

Surah al-Muzzammil (73)

سورة المزمل

'The Enwrapped'

The surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *al-muzzammil*, meaning one who has enwrapped himself. Like the other Madinan surahs it is concerned with the Islamic social order and the beliefs. It is said that it was partly revealed at Makkah and partly at Madinah. While Surah al-Jinn concluded on the theme of the Messengers, this surah opens by mentioning the Messenger of Allah *may Allah bless him and his family*.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah, ... We begin this surah by the name of Allah – as if clothed in this noble name – for in the hand of Him whom the name denotes is all of existence.

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. He bestows mercy on all things in creating them and raising them, for all things to reach the height of their relative perfection, and who bestows mercy in the hereafter upon His servants the believers with rewards and bounty.

O thou the enwrapped, (1)

يَتَأْتِيهَا الْمَزْمَلُ ﴿١﴾

'The enwrapped' is given for *al-muzzammil*, meaning one who has wrapped himself in a robe or suchlike. The address is to the Messenger, for he would wrap himself in his cloak and sleep. It seems he is addressed as such in consideration of the relation between that his condition and the following directive of "standing the night", i.e. keeping vigil during the night.

Stand the night, except a little, (2)

قُمْ اللَّيْلَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ﴿٢﴾

The Messenger was to keep vigil during the night to perform the night-prayer, supplication, reflection and other acts of worship . . . except a little of it in which was permitted to sleep.

Then He, glory be to Him, clarifies the little in which the Messenger is permitted to sleep, with His word.

Half of it, or lessen from it a little, (3)

نَضَفَهُ أَوْ أَنْقَصَ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا ﴿٣﴾

That is, he was permitted to sleep half the night; or was to lessen from the half and add to his period of vigil, so that he would sleep for less than half the night.

Or add to it; and chant the Qur'an, chanting. (4)

أَوْزِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا ﴿٤﴾

Or add to it; ... That is, he was permitted to add to the half in which he slept, so that he could sleep more than half the night. The sum of this is that he was to be wakeful for half the night, more or less, but about half the night.

... and chant the Qur'an, chanting. 'Chant' is given for *rattil*, meaning to recite at a moderate pace, neither hastily nor too slow. The repetition is for emphasis.

Imam Ali, *peace be upon him*, was asked about this ayah, and he said: 'Clarify it clearly, sing it not like a poem [i.e. do not recite it speedily like you would a poem], and do not recite it in fragments [that is, do not recite it in a disjointed fashion], but (recite it in such a way so as to) terrify your hard hearts, and let not the purpose of any of you be to finish the surah.

Indeed We shall cast unto thee a heavy word; (5)

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا ﴿٥﴾

It means that a heavy word was to be revealed or inspired to the Messenger a word difficult to implement. What is meant is the Qur'an, for to act according to the Qur'an is heavy on a person; or it means the Messengership, for that was a heavy task. Or what is meant is standing the night, as is explained in His word:

Indeed the rising of the night, it is more severe in tread and sturdier in word. (6)

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْفًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلاً ﴿٦﴾

Indeed the rising of the night ... 'Rising' is given for *nashi'ah* which here means the hours of the night that rise one upon the other. What is meant are the actions of the night, or worship that is performed in the night.

... **it is more severe in tread ...** 'More severe in tread' means heavier and more difficult – due to the cold in winter, and the shortness of the night in summer. It may mean that the works of the night are harder than those of the day.

... **and sturdier in word.** Speech and worship during the night are more constructive, and more effective for the night brings an increase in presence of heart and mental concentration. And the best of deeds is the most difficult.

Indeed in the day thou have a lengthy turning. (7)

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا ﴿٧﴾

'Turning' is put for *sabih* meaning to revolve, and thus one who swims or revolves in water is called *sabih* or swimmer. The meaning is that during the day the Messenger had many things to turn to, such as indicating the path and delivering the guidance, and so he could not worship fully. Thus the night was appointed for him to worship.

It is narrated that Imam Ali, would work throughout the day, and would worship throughout the night. When he was asked whether he ever rested, he replied, 'if I rested during the day it would mean ruin for the nation, and if I rested during the night it would mean ruin for myself.'

And recall the name of thy Lord, and exclude thyself to Him, totally: (8)

وَأَذْكُرِ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا ﴿٨﴾

The Messenger is commanded to remember the name of the Lord, by worshipping Him and humbling himself before Him. 'Exclude thyself' is put for *tabattal*, from *al-tabattul*, meaning to cut oneself from all other things and devote oneself to Allah, the Grand and Magnificent, and to worship Him with total devotion and exclusivity. 'To Him' is the meaning of the Arabic *ilayhi* signifying that the Messenger was to exclude all other things from himself for His sake, not to cut himself off from Him, glory be to Him. The words 'thy Lord' are then enlarged upon in His word:

Lord of the east and the west, there is no god but Him, so take Him as a trustee. (9)

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا ﴿٩﴾

Lord of the east and the west, ... 'The east and the west' is a term used to denote the whole of existence, for whoever has the east and the west in his hand has existence in its entirety.

