

Surah al-Nazīʿat (79)

سورة النازعات

‘Those Who Tear Out’

This surah has been given its name due to the prominence within it of the word *al-nazīʿat*, meaning ‘those who tear out’. Like the other Makkan surahs, this surah attends to matters of belief: the Divinity, the message and the return. As Surah al-Naba’ concluded with conditions on the day of resurrection, so this surah opens on a similar theme.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah, ... We seek help from the name of Allah, the Owner of every thing, the sole, absolute power and authority who has free disposal over existence;

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. He who graces His servants with repeated mercies in this world and the next.

By those who tear out, excessively, (1)

وَالنَّازِعَاتِ غَرْقًا ﴿١﴾

A vow by the angels who tear out the souls of the disbelievers from their bodies harshly.

And by the active ones, actively, (2)

وَالنَّاشِطَاتِ نَشْطًا ﴿٢﴾

A vow by the angels who are zealous and energetic at the taking of the souls of the disbelievers, or who are eager and brisk at the disbelievers souls being taken off to hell.

And by the gliders, gliding, (3)

وَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْحًا ﴿٣﴾

That is, a vow by the angels who glide through the space after the souls have been taken. ‘Glide’ is used for *sabḥ* meaning to move effortlessly, like a swimmer through water. The word is repeated in the verse for emphasis. It is recorded in narrations that what is meant here are the angels who take out the souls of the believers with ease, gently.

And by the proceeders, proceeding, (4)

فَالسَّابِقَاتِ سَبْقًا ﴿٤﴾

That is, a vow by the angels who precede the souls, or the souls of the believers towards their lofty station.

And by the managers of the affair; (5)

فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا ﴿٥﴾

A vow by the angels who regulate affairs with Allah's permission.

These vows sworn by the said classes of angels are to the point that the content of the subsequent ayaṭ or portents, describing the resurrection and sky and hell, is all true and accords to the reality. The point is not given explicitly but is implicit in the content of the subsequent ayaṭ and their tone:

The day when the trembler trembles, (6)

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الرَّاجِفَةُ ﴿٦﴾

That is: recount, O Messenger, the day when the trembler shall shake and be convulsed. The trembler is the earth, as Allah says: ‘*The day when the earth and the mountains tremble*’. [73: 15]

What is next follows it. (7)

تَتَّبِعُهَا الرَّادِفَةُ ﴿٧﴾

The convulsions of the earth will be followed by what comes after it in the disintegration of the universal order, and that is the sky. It may be that what is meant by ‘the trembler’ is the first trumpet, and that ‘what is next’ is the second trumpet.

Hearts on that day are in tumult, (8)

قُلُوبٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ وَاجِفَةٌ ﴿٨﴾

On that day – the day of resurrection – hearts will be ‘in tumult’ (*wajifah*): in extreme agitation.

Their eyes humble; (9)

أَبْصَرُهَا خَشِيعَةٌ ﴿٩﴾

The eyes attributed to the hearts, or those possessing the hearts, will be submissive and humble. They will not look anywhere save in fear, alarm, dread and shame.

They say: 'Are we to be returned to the track? (10)

يَقُولُونَ أَإِنَّا لَمَرْدُودُونَ فِي الْحَافِرَةِ ﴿١٠﴾

Here it is those whose hearts are in tumult who are cited. ‘Track’ is given for *ḥḥfirah*, which is the path a person travels in, called such by reason of how that person carves (*ḥḥfara*) it by his footsteps. This account is of their condition in the world, where they used to ask: ‘Are we to return to life after death, and be as before?’ Such questioning, clearly, was framed as a denial of the hereafter.

'What, when we are bones, rotten?' (11)

أَإِذَا كُنَّا عِظْمًا فِجْرَةً ﴿١١﴾

That is: how shall we return to our former condition when we have died and become rotten bones?

They said, 'That, then, would be a lossful return.' (12)

قَالُوا تِلْكَ إِذًا كَرَّةٌ خَاسِرَةٌ ﴿١٢﴾

These same disbelievers are cited again. Speaking about the return told to them by you, the believers, they say their return to the world would be one that would occasion great loss. But of course they do not admit the truth of the return, and so they are speaking about it metaphorically. Indeed, all they say about it is a form of mockery and derision, for the idea that it might be true disturbs them.

Now comes the censure of their position, in the word of Allah:

Nay, it is but a single upbraiding, (13)

فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ ﴿١٣﴾

That is, the return that they find so difficult to accept is not in the least difficult for Allah, glory be to Him. The return is but a single cry that shall be raised by Israfil blowing in the trumpet, the second blast. The cry is called an upbraiding (*zajrah*), by reason of it being the means of turning them from one path towards another.

And lo, they are on the surface. (14)

فَإِذَا هُمْ بِالسَّاهِرَةِ ﴿١٤﴾

All mankind will be returned from the depths of the earth to its surface. ‘Surface’ is given for *sahira*, for when crossing a flat plain or the desert a person remains sleepless and awake (*sahira*) upon it and will have no repose, from fear of an enemy or of a wild beast. Here the state of restlessness has been attributed to a location, and this indicates that the resurrection will take place on a flat ground, like a huge desert plain in which there is no unevenness, no buildings and no trees.

The revelation now turns to explain some aspects of the account of Moses and the Pharaoh, that the disbelievers may heed the final end that the Pharaoh brought upon himself by his disbelief:

Has there come to thee the account of Moses, (15)

هَلْ أَتَاكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَى ﴿١٥﴾

The story of Moses, *peace be upon him*.

When his Lord called him in the holy valley of Tuwa: (16)

إِذْ نَادَاهُ رَبُّهُ بِالْوَادِ الْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى ﴿١٦﴾

This was the first time that Allah revealed to him on his return from Madyan and Shu'ayb towards the land of Egypt, which took place in a holy valley called Tuwa. It was there that Moses was spoken to by Allah, and was inspired to Messengerhood.

Allah then said to Moses:

Go to Pharaoh, verily he has transgressed, (17)

أَذْهَبَ إِلَىٰ فِرْعَوْنَ إِنَّهُ طَغَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

That is, he transgressed the limit in disbelief and sin.

So say: 'Is it for thee to purify thyself? (18)

فَقُلْ هَلْ لَكَ إِلَهٌ إِلَّا أَن تَزَكَّىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

The questioning mode is used to convey the command in a courteous manner. This means; why don't you surrender and be in harmony with the will of Allah? Do you not wish to purify yourself from disbelief and disobedience?

And 'I will guide thee to thy Lord till thou shall be in awe.' (19)

وَأَهْدِيكَ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَتَحْتَنِي ﴿١٩﴾

That is: is it for you that I guide you to your Lord, lead you to Him? For man is such that he does not realise Allah's excellence save after being guided. And he should be in awe, that is, fear Him, glory be to Him, by refraining from disbelief and from disobedience; for this fear can only follow upon awareness.

So he showed him the great sign, (20)

فَأَرْسَلْنَا آيَةَ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾

That is, Moses showed the Pharaoh the great sign or miracle, namely the miracle of the staff [which turned into a serpent by God's permission].

So he belied, and disobeyed, (21)

فَكَذَّبَ وَعَصَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾

He called the miracles false and defied Moses, so that Moses' effort did not end with Pharaoh's submission to Allah, glory be to Him.

Then he turned away to strive. (22)

ثُمَّ أَدْبَرَ يَسْعَىٰ ﴿٢٢﴾

He strove to seek something that would destroy Moses' argument, and falsify Moses' prophethood.

So he gathered and then proclaimed, (23)

فَحَشَرَ فَنَادَىٰ ﴿٢٣﴾

Pharaoh summoned his court and leading officers, and addressed them.

And said: 'I am your Lord, the Most High!' (24)

فَقَالَ أَنَا رَبُّكُمُ الْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٢٤﴾

He said to them: 'I am your Lord, the Most High, for the idols are under my divinity, and verily the Most High Lord – over whom is no other lord – is myself. It is not as Moses imagines – that I have a God over me.'

So Allah took him for punishment in the afterlife and in the former; (25)

فَأَخَذَهُ اللَّهُ نَكَالَ الْأَخْزَرِ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿٢٥﴾

Allah took him in punishment: his being drowned along with his soldiers in the sea, and his entry into the fire. 'Punishment' is given for *nakaḷ*, the form of which is emphatic, meaning that Allah

punishes him in the afterlife with the fire, while his first punishment was his being drowned. In other words, he was punished with the two types of punishment.

Indeed in that is a monition for whosoever fears. (26)

إِنَّ فِي ذَلِكَ لَعِبْرَةً لِمَن يَخْشَى ﴿٢٦﴾

In the punishment of the Pharaoh is a warningful lesson for whoever fears punishment, that they be warned and realise that the outcome of disbelief is chastisement.

The account of Pharaoh with stirring brevity concluded, the revelation turns to define the limits of the disbelievers' power, and their might before the might of Allah, glory be to Him. It makes clear that they are nothing before the might of His creation, let alone before His will, glory be to Him, His total creativity and control:

Are ye more powerful in constitution or the sky He built? (27)

ءَأَنْتُمْ أَشَدُّ خُلُقًا أَمْ السَّمَاءُ بَنَاهَا ﴿٢٧﴾

O humankind, or O disbelievers of Makkah, for the address is in the plural, are you stronger and more solid, or the sky? There is no doubt as to the answer: the sky is more powerful. This is not inconsistent with man being more subtle, more precise and more wondrous, for the verse speaks of power and strength, not of magnificence and precision. Allah built the sky, glory be to Him, and He who builds the sky finds nothing at all difficult for Him, and no force matches His force.

He raised its roof and then fashioned it, (28)

رَفَعَ سَمَكَهَا فَسَوَّاهَا ﴿٢٨﴾

Allah raised its roof. Roof is given for *samk*, related to *sumk*, meaning height. Therefore, Allah glory be to Him, raised the skies expansively in an upward direction. Then He fashioned them and justified them so that they were without chinks or ruptures and there was no disorder.

And He darkened its night and brought out its light. (29)

وَأَغْطَشَ لَيْلَهَا وَأَخْرَجَ ضُحَاهَا ﴿٢٩﴾

These two things are attributed to the sky as the sky is their source, by the rising and setting of the sun.

And the earth, after that, He laid it out, (30)

وَالْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ دَحَاهَا ﴿٣٠﴾

After creating the skies and arranging their forces He spread out the earth, for first He created the earth unspread, glory be to Him, then He created the skies, and then He spread out and levelled the earth. This verse is held by our astronomers to show the movement of the earth, for spreading out (*dahw*) implies being hurled. It is in this sense that the Commander of the Believers, Imam Ali is called 'the hurler of the gate (of fort Khaybar)' or *dah*-*al-bab*. They find similar import in the verse: 'Have We not put the earth a container' [77:25], 'container' being given for *kifatan*, from the restraining of a bird (*kift al-thyr*). Allah knows.

He brought forth its water from it and its pastures, (31)

أَخْرَجَ مِنْهَا مَاءَهَا وَمَرْعَاهَا ﴿٣١﴾

He brought waters forth from the earth, creating its passageways, its wells and spreading its oceans. He created its fields and meadows, where flocks and herds are grazed. The meaning of it is that Allah created the earth's herbage and vegetation.

And the mountains, He secured them; (32)

وَأَلْبَسَهَا أُزْسِنَهَا ﴿٣٢﴾

He fixed them in certain places so that the earth would not shake and break up.

And He did all this for,

As provision for ye and your livestock. (33)

مَتَاعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَامِكُمْ ﴿٣٣﴾

For your pleasure (*mataʿan*) and benefit, O humankind, and that your animals may enjoy the stability of the ground, and for you to derive your livelihoods and graze your herds and flocks. 'Livestock' is given for *anʿām*, meaning camels, cattle, sheep and goats.

So when comes the great overwhelming, (34)

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الطَّامَةُ الْكُبْرَى ﴿٣٤﴾

The resurrection. It is called 'the overwhelming' (*al-taḥmma*) because it overcomes and dominates, all things. It is great (*al-kubra*) in that it is mightier than any other frightening calamity.

The day when the human recalls his endeavour, (35)

يَوْمَ يَتَذَكَّرُ الْإِنْسَانُ مَا سَعَى ﴿٣٥﴾

That is, he remembers his actions, either by the internal process of memory, or by being reminded on reading his book written by the two angels appointed for the purpose. [Two angels appointed for each and every individual.]

