech was coined in the third person, to make it sound like a mild rebuke to the Prophet (PBUH). Then the verses continue to present the reprimand, *"But how do you know? Perhaps he might be purified. Or he might receive admonition, and the reminder might benefit him?"* The Qur'an told the Prophet (PBUH) that he does not know who will benefit more from the guidance. Then the tone of the reprimand was heightened a little bit more, *"But for him who was indifferent, you gave him your attention; though it is no blame to you if he does not purify himself. And as to him who comes to you striving hard, and he fears, from him you were distracted."* You gave your attention to the one who was indifferent and you ignored the one who was sincere in his interest; although you are not responsible for guiding the one who is not interested.

The level of reprimand was then raised another notch, *"By no means!"* This should not have happened because this religion is simply a reminder, *"Indeed, it is an admonition. Therefore let whoso wills remember it. (It is recorded) on honored sheets, exalted, purified, (written) by the hands of scribes, noble and righteous."*

This was the standard that God established for people in this religion. This standard was established while the call to Islam was still in the early formative years, when Islam was new and Muslims were weak and persecuted. After this incident, the Prophet (PBUH) used to greet Ibn Um Maktoum (RA) warmly; and he would say to him whenever he met him, *"Welcome to the man who was the cause for my Lord's reprimand."*

"Woe to man! How ungrateful is he?" The verse indicates the horrible deed that humankind commits when he refuses to accept guidance and shows ingratitude to God who created him. Had he reflected on the way he was created, he would have expressed his gratitude to his Creator. But why does he behave arrogantly anyway, did he forget how he was created, *"From what thing did He create him?"* He was created from a tiny little insignificant thing, *"From a sperm-drop, He created him, and then fashioned him in due proportions."* God fashioned him in the best form. Then God made life easy for him; He made the way to guidance available to him; and He equipped him with the necessary tools and knowledge for the continuation of his life, *"Then He made the path easy for him."* And when he completes his role on earth, God will put him to death, *"Then He put him to death, and buried him."* God honored humankind and made the earth, from which he was created, his final resting place rather than leaving his body to be preyed upon by wild animals. At the time that God has decreed, he will be resurrected to face his accountability, *"Then, when it is His will, He will raise him up (again)."* Humankind was created for a purpose and he will be accountable for his deeds.

"By no means has he fulfilled what God has commanded him." The different generations of the human race since the beginning till the end did not and will not fulfill God's commands. Humankind has great shortcomings. He never fulfills his duty. He did not remember the story of his creation nor did he express enough gratitude to his Creator. He did not spend his life on earth preparing for the Day of Reckoning. In addition, most people turned away from guidance and

behaved arrogantly.

The Sura then asks humankind to reflect on his food, *“Then let man look at his food. How We pour water down in abundance, and We split the soil open, and produce therein grain, and grapes and green fodder, and olives and palm-trees, and thick gardens, and fruits and fodder, provision for you and your cattle.”* These verses describe the process of producing the food which allows humankind to survive. He should reflect on it. Does he have any control over this process? The Creator who created humankind is the one who miraculously developed this process.

“We pour water down in abundance.” Everyone knows about rain. We know now more about the water cycle and the role that rain plays in this cycle. Water coming from the sky is the first step in producing food. The second stage is, *“We split the soil open.”* Water goes through the soil and then the slender plant comes out through the heavy soil by the power of God and reaches out for air and sun to grow. These facts are seen and can be appreciated by every human being regardless of their level of education or knowledge. The third stage is the production of all types of edible things, *“grain, and grapes and green fodder, and olives and palm-trees, and thick gardens, and fruits and fodder, provision for you and your cattle.”* This is the story of the production of food. It has been created by God who created humankind. It is a miraculous process especially when we look at how the same pieces of land, irrigated by the same water produce different types of plants. All the characteristics of the plant have been preserved in the tiny seed that produces the plant. God has created this as a provision for humankind and their cattle.

“But when the Deafening Blast comes; on the day man will flee from his brother, and from his mother and his father, and from his wife and his children. Each one of them, that Day, will have enough concern (of his own) to make him indifferent to the others. Some faces that Day will be beaming, laughing, rejoicing. And other faces that Day will be dust-stained, blackness will cover them; those are the disbelievers, the wicked.” Then the end of life and its enjoyments come to conclude the different stages of human life on earth, which have been planned meticulously and deliberately. The conclusion of the Sura fits nicely with its beginning. It explains the way the two, the one who came striving hard though he feared, and the one who was indifferent and turned away from guidance, will be evaluated using the divine standard. The deafening blast will split the air and pierces the ears to introduce the horrific scene that will follow. Everyone is for himself/herself. No one cares for anyone else even if they were his/her brother, mother, father, spouse, or son. The strong relationships that existed between these people are severed by the blast. It is psychological horror that will keep people apart from each other.

The verses then describe the conditions of the two groups. The believers will come having bright faces, happy, and joyful. But the disbelievers who rejected guidance and transgressed, they will have blackened faces covered with dust.