... **there is no god but Him,** He has no partners in Godhead, as the polytheists supposed, and so there is no justice in worshipping any but Him.

... **so take Him as a trustee.** The Messenger was to take Him as his 'trustee' (*wakil*), as a protector to protect his undertaking, and was to entrust the success of his undertaking to Him.

And be restrained at what they say, and forgo them with a graceful forgoing. (10)

وَأَصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَأَهْجِرْهُمْ هَجْرًا حَمِيلًا ﴿١٠﴾

And Be restrained ... 'Be restrained' is given for *usbur*, meaning 'bear patiently'. He was to bear patiently, on the path of his monotheism and his denouncing the idols,

... **at what they say ...** He was not to let what the disbelievers around him were saying, that he was a witch, a soothsayer, or mad and suchlike, put him off.

... **and forgo them with a graceful forgoing ...** He was to distance himself from them in a beautiful way; that is, by calling them to the guidance with wisdom and kind admonitions and with arguments that are best, all the while distancing himself from them.

And leave Me with the beliers, those with blessings; and respite them a little. (11)

وَذَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِيَ النَّعْمَةِ وَمَهِّلْهُمْ قَلِيلًا ﴿١١﴾

And leave Me with the beliers ... That is, he was to leave them to Allah, and know that He, glory be to Him, was to suffice him against their evil. 'The beliers, *al-mukadhdhibin*, were those who called his messengership and what he brought a lie.

... those with blessings ... They were possessors of blessings in that they owned wealth and the other forms of bounty.

... and respite them a little. He was to respite them, for soon their requital was with Him, glory be to Him. In the world they were soon to be overtaken by the chastisement: at the battle of Badr, and then in the hereafter. The phrase 'Respite them a little' is in reference to bearing with them patience, and constitutes a warning to the disbelievers.

Indeed with Us are fetters and a raging fire, (12)

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا وَحَجِيمًا ﴿١٢﴾

The meaning is in the hereafter. 'with Us' means with Our reckoning and requital. 'Raging fire', *jahim*, is one of the names of hell.

And food that chokes, and a painful chastisement. (13)

وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا ﴿١٣﴾

'chokes' is put for *dha-ghussah*, meaning food that sticks in the throat and cannot be swallowed. The provision of hell that is prepared for them has the quality of sticking in the throat and choking them, so that the guilty will not be able to swallow it except after great difficulty and exertion.

These characteristics of the chastisement will surely take place on:

The day the earth and the mountains tremble, and the mountains will be a sliding sand-hill. (14)

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيرًا مَّهِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾

The day the earth and the mountains tremble, ... The earth will quake and be convulsed. This is amongst the *ayaat* or signs of the resurrection, as He says, 'Indeed the earthquake of the Hour is a mighty thing.' [22: 2] The mountains will also tremble, so as to increase the terror.

... and the mountains will be a sliding sand-hill. And the mountains that day will be as heaps of sand (*kathib*), sliding (*mahin*) about the earth.

Indeed We have sent a Messenger unto ye – a witness over ye – just as We sent unto Pharaoh a Messenger. (15)

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا ﴿١٥﴾

The address is to the disbelievers. The Messenger was Muhammad, *may Allah bless him and his family*. He was a witness of what they believed and performed, worthy and corrupt. The Messenger sent to the Pharaoh was Moses.

But Pharaoh disobeyed the Messenger, and so We took him, a terrible taking. (16)

فَعَصَى فِرْعَوْنُ الرَّسُولَ فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيلاً ﴿١٦﴾

The Pharaoh refused to obey his commands; rather he opposed him and became a stubborn enemy. So Allah took the Pharaoh, with a terrible taking – drowning him in the sea. The implication was that the same would happen to them: if they disbelieved they would be taken with any one of a range of chastisements.

So how will ye be guardful, if ye disbelieve, of the day that puts children grey? (17)

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِنْ كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا ﴿١٧﴾

The question is addressed to the disbelievers. How will they guard against that day, the chastisement of that day, that makes the children old and grey? The day of resurrection and its terrors are such that it will render young lads as old men, sending their hair white and so forth. The meaning is: Are you able to protect yourself against the chastisement of the day of resurrection? And since you are not able, how is it that you disbelieve and render yourselves deserving of it?

The sky will be burst open by it; His promise will be done. (18)

السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعْدُهُ مَفْعُولًا ﴿١٨﴾

The sky will be burst open by it; ... The terror of that day will be such as to cause the sky itself to split, so that the sky will appear like something torn apart, as a result of the breakdown of the celestial order.

... His promise will be done. His promise, glory be to Him, can only be done (*ma'fud*), fulfilled, carried out, with no discrepancy and no alteration, but exactly as He, glory be to Him, wills it.

Indeed this is a reminder, so he who wills shall take unto his Lord a path. (19)

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذَكُّرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا ﴿١٩﴾

Indeed this is a reminder ... The description of the things described in order to produce fear of that day is a reminder and an exhortation for mankind.

... so he who wills shall take unto his Lord a path. So he who wills shall take unto his Lord a path (*sabīl*), meaning that he shall journey the path that leads to His satisfaction and contentment, which is the path of Islam.

The current then returns to the night-prayer, with which the discourse began, as He says:

Indeed thy Lord knows that thou stand close on two-thirds of the night, a half of it, and a third of it; and a party of those with thee. And Allah determines the night and the day. He knows that ye will never count it, so He has relented toward ye; so recite such of the recitation ye find easy.

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ،
وَتُلُثُهُ، وَطَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ
عَلِمَ أَنَّ لَن نُّحْصِيهِ فِتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِن
الْقُرْآنِ عَلِمَ أَنَّ سَيَكُونُ مِنكُمْ مَّرْضَىٰ وَءَاخِرُونَ
يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَبْتَغُونَ مِن فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَءَاخِرُونَ
يُقْتَلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ وَأَقِيمُوا
الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا وَمَا
تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنفُسِكُمْ مِن خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا
وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا لِلَّذِينَ تَبَتُّوا أَنَّهُ لَمْ يَغْفُرْ رَحِيمًا ﴿٢٠﴾

He knows that there will be among ye one ill, while others strike out in the land reaching for the profusion of Allah, and others battle in Allah's path. So recite that of it ye find easy; and establish the prayer, and pay the zakat, and lend to Allah a beautiful loan.

And what good ye send on for yourselves – ye will find it with Allah; it is better and greater in wage; and seek Allah's forgiveness indeed Allah is forgiving, merciful. (20)

Indeed thy Lord ... The address, in the singular, is to the Messenger of Allah, *may Allah bless him and his family.*

... knows that thou stand close on two-thirds of the night, a half of it, and a third of it; ... 'Under' (*adna*), here, means almost. Some nights the Messenger would rise before two-thirds of the night, so that there would remain two-thirds before the dawn. Other nights he would rise before a half, and other nights he would rise before a third,

... and a party of those with thee ... from amongst the believers such as Imam Ali, and the Lady Fatimah, *peace be upon them*, and other select ones.

... **And Allah determines the night and the day** ... The length of the night and the day is in His hand, subject to His determination. Therefore He knows all about what it is that He has determined.

... **He knows that ye will never count it** ... He knows that we cannot spend the whole night in worship and devotion.

... **so He has relented toward ye;** ... He has turned to us all [the pronoun is plural] in grace, and has not made it an obligation to stand the whole night, even though the conditions exist to make it obligatory.

... **so recite such of the recitation ye find easy** ... We are therefore to recite, during the night, what is easy of 'the recitation' (*al-qur'aṅ*), in the general sense of that which is recited meaning the prayer, supplications and Qur'an recitation. What is meant is that since you are unable to be 'reciting' the whole night, spend as much of the night reciting (i.e. worship, prayers, and supplication) as is easy for you.

The reasoning behind this lenience is then explained:

... **He knows that there will be among ye one ill,** ... Allah knows that some of you will be ill; for those who are ill are unable to stand during the night for prayer.

... **while others strike out in the land** ... journeying through the land,

reaching for the profusion of Allah, ... seeking the bounty of Allah through trade.

... **and others battle in Allah's path** ... And others fight in the way of Allah to elevate His word and the way of His religion. The traveller and the warrior both endure hardships during the day and it is not easy for them to stand the night – therefore Allah has lessened it for them, and not commanded them to stand, or at least not for a particular portion, such as a half or a third or two-thirds.

... **So recite that of it ye find easy;** ... So we are to recite of it – of the recitation, meaning the prayer, supplication and the Sacred Qur'an – that which is easy for us. Those categories require a general reduction, in accordance to wisdom.

... **and establish the prayer,** ... And establish the prayer: at its times, as commanded by Allah, glory be to Him.

... **and pay the zakat,** ... And pay the poor-due (*zakaṭ*): both that which is obligatory, and what is desirable.

... **and lend to Allah a beautiful loan** ... And lend to Allah a goodly loan: by spending your wealth to gain His pleasure, without making anyone beholden, or doing it for show, or for reputation, or being conceited about it. This is termed 'a loan' because Allah, glory be to Him, returns it to man in the world and the hereafter, many times multiplied.

... **And what good ye send on for yourselves** ... It means send on to the hereafter. For when man does good (*khayr*) – meaning obedience and devotion – that good precedes him to the Garden, in that when he arrives there he finds there the rewards for what he has done. – **ye will find it with Allah;** ... We will find that good deed 'with' (*ʿind*) Allah:, meaning in the domain of His grace. That you will find: you will find the exact same thing, with no diminishment and no variance.

... **it is better** ... There it will be 'better' (*khayr*), in that that same good will be better, or itself good.

... **and greater in wage;** ... The reward will be greater than what it was itself; its reward in the hereafter is greater than what it was in the world. If in the world it equalled ten, let us suppose, then in the hereafter we will find that it will equal a hundred. Or it means greater in reward than what would remain in the world.

... **and seek Allah's forgiveness; indeed Allah is forgiving, merciful.** Allah is forgiving: of the sins, and He bestows mercy and compassion over and above the forgiving of sins.