

Sura 83: Al-Mutaffifin (The Defrauders)

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

Verses 1 to 36:

1. *Woe to the defrauders;*
2. *Those who, when they have to receive a measure from people, they take it in full;*
3. *But when they give a measure or weight to people, they give less than what is due.*
4. *Do they think that they will not be raised again?*
5. *To a mighty Day,*
6. *The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?*
7. *No, indeed! The record of the wicked will be in Sijjin.*
8. *And what will explain to you what Sijjin is?*
9. *A written record.*
10. *Woe, that Day, to the deniers;*
11. *Those who deny the Day of Judgment.*
12. *And none can deny it except a transgressor, sinner.*
13. *Who, when Our revelation is recited to him, says, "Ancient fables."*
14. *Verily, their hearts are covered by rust because of what they used to earn.*
15. *Verily, that Day they will be veiled from their Lord.*
16. *Then they will burn in Hell,*
17. *And it will be said (to them), "This is what you used to deny."*
18. *Nay, the record of the righteous shall be in the 'Iliyin.*
19. *And what will explain to you what 'Iliyun is?*
20. *A written record.*
21. *Those who are drawn near (to God) shall witness it.*
22. *Truly the righteous will be in Bliss;*
23. *On couches, gazing.*
24. *You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss.*
25. *They will be given to drink pure wine, sealed,*
26. *Whose seal is musk; this is what the competitors should compete for.*
27. *And mixed with water of Tasnim,*
28. *A fountain from which those drawn near (to God) drink.*
29. *Surely, the guilty used to laugh at those who believed.*
30. *And whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at each other;*
31. *And when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting;*
32. *And whenever they saw them, they would say, "These people have gone astray."*
33. *But they were not sent as keepers over them.*
34. *But on this Day the believers will laugh at the disbelievers;*
35. *On high couches, gazing.*
36. *Have the disbelievers been paid back for what they did?*

There is a difference in opinion among the scholars about the place of revelation of this Sura. Some, like Ibn Mas'oud (RA) and al-Dahhak, believe that it was revealed in Mecca. While, al-Hassan and 'Ikrimah (RA) are of the opinion that it was revealed in Medina.

Al-Suyuti made an insightful comment on the fact that Surat *al-Mutaffifin* is preceded by Surat *al-Infitar* and is followed by Surat *al-Inshiqaq*. He said that Surat *al-Infitar* focuses on the events

which will occur early on the Day of Judgment, while Surat *al-Inshiqaq* focuses on the events which will occur late on the Day of Judgment (the actual passing of the judgments). In between, comes Surat *al-Mutaffifin* which refers to the long duration of events in between the beginning and end of the Day, *“The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds.”*

Hawwa suggests that the Sura consists of four well defined sections. The first section is comprised of the first six verses. This section describes the characteristics of the defrauders. The second section is comprised of the verses 7 to 17. This section describes the characteristics of the transgressors. The third section is comprised of the verses 18 to 28. The third section describes the characteristics of the righteous. The final section is comprised of the verses 29 to 36. This section describes the promised reward that the righteous will get and the promised punishment that the transgressors will get.

This Sura deals with one of the ills which were prevalent in the society at the time of the advent of Islam. Powerful business people forced their crooked ways of conducting business on helpless people. Islam sought to correct this injustice by inculcating high ethical values in the hearts of people. The Sura aimed at awakening the hearts and evoking the feelings so that people would accept the changes in the values which have been brought by the Divine Message.

The Sura starts with a dire threat to the defrauders outlining the punishment they will receive on the Day of Judgment. It describes the bad behavior of the disbelievers who went astray and were mocking the believers. It ends by a description of the rewards that will be given to the believers. *“Woe to the defrauders; those who, when they have to receive a measure from people, they take it in full; but when they give a measure or weight to people, they give less than what is due. Do they think that they will not be raised again? to a mighty Day,”* The Sura starts with a declaration of war on the defrauders. It is the same whether this was a decree that the defrauders will be destroyed or a mere invocation asking for their destruction. An invocation made by God is a decree. The verses explain what is meant by the term “defrauders.” These are the people who receive their share in full but they do not give people their due share. The verses express an amazement that these people subscribe to such an evil practice, *“Do they think that they will not be raised again? to a mighty Day. The Day when (all) humankind will stand before the Lord of the Worlds?”*

Considering the opinion that the Sura was revealed in Mecca, it is interesting that a Meccan Sura would deal with the issue of defrauding. The Meccan Suras dealt mainly with the fundamental principles of the doctrine e.g. the belief in the Oneness of God, the Divine will, the revelation, and the Hereafter. They also tried to relate ethical principles to the doctrine. But it was not usual to discuss a specific ethical problem, especially one that is related to the normal daily life dealings. The discussion of these issues appeared later in the Suras of the Qur’an which were revealed in Medina, which dealt with the organization of the Muslim society in general. So it is interesting to find a Meccan Sura dealing with such a topic. One may deduce several indicators from this.

Defrauding people of their due share must have been prevalent in the Meccan society at that time. It was practiced mainly by the rich traders. These rich traders monopolized the caravan trade between Mecca and Yemen in the winter and Mecca and Syria in the summer. They also established and controlled big markets, like the market of ‘Okaz which was held every year during the season of pilgrimage. The verses used the term “the defrauders” in reference to these rich traders who had the power to oppress the helpless people and treat them unfairly. This shows that Islam is a comprehensive religion. It encompasses all aspects of life. It aims at

establishing a way of life based on ethical practices and sound moral values. These verses pronounce Islam's disapproval of the social injustices that were part and parcel of the society at that time. This is remarkable since this was done at a time when the religion of Islam was still a fledgling call. A call that did not have yet the power to control the social life of people. Islam made the call to awaken the masses and to alert them to the injustice that they have been subjected to; it was not the opium of the masses.

This also explains the reason that the chiefs of Quraish resisted adamantly the call to Islam. They realized that Islam is a Divine project that will destroy all the unfair practices on which their society was established, far more than a mere belief resting deep in the heart or a testament of faith pronounced by the tongue. This project does not accept compromise nor does it allow the amalgamation between the Divine and the earthly values. Only tyrants and oppressors would object to the values that the Islamic project aims at establishing. They know that the Islamic project threatens their interests, their bad behavior, and the power that they usurped.

Those who pledged allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH) also realized this. When the chiefs of the tribes of Aws and Khazraj came to pledge allegiance to the Prophet (PBUH), Al-'Abbas ibn 'Ubadah ibn Nadlah Al-Ansari said to them, *"Are you fully aware of the meaning of this pledge?"* They said, *"Yes."* He said, *"You are pledging to fight with him against all people, red or black. If you think that you will renege on your pledge if your wealth is lost or your nobility are killed, then do not give him your pledge now, because this would be something that you would be ashamed of in this life and in the Hereafter. But if you think that you will fulfill your pledge even if your wealth is lost or your nobility are killed, then go ahead with your pledge. This pledge is the best thing for you in this life and in the Hereafter."* They said, *"We will fulfill our pledge to him even if our wealth is lost or our nobility are killed."* They asked the Messenger of God (PBUH), *"What do we get out of this?"* He said, *"Paradise."* So they made the pledge.

"No, indeed! The record of the wicked will be in Sijjin. And what will explain to you what Sijjin is? A written record." In the earlier verses they were called defrauders but in these verses they are called wicked. The wicked people are those who transgress all limits. Their deeds will be recorded. However, this record is part of the unseen. This record is kept in Sijjin. The enormity of Sijjin is then expressed by the rhetorical question, *"And what will explain to you what Sijjin is?"* Naming the place of the record assures the addressee of its existence, even if the place is unknown to the addressee. The record will be kept intact until the Day of Judgment. Who are the wicked? *"Woe, that Day, to the deniers, those who deny the Day of Judgment. And none can deny it except a transgressor, sinner. Who, when Our revelation is recited to him, says, 'Ancient fables.'"* Their transgression and wickedness lead them to deny the inevitability of the Day of Judgment. Their denial was caused by the rust that covered their hearts and prevented them from seeing the truth. Their hearts died because the rust covered it and prevented the light of guidance to shine on them, *"Verily, their hearts are covered by rust because of what they used to earn."*

"Verily, that Day they will be veiled from their Lord. Then they will burn in Hell, and it will be said (to them), 'This is what you used to deny.'" The sins covered their hearts and prevented them from connecting with their Lord in the life of this world so it is logical that they will not be able to connect with God in the Hereafter. They will be deprived of the pleasure of looking at God's face. Thus they will lose the greatest joy that anyone can experience; the joy will only be experienced by those whose souls became pure and transparent, there will be no barrier between them and their Lord. The wicked will suffer the deprivation of looking at God's face which is

itself a great punishment. They will be admitted to Hell, and will be reminded that they used to deny it during their life on earth.

The situation of the wicked is then juxtaposed against the situation of the righteous, “*Nay, the record of the righteous shall be in the ‘Iliyin. And what will explain to you what ‘Illiyyun is? a written record, those who are drawn near (to God) shall witness it. Truly the righteous will be in Bliss; on couches, gazing. You will recognize on their faces the radiance of bliss. They will be given to drink pure wine, sealed, whose seal is musk; this is what the competitors should compete for; and mixed with water of Tasnim, a fountain from which those drawn near (to God) drink.*” The verses start with the Arabic word, “*Kalla (Nay)*” which indicates severe reproach and a command to the wicked to desist. Then the verse emphasizes firmly that the written record of the righteous is in ‘Iliyin. This word has the connotation of highness and elevation, which indicates that the word Sijjin has the connotation of lowliness and abasement. The effect is also magnified by the use of a rhetorical question, “*what will explain to you what ‘Illiyyun is?*” The righteous will be honored by the fact that the angels will witness their record. The righteous situation is then described. They will be in bliss sitting comfortably on couches. They look wherever they wish. Their eyes will not be down cast nor will they suffer any hardship that will prevent them from enjoying their surroundings. Their faces will be radiant and they will be drinking a pure drink. Their drink will be mixed with a fluid coming from a fountain from which only those who are drawn near to God drink. This is something worthy of competing for. Compare that with the fact that the wicked were competing for trivial pleasures of the fleeting world.

It is amazing that competition in matters of the Hereafter elevates the souls of all competitors while competition in matters of the worldly life debases the souls of all competitors. Competing for matters of the Hereafter purifies the earth and makes a better place for living while competing for the pleasures of worldly life turns the earth into a swamp in which worms eat each other.

“*Surely, the guilty used to laugh at those who believed; and whenever they passed by them, they used to wink at each other; and when they returned to their own people, they would return jesting; and whenever they saw them, they would say, ‘These people have gone astray.’ But they were not sent as keepers over them. But on this Day the believers will laugh at the disbelievers; on high couches, gazing. Have the disbelievers been paid back for what they did?*” The images that the Qur’an portrays for the ridicule that the believers suffered at the hands of the criminals are taken directly from scenes that used to occur in Mecca. But one can see these images repeated at different times, and different places. The nature of the wicked criminals is the same at all times and in all places.

The criminals used to laugh at the believers who may have been poor, weak, or unable to defend themselves. Part of this ridicule was expressed by winking to each other. Having enjoyed ridiculing the believers, the criminals would then go back to their families happy and content. They even had the audacity to call the believers, “*those who have gone astray.*” The Qur’an dismisses this by simply stating that they were not sent as keepers over the believers. On the Day of Judgment the situation will change. On one hand, the wicked are deprived of the pleasure of looking at their Lord; while the believers are enjoying the bliss, they are free to look around as they wish, and they drink a sealed pure drink. Today is the turn for the believers to laugh at the disbelievers and ask, “*Did the disbelievers get what they deserve?*”

