

## Surah al-Insan (76)

## سورة الانسان

### 'The Human'

The surah is also called *al-Dahr*, meaning 'Time'. The surah derives these two names from the prominence within it of the words *al-dahr*, meaning the age, time, or period, and *al-insan*, meaning the human being. Like the other Madinan surahs it is composed of matters relating to the Islamic order, while tending towards dealing with matters of faith. Just as Surah *al-Qiyamah* concluded on the topic of a person's conditions from the time of his being a drop of sperm until his being raised to full maturity, so this surah opens on the human's origin, and the return and resurrection that is arranged for him.

The surah was sent down on the twenty-fifth of Dhi-Hijjah, about Ali, Fatimah, al-Hasan and al-Husayn, *peace be upon them*, and a servant girl they had who was named Fiddah. The circumstance was that al-Hasan and al-Husayn, were ill, and so the Messenger visited them along with a group of his companions. The Messenger said to Ali, 'O Abul-Hasan, if you vowed for your two sons (recovery) ...' And so he made a vow (*nadhr*) to fast for three days if Allah, glory be to Him, would cure them. Fatimah made the same vow and so did Fiddah. al-Hasan and al-Husayn, recovered, and so Imam Ali, Lady Fatimah and Fiddah started to fast, as well as al-Hasan and al-Husayn, who joined their parents in the fast. The family performed the fast of day one while they had nothing whatsoever. Ali borrowed three measures of barley from a Jew, and Lady Fatimah al-Zahra, *peace be upon her*, ground one measure and made bread with it, and after performing the *maghrib* prayer she put it before the family for break of the fast. At that moment a pauper came to them and called them and requested of them; Ali gave him his loaf, and so did Lady Fatimah followed by Hasan and Husayn, and Fiddah, and themselves ended their fast with no more than water. The second day they all fasted, and again Fatimah, ground a measure and cooked bread with it. After *maghrib* prayers she put it before the family for the meal, when suddenly there was an orphan at the door seeking food. Like the day before, they each gave him their bread while they themselves tasted nothing but water for their meal. The third day Fatimah, took the third measure, ground it and made bread, and after *maghrib* prayers when they were about to break the fast, a captive appeared at the door seeking food. So they gave him their five loaves and broke their fasts with nothing but water. So when it was the fourth day and they had performed their vows, Imam Ali went with al-Hasan and al-Husayn, to see the Messenger of Allah *may Allah bless him and his family*. On seeing them and witnessing their condition of weakness the Messenger wept, and then Gabriel was sent down with this surah.

In some narrations Allah, glory be to Him, sent down a spread of food from the sky for them.

And it is said that among the wonders of this surah is that it describes all the blessings of paradise with the exception of paradise's 'beauties' (*al-hūr*), out of respect for Lady Fatimah, *peace be upon her*.

***By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful***

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

***By the name of Allah, ...*** Beginning by the name of Allah who is the First before all things, so it is a thing of beauty to begin with His noble name in every affair.

***... the Compassionate, the Merciful.*** He bestows mercy on everyone with shortcomings, fulfilling their shortcomings, amongst which is the forgiveness of man's shakiness, so that it is as if he does not sin.

***Has there come upon the human a period of all time when he was not a thing recalled? (1)***

هَلْ أَتَى عَلَى الْإِنْسَانِ حِينٌ مِّنَ الدَّهْرِ لَمْ يَكُن شَيْئًا

مَذْكُورًا ﴿١﴾

The interrogative is for assertion, for a person to admit this truth, and it becomes clear to him that since he was not and now is, that which brought him into being is able to restore him after destroying him. 'Time' is put for *dahr*, meaning a long period of time passed. He was not a thing

recalled. He was non-existent, with no consequences, no influence, nothing. The implied answer is 'yes, there was such a time.' And: 'can anyone deny the reality of this?'

**Indeed We have created the human from a mingled sperm-drop; We try him, so We made him hearing, seeing. (2)**

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا ﴿٢﴾

The sperm-drop is composed of mingled substances, the sperm of the man and that of the woman, and of the various elements of what is eaten. He is created to be tested, in that he is subject to obligations: will he perform them with beauty or in evil. Thus he was made to hear and to see, for the obligations upon him to be complete.