And the raging fire is made to appear for whosoever sees: (36)

وَبُرُزَّتِ الْجَحِيمُ لِمَن يَرَى ﴿٣٦﴾

It is Allah who makes the raging fire appear, and the raging fire is hell; all who are granted sight will see it clearly revealed.

The consequent of the conditional 'when comes...' has not been given. It is implicit in the subsequent ayaʿ or portents. That mankind is categorised in two groups:

So as for him who transgressed, (37)

فَأَمَّا مَنْ طَغَى ﴿٣٧﴾

That is, was arrogant and transgressed in disbelief and sin.

And preferred the worldly life, (38)

وَأَثَرَ الْحَيَاةِ الدُّنْيَا ﴿٣٨﴾

That is, rather than choose the eternal life of the future. It means that all he did was for his worldly life, and he did nothing for the hereafter.

Then indeed the raging fire, that is the abode: (39)

فَإِنَّ الْجَحِيمَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى ﴿٣٩﴾

'Abode' is given for *al-ma'wa* from the root *awa*, meaning to take a home. The sinner's road is towards the raging fire (*al-jahīm*).

While as for him who feared the station of his Lord, and forbade the soul from desire, (40)

وَأَمَّا مَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ وَنَهَى النَّفْسَ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

That is, feared the station associated with the Lord, which is the resurrection. The association is one of honour, like the phrase 'House of Allah' (*Bayt Allah*) for the Kaʿbah. And so the meaning is that he feared the punishment of the afterlife, and restrained his soul (*nafs*) and protected it from following its desires and caprices through committing the forbidden and abandoning the obligatory.

Then indeed the garden, that is the home. (41)

فَإِنَّ الْجَنَّةَ هِيَ الْمَأْوَى ﴿٤١﴾

For that is his destination.

As the topic has been the resurrection, the revelation turns to answer the question about the timing of the resurrection:

They question thee about the Hour: "When will it establish?" (42)

يَسْأَلُونَكَ عَنِ السَّاعَةِ أَيَّانَ مُرْسِنُهَا ﴿٤٢﴾

That is, they question you, O Messenger, about the resurrection. They ask: when will it establish; that is, when will it come? 'Establish' is given for *mursa* from *al-irsa*, meaning to be firm, stable, steady.

But what are thou in, to recount of it? (43)

فِيمَ أَنْتَ مِنْ ذِكْرِهَا ﴿٤٣﴾

That is, O Messenger, you have nothing to tell of the timing of the resurrection, for you do not know its timing. Just as a person within a thing is aware of its characteristics, whereas when he is external to it he remains unaware of them. The question form of '...what are thou in...?' (*fi>ma>anta*) is used to denote negation; it means: you have nothing to recount, for you know nothing of it; such knowledge is particular to Allah, glory be to Him.

Unto thy Lord is its finality; (44)

إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ مُنْتَهَاهَا ﴿٤٤﴾

That is, the course towards knowledge of the Hour ends with your Lord, O Messenger of Allah. For when a person is asked about the Hour he redirects the inquiry and refers it to another, and so on until it is directed towards Allah, who knows the timing of the Hour.

Yes, the timing of the Hour does not concern thee, O Messenger, for:

Thou are but a warner of whosoever fears it: (45)

إِنَّمَا أَنْتَ مُنذِرٌ مَنِ تَخَشَّهَا ﴿٤٥﴾

You, O Messenger, are solely the warner of whoever fears it. Your station is to warn whoever fears the Hour. The reason that the object of the warning is limited in this way is that it is those who fear alone who will benefit from the warning; others will not benefit.

The revelation then turns to warn humankind and remind them that their time in this world is short, so short that:

It will be as if, on the day they see it, they had stayed but an afternoon, or its forenoon. (46)

كَأَنَّهُمْ يَوْمَ يَرَوْنَهَا لَمْ يَلْبَثُوا إِلَّا عَشِيَّةً أَوْ ضُحًى ﴿٤٦﴾

For humankind when they see the Hour and all that then happens, it will be as if they had lived in the world but for the few hours of an afternoon, or the morning of that afternoon. The meaning is that it will seem to them that they had lived in the world for no more than half a day – a morning or an afternoon.