

Surah 'Abasa (80)

سورة عبس

'He Frowned'

This surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word 'abasa, meaning 'he frowned'. Like the other Makkan surahs it deals with matters of belief. While Surah al-Nazi'at concludes by warning him who fears, this surah opens by warning a particular person.

In fact, this surah descended in reference to 'Uthman ibn 'Affan, in that he was with the Messenger along with a group of companions, when a blind man came and sat near to 'Uthman. So a frown appeared on 'Uthman's face and he turned away from him and gathered his clothing, and moved toward his wealthy friends. Then the ayat descended.

Strange, then, that members of the Umayyad clan who hated the Messenger attributed this affair to the Prophet so as to acquit their relative 'Uthman, maintaining that it was the Prophet who frowned and turned away, thus contradicting the text of the magnificent Qur'an: 'Indeed thou are on a magnificent disposition', and '(the Messenger is) with the believers tender, merciful...' and suchlike.

Nevertheless, following this came a group of Wahhabis who took to lapping up this tale by which the Umayyads attributed the frowning to the Prophet, with further embellishments and flourishes. This then became a weapon in the hands some of the Christians in their attacks against the Messenger, *may Allah bless him and his family*, so that in some of their pamphlets it is written: 'Who is better, Jesus or Muhammad? For the former used to heal the blind – by your own book: "He absolved him born blind and the leper", and by contrast, the latter frowned and turned away when a blind man came to him – again by the clear text of your own book!'

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... Beginning by the name of Allah, whose is everything in the skies and the earth. He is more worthy of beginning by His name than any other. He is the originator, in whose hands are all things.

... the Compassionate, the Merciful. He who is merciful towards the servants by bestowing on them all that completes their shortcomings.

He frowned and turned away, (1)

عَبَسَ وَتَوَلَّى ۝١

That is, 'Uthman ibn 'Affan scowled and turned his back.

That the blind man came to him; (2)

أَنْ جَاءَهُ الْأَعْمَى ۝٢

'Uthman ibn 'Affan scowled and turned away because a blind man came and sat next to him. It is said that the blind man was 'Abdullah ibn Umm Maktum, who was blind (and poor).

The revelation then turns to reprehend 'Uthman for what he has done, addressing him directly, as is the manner of the Qur'an in addressing itself to mankind, shown in the verse 'Are ye more powerful in constitution or the sky?' [79: 28]

And what will make thee comprehend: perhaps he is becoming purified, (3)

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكَّى ۝٣

That is, when will you realise, O scowler, that perhaps the blind man will cleanse himself with righteous deeds, when to turn from him would be a sin, as from a pure and righteous one.

Or being reminded, and the reminder benefit him. (4)

أَوْ يَذَّكَّرُ فَتَنْفَعَهُ الذِّكْرَى ۝٤

That is, being reminded by admonishments and guidance, and that he would benefit from being reminded. The difference between this and the previous verse is that there the purification originated within himself, here the purification is through being reminded.

But as for him who is rich, (5)

أَمَّا مَنْ اسْتَغْنَىٰ ﴿٥﴾

Rich, with much property and wealth. The word used is *istighna*, essentially meaning to seek wealth.

So thou attend to him; (6)

فَأَنْتَ لَهُ تَصَدَّىٰ ﴿٦﴾

You, O scowler, turn to him and do not mind being near him and talking to him, whatever his ethical condition. For:

And thou feel not burdened that he does not become purified? (7)

وَمَا عَلَيْكَ أَلَّا يَزَكِّيٰ ﴿٧﴾

That is; O scowler, you do not care whether he is pure and righteous or not, for it is wealth that is great in your eyes, not the religion. That is why you care nothing for religion when with a person of wealth.

But whosoever comes to thee striving, (8)

وَأَمَّا مَنْ جَاءَكَ يَسْعَىٰ ﴿٨﴾

That is, striving for the sake of goodness and personal growth, like Ibn Umm Maktum.

And he is in awe, (9)

وَهُوَ خَشِيَ ﴿٩﴾

That is, he fears Allah, grand and magnificent.

