

Sura 81: Al-Takweer (Shrouding in Darkness)

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

Verses 1 to 29:

1. *When the sun is shrouded in darkness;*
2. *And when the stars are dispersed;*
3. *And when the mountains are set in motion;*
4. *And when the pregnant she-camels are abandoned;*
5. *And when the wild beasts are herded together;*
6. *And when the seas boil over;*
7. *And when the souls are paired;*
8. *And when the female infant, buried alive, is questioned,*
9. *For what crime she was killed;*
10. *And when the scrolls are laid open;*
11. *And when the sky is torn away;*
12. *And when the Hell is kindled up;*
13. *And when the Garden is brought near;*
14. *(Then) shall each soul know what it has put forward.*
15. *I swear by the planets that recede;*
16. *Those that run (their course) and disappear;*
17. *And the night as it departs;*
18. *And the dawn as it breathes;*
19. *This is indeed the speech of a noble Messenger;*
20. *Endued with power, and is held in honor by the Lord of the Throne,*
21. *One (to be) obeyed, and trustworthy.*
22. *And your companion is not mad.*
23. *And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon.*
24. *He does not withhold knowledge of the unseen.*
25. *Nor is it the utterance of Satan, the outcast.*
26. *Where will you go?*
27. *It is nothing but a reminder for all people,*
28. *For him among you who wishes to go straight.*
29. *But you will only wish to do so by the will of God, the Lord of the Worlds.*

This Sura may be divided into two parts. Each part deals with a fundamental principle of the principles of the doctrine of Islam. The first principle deals with the characteristics of the Day of Resurrection and the cosmic cataclysm that will accompany it. This cataclysm will engulf the sun, the stars, the mountains, the seas, the earth, the sky, the cattle, the wild beasts, as well as the human beings. The second principle deals with the essence of the revelation, the angel who brought it down, the Prophet who received it, the people who are being addressed by it, and the Divine will that created them and sent them this revelation.

“When the sun is shrouded in darkness; and when the stars are dispersed; and when the mountains are set in motion; and when the pregnant she-camels are abandoned; and when the wild beasts are herded together; and when the seas boil over; and when the souls are paired; and when the female infant, buried alive, is questioned for what crime she was killed; and when the scrolls are laid open; and when the sky is torn away; and when the Hell is kindled up; and

when the Garden is brought near; (then) shall each soul know what it has put forward.” This is the scene of the cataclysm that will occur. It will change the whole universe as we know it. This cataclysm will engulf the planets, the animals both domestic and wild, and the human beings. All secrets will be uncovered and each human being will stand up to account for his/her deeds. These cosmic changes indicate that the well balanced, meticulously controlled universe will be destroyed and its parts will be scattered. This is what the Sura is trying to instill in the psyche of the human being: abandon these fleeting appearances and get connected to the eternal truth that will never change, God is the absolute truth, the Eternal.

We have no way of knowing the true nature of the phenomena described in these verses. They are part of the unseen. But they are signs of the great upheaval that the universe will suffer. When all these signs occur then each soul will be held accountable.

The second part of the Sura starts with an oath by the beautiful cosmic scenes, *“I swear by the planets that recede; those that run (their course) and disappear; and the night as it departs; and the dawn as it breathes.”* The oath is by the planets that move in their orbits, the night when it becomes dark, and the morning as it breathes. These are beautiful scenes that are being described using extremely elegant expressions that bring the scenes to life. Even the morning is described as if it were a living creature that breathes.

What is the oath about? It is about the truthfulness of the revelation, *“This is indeed the speech of a noble Messenger; endued with power, and is held in honor by the Lord of the Throne, one (to be) obeyed, and trustworthy.”* This Qur’an and this description of the Day of Judgment are the speech of a noble messenger, Gabriel (PBUH). He was chosen to deliver the Message. The verses then list the attributes of this Messenger. He is strong and is deemed noble by his Lord. He is being obeyed among the higher host and he is trustworthy. These attributes indicate the nobility of the Message, its enormity, and its majesty. They also indicate the amount of care that God bestowed on humankind when He chose a Messenger with these attributes to convey His Message to humankind.

“And your companion is not mad. And without doubt he saw him on the clear horizon. He does not withhold knowledge of the unseen. Nor is it the utterance of Satan, the outcast. Where will you go? It is nothing but a reminder for all people, for him among you who wishes to go straight. But you will only wish to do so by the will of God, the Lord of the Worlds.” The pagans of Mecca claimed that the Prophet (PBUH), whom they knew very well, was mad. Those who were impressed by the language of the Qur’an thought that it must have been the speech of a devil. They ignored the only logical explanation, that this Qur’an is God’s revelation. So the verses emphasize that the Prophet (PBUH) was not mad, and that he did truly see Gabriel (PBUH) at the horizon. The Prophet (PBUH) is to be trusted about what he says about the unseen. Finally, it is a reminder for the people, not the speech of a cursed devil. It is a reminder that reminds people of the truth of their creation and the truth of the universe around them. It is a universal Message to all people. The verses also remind them that the door to guidance is open for those who desire to be guided. However, it is all contingent on the will of God. People should understand that their will is part of the Divine will, not independent from it. Everything that exists in the universe existed because of the Divine will and it is controlled by that will. God gives people the freedom to choose as part of His will.