**Indeed We have guided him to the path, whether he is grateful or ungrateful. (3)**

إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا ﴿٣﴾

Man is guided to the path, through the raising of the Messengers and the sending of the Books. Either man is grateful for the blessings of Allah, glory be to Him, through belief and obedience. Or he is ungrateful, given for *kafur*, for every disbeliever is ungrateful relative to the various times and conditions.

**Indeed We have prepared for the disbelievers chains, fetters and a blaze. (4)**

إِنَّا أَعْتَدْنَا لِلْكَافِرِينَ سَلَاسِلًا وَأَغْلَالًا وَسَعِيرًا ﴿٤﴾

They will be dragged along in chains of iron, and bound in fetters. And there is a raging, blazing fire ahead of them. All of this is prepared for them in the hereafter.

**Indeed the righteous shall be drinking of a cup whose mixture is camphor: (5)**

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا ﴿٥﴾

﴿٥﴾

The righteous (*al-abrar*) shall be drinking the cool, pleasant drinks of paradise, in which camphor (*kafor*) is mixed, denoting the coolness of those drinks, their sweetness and their pleasant fragrance. It seems that their drinking is given precedence on account of its connection to the preceding word 'flame', from which one seeks relief by drinking water.

The Arabs would sometimes mix their wine with camphor and sometimes with ginger. Thus it is stated that the drinks of paradise are like this, appropriate to the Arabs' understanding, for the food there is different from the food and drink of the world, in delight and goodness.

**A fountain, Allah's worshippers drink from it; they open it up, opening. (6)**

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا ﴿٦﴾

That is, those cups will be filled from a spring. Those who are given this good news are the servants of Allah, who worship Him and obey Him with a just and fitting obedience. 'They open it up' is given for *yufajjirunaha* meaning to set it flowing. What is meant is that as and when they like they will be able to draw the water of the spring from their own dwellings and palaces, for that itself is a pleasure and a delight.

*The servants of Allah are then described:*

**They fulfil the vow and they fear a day whose evil is widespread. (7)**

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا ﴿٧﴾

**They fulfil the vow ...** While in the world they were such that whenever they made a vow, they fulfilled their vow. 'Vow' is given for *nadhr*, which is that a person binds some good upon himself for His sake, glory be to Him, like vowing to fast or give charity or suchlike.

**... and they fear a day whose evil is widespread ...** And they fear the day, that is the terrors of that day – the day of resurrection – whose evil is widespread, meaning that it is everywhere and will embrace every disbeliever and sinner, unlike the evils of the world that are particular to a country, or person or place.

**And they feed food out of love to a pauper and an orphan and a captive: (8)**

وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا ﴿٨﴾

**And they feed food out of love ...** ‘out of love’ is given for *‘ala>hubbhi*, literally: upon, or over, love for Him, or for it. It means that they feed the food for His sake, glory be to Him. It may also mean that they feed the food though they love that food for themselves on account of their hunger.

**... to a pauper ...** ‘Pauper’ is given for *miskinā*, a person whose poverty renders him inactive (*sakin*), for whereas the wealthy person is active in different fields the pauper is inactive, as he has no wealth to spend in his concerns.

**... and an orphan ...** And on the orphan, a child whose father has died, or both his parents, or even just his mother.

**... and a captive.** That is, a person taken in war.

The purified Household, *peace be upon them*, fulfilled their vow and fed food to all three categories, as shown above.

*Their intention in giving the food was that:*

**We feed ye but for the face of Allah, we neither want from ye a recompense nor thanks; (9)**

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكْرًا ﴿٩﴾

﴿٩﴾

The meaning is that they feed that food for the sake of Allah, glory be to Him. The use of the word ‘face’ is to illustrate intention and orientation; it is a metaphorical usage derived from the fact that it is the face of a person we direct ourselves towards, when we are trying to please that person.

**Indeed we fear from our Lord a frowning, catastrophic day. (10)**

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا ﴿١٠﴾

They fear, were they to disobey Him in failing to fulfil their vow, or in failing to feed the destitute for His sake, a day of dread that would cause faces to frown. Catastrophic: a day of extreme difficulty and hardship.

**So Allah guards them from the evil of that day, and presents them to radiance and joy. (11)**

فَوَقَّاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا ﴿١١﴾

Allah protects them from the horrors of the day of resurrection, and presents to them, grants to them, radiance and beauty of the face and joy in the heart.

**And He recompenses them for their restraint with a garden and with silk. (12)**

وَجَزَّاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا ﴿١٢﴾

They are rewarded for their patience with gardens as an abode, and with silk for clothing.

**Reclining therein on couches, neither seeing therein a sun nor a frost. (13)**

مُتَّكِئِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا

زَمْهَرِيرًا ﴿١٣﴾

In the gardens they will recline on thrones or couches (*ara>ik*), and will be troubled neither by heat nor by cold.

**And close to them are its shades, and its clusters are made lowly, made lowly, (14)**

وَدَانِيَةً عَلَيْهِمْ ظِلُّهَا وَذُلَّتْ قُطُوفُهَا تَذَلِيلًا ﴿١٤﴾

The shade from the trees in paradise is near to them, as the light in paradise – and in it there is some heat – is shaded by trees, and by walls and roofs of the palaces. And the climate is more pleasant and agreeable in the shade, and it seems that it is arranged in this way so that a person may seek a change of temperature between the shade and the heat, and vice versa. Clusters of

fruit weigh down their branches, so that they can easily be picked by hand, so close by are they and so near to the ground.

**And vessels of silver are passed around them, and goblets that are glass, (15)**

وَيُطَافُ عَلَيْهِمْ بِغَابِئَةٍ مِّنْ فِضَّةٍ وَأَكْوَابٍ كَانَتْ قَوَارِيرًا ﴿١٥﴾

Those who pass them around are the immortal youths mentioned below. 'Vessels' is put for *anīyah*, meaning a jug or pitcher or suchlike used to contain water. Perhaps they will be full of wine. 'Goblets' is put for *akwāb*, small vessels used for drinking: the wine is poured from the vessels into the goblets for the righteous to drink from. The goblets are made of a glass.

**Glass of silver, they are determined precisely. (16)**

قَوَارِيرًا مِّنْ فِضَّةٍ قَدَّرُوهَا تَقْدِيرًا ﴿١٦﴾

The goblets are of a glass that is the colour of silver, so that they present the sight with two pleasures. Imam al-Sādiq has said that sight penetrates the silver of paradise just as it penetrates glass.

Thus the goblets of paradise have the clarity and transparency of glass, and the whiteness and softness of silver. And they are precisely determined, meaning measured, so that the goblets have such a uniform shape and dimensions that it is as if they are made by machine; unlike vessels made by hand whose differences are apparent to the eye, and jolt the sensibilities.

**And they shall be given to drink therein a cup whose admixture is ginger. (17)**

وَيُسْقَوْنَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا زَنْجَبِيلًا ﴿١٧﴾

'They' means the righteous mentioned earlier. 'Therein' means in the Garden. They shall be given a cup, meaning a drink from a cup, whose admixture is ginger, in that mixed with the drink will be something resembling ginger, the well-known spice that is used for mixing with drinks.

**A fountain therein; it is called Salsabil. (18)**

عَيْنًا فِيهَا تُسَمَّى سَلْسَبِيلًا ﴿١٨﴾

'Therein' means in paradise. The drink mixed with ginger issues from that spring. It is called 'Salsabil' on account of its flowing (*sayalānihi*) in streams sweet, refreshing and resplendent; or on account of its being so palatable due to its purity and lightness. So it is not to be imagined that the ginger will lead to heartburn or discomfort.

**And eternalised youths shall circle around them; when thou see them thou will reckon them to be pearls, scattered. (19)**

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ إِذَا رَأَيْتَهُمْ حَسِبْتَهُمْ لُؤْلُؤًا مَّنثُورًا ﴿١٩﴾

**And eternalised youths shall circle around them; ...** 'Circle around' is given for *yatūfu*, from *tāwaf*. Here it means to pass from one to another and then to another and so on, until arriving back at the first. The meaning of 'eternalised' (*mukhalladun*) is that they remain eternally in paradise. The 'youths' is given for *wildan*. They are the male equivalent of the 'beauties' or 'houries' of paradise (*al-hūr*); they are the youths while the beauties are the maidens.

**... when thou see them thou will reckon them to be pearls, scattered.** When thou see them, O human, thou will imagine them to be pearls, on account of their radiance and delicate appearance, and as they move about they will be taken for pearls scattered about rather than arranged on a thread, as they busily disperse carrying out their duties.

**And when thou see there, thou shall see blessings and a great dominion. (20)**

وَإِذَا رَأَيْتَ ثَمَّ رَأَيْتَ نَعِيمًا وَمُلْكًا كَبِيرًا ﴿٢٠﴾

When thou, O Messenger, or O observer, see that place (*thamma* means 'there' or 'that place'), meaning the Garden, you will see blessings and a great estate. Yes, for the least of the people of paradise will be granted a dwelling from amongst the palaces and gardens sufficient to entertain the two species of men and jinn at a single sitting.

***Upon them will be robes of green silk with brocade, and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver, and their Lord shall give them to drink a pure drink. (21)***

عَلَيْهِمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٌ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ وَحُلُوفٌ أُسْوِرَ مِنْ  
فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَنَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا ﴿٢١﴾

They are dressed in clothing made of fine green silk, with brocades (*istabraq*), made of rough silk. The fine silk is kinder to the body, the rough silk more pleasing to the eye. They shall be adorned by wearing jewellery: bracelets made of silver. It used to be the habit of kings and the powerful to adorn themselves with a wristband, or bracelet. Their Lord shall give them to drink of a pure wine, unlike wine in the world that is unclean and leads to vices like drunkenness and suchlike.

***'Indeed this is a recompense for you,' and 'Your effort is thanked'. (22)***

إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا ﴿٢٢﴾

These are the words that will be addressed to the people of the Garden. The delights in which they find themselves are a recompense for their faith and righteous deeds, so that their effort and their struggle while in the world has not gone unthanked: Allah, glory be to Him, will be thankful for it and will have appreciated it, and so He will reward them with these blessings.

*After having explained the recompense of the two worlds, the flow now turns to hearten the Messenger, and console him for the trouble he was receiving on the path of calling people to such blessings as those mentioned:*

***Indeed We Ourselves have sent down the Qur'an upon thee, consummately. (23)***

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نَزَّلْنَا عَلَيْكَ الْقُرْآنَ تَنْزِيلًا ﴿٢٣﴾

The emphasis of the repeated pronoun 'We' is to refute the claims of the disbelievers about the Qur'an, that it is sorcery or poetry or taught by man and suchlike.

***So be restrained for the affair of thy Lord, and do not obey among them a sinner or a disbeliever. (24)***

فَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ وَلَا تَطِعْ مِنْهُمْ ءَائِمًا أَوْ كَفُورًا ﴿٢٤﴾

That is: be patient, O Messenger of Allah, for the sake of thy obedience to Allah, glory be to Him. He was to continue to propagate His message in the midst of the storm raised by their denial, persecution and mockery. And he was not to follow any sinner in his sin or disbeliever in his disbelief, in failing to propagate a matter of faith or of obligation in obedience to them, seeking to please them. It is recorded that Abu Jahl used to proscribe the Messenger from the prayer, along with 'Utbah and al-Walid. They said to him, 'Come away from this affair and we will satisfy thee with wealth and with wives.' The ayah has a general meaning covering every disbeliever who urges to disbelief and every sinner who encourages to sin.

***And recall the name of thy Lord morning and afternoon. (25)***

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ بُكْرَةً وَأَصِيلًا ﴿٢٥﴾

That is: he was to recall the name of the Lord, with remembrance, supplications and the prayer, at the two ends of the day.

***And of the night, prostrate to Him, and glorify Him in the long night. (26)***

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَاسْجُدْ لَهُ وَسَبِّحْهُ لَيْلًا طَوِيلًا ﴿٢٦﴾

***And of the night, prostrate to Him, ...*** That is: during a part of the night, prostrate to Allah, glory be to Him, meaning prayer and worship. In other words, he was to surrender himself to Allah, glory be to Him.

***... and glorify Him ...*** He was to express his declarations that He is above all that is unworthy of Him.

***... in the long night.*** The night is the spring-time of the devoted, they take its duration as a means for submissiveness and supplication, for the deepest impulses are only activated by a long submissiveness and humility.

It is narrated that 'morning' in these *ayaṭ* signifies the morning prayer (*al-fajr*), 'afternoon' signifies the noon (*al-dhuhr*) and afternoon (*al-ʿaṣr*) prayers, 'prostrate to Him' signifies the two evening prayers (*al-maghrib* and *al-ʿisha*), while 'glorify Him' signifies the night-prayer (*al-layl*).

***Indeed those, they love the hasty and leave aside a heavy day before them. (27)***

إِنَّ هَؤُلَاءِ تَحِبُّونَ الْعَاجِلَةَ وَيَذُرُونَ وَرَاءَهُمْ يَوْمًا ثَقِيلًا



The disbelievers who turn from Allah, glory be to Him, and direct themselves to their cravings and desires, love the life of the world and its temporary pleasures. They forsake and desert their futures: a grievous day that is weighty on man on account of the terrors and difficulties. They do not work for that day.

*They disbelieve in Allah who created them and in His hands are their lives and livelihood:*

***We created them, and We strengthened their vigour; and if We wish it We substitute their like, a substitute. (28)***

مَنْ خَلَقْنَاهُمْ وَشَدَدْنَا أَسْرَهُمْ وَإِذَا شِئْنَا بَدَلْنَا أَمْثَلَهُمْ

تَبْدِيلًا

That is: Allah created them from nothing. And He strengthened them in their creation, by giving order to their constituent parts. 'Vigour' is given for *asr*, that originally meant severity (*shadd*); that is why a prisoner of conflict is called an *asir*, as he suffers the severity of being bound by a rope. So the meaning is: We strengthened their vigour in their creation, by making them such that there is no incongruity or rift between their constituent parts, but all interlocked and are interwoven. 'And when if wish it We substitute for them the like of them – that is, We put others in their place; We destroy them and bring others like them to take their place.'

***Indeed this is a reminder, so whoever wills it takes unto his Lord a path. (29)***

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذِكْرَةٌ فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا

This surah, or this set of teachings and warnings borne by the Qur'an, is a reminder to man of what has been placed in his human nature, calling their attention towards existence and His portents. He who wills it will take a path unto his Lord, the path of His satisfaction, glory be to Him, after having seen the real, and having made the distinction between truth and falsehood.

***And ye do not will it unless Allah wills it; truly Allah is Knowing, Wise. (30)***

وَمَا تَشَاءُونَ إِلَّا أَنْ يَشَاءَ اللَّهُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ عَلِيمًا حَكِيمًا



Nobody wishes belief and guidance, unless Allah wishes it, by sending Messengers and clarifying the way. Guidance has two aspects: one is His establishing the proof; and one is man's accepting the proof and being guided by it. Allah knows our best interests, and is Wise in what He does. Wisdom is the placing of each thing in its place; Allah acts only with wisdom and discretion.

***He enters whom He wills into His mercy, while the wrongful – He has prepared for them a painful chastisement. (31)***

يُدْخِلُ مَنْ يَشَاءُ فِي رَحْمَتِهِ وَالظَّالِمِينَ أَعَدَّ لَهُمْ عَذَابًا

أَلِيمًا

He places whomever He wishes in the felicity of the world and the Hereafter; but it is not haphazard, rather He places there His righteous servants. As for 'the wrongful' (*dhakimīn*), who wrong themselves by disbelief or disobedience, theirs is a painful chastisement, with a wretched life in the world, and the fire and torment in the hereafter.