Then, thou distract thyself from him! (10)

فَأَنْتَ عَنْهُ تَلَهَّىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

You, O scowler, pay him no heed and divert yourself to another, simply because he is poor and needy.

Nay, indeed it is a reminder (11)

كَلَّا إِنَّهَا تَذَكُّرَةٌ ﴿١١﴾

Nay, it is not as you suppose, O scowler! ... that wealth is better than the religion. Indeed it, these *ayaat*, is a reminder; reminding of the knowledge of the good and the obscene latent in human nature and the soul.

- So whosoever wills recalls it - (12)

فَمَنْ شَاءَ ذَكَرْهُ ﴿١٢﴾

That is, whoever wills goodness and salvation shall remember what has been placed in their nature and their souls, so that they act according to the moral admonition, advice, and guidance.

In honoured scrolls, (13)

فِي صُحُفٍ مُّكْرَمَةٍ ﴿١٣﴾

That is, this reminder exists in honoured scrolls, kept by Allah, glory be to Him. What is meant by 'scrolls' (*shuhuf*) is the 'protected tablet' (*al-lawh al-mahfudh*) and the other tablets that exist at the highest level (*al-mala' al-a'la*).

Exalted, purified, (14)

مَرْفُوعَةٍ مُّطَهَّرَةٍ ﴿١٤﴾

Exalted (*marfu'ah*): in the skies, physically; or, metaphorically, in magnificence and glory. Purified: unblemished by faults, shortcomings and suchlike.

By the hands of scribes, (15)

بِأَيْدِي سَفَرَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾

That is, the scrolls are written by the noble angels.

Munificent, righteous. (16)

كِرَامٍ بَرَزَةٍ ﴿١٦﴾

Angels of lofty station, doers of goodness.

The thread then turns to one of outraged amazement at the disbelievers, and at how they continue to disbelieve in this magnificent book, sent down from Allah, glory be to Him, the Creator in whose hands are the reins of all things:

May man be killed! How he disbelieves! (17)

فُقَيْلٍ آلٍ نَسْنُنٍ مَّا أَكْفَرَهُ ﴿١٧﴾

May man be killed! an invocation against him. It is the category of man who is astray whom is meant, as is clear from the words 'How he disbelieves!' The tone is one of indignation at man's disbelief and straying, even when the evidence is fully laid before him, and the argument is complete.

From which thing did He create him? (18)

مِنْ أَيِّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقَهُ ﴿١٨﴾

That is, does man not look at the beginning of his creation, at how the Most High created him from a contemptible liquid? And then made of him the precise, sensitive, able and dextrous marvel that he is?

From a drop He created him, then He determined him, (19)

مِنْ نُّطْفَةٍ خَلَقَهُ فَقَدَرَهُ ﴿١٩﴾

That is, from a drop of semen He created him. Then He fashioned him: He determined his qualities and his characteristics; his senses, his powers of perception, his physical endowments, his capabilities, his quantity, his quality, his length and his breadth and so on.

And then the path: He eases for him; (20)

ثُمَّ السَّبِيلَ يَسَّرَهُ ﴿٢٠﴾

That is, He eases the path of life for him, in that He prepares his needs for him, and guides him to what is good for him and towards his felicity.

Thereupon He makes him die, and has him buried. (21)

ثُمَّ أَمَاتَهُ فَأَقْبَرَهُ ﴿٢١﴾

Then, after man's period on the earth draws to its conclusion, He makes him die. That is, He takes out his soul. And He 'has him buried'; this is the place where his body is contained after death, even if it be at sea or suchlike.

Thereupon, when He wills, He disperses him. (22)

ثُمَّ إِذَا شَاءَ أَنْشَرَهُ ﴿٢٢﴾

That is, when He, glory be to Him, wills the resurrection, He raises him alive perfectly.

Does he see himself prepared for the rising and ready to face that awesome day through his belief and good deeds?

Nay, he has not yet consummated what He commanded him! (23)

كَلَّا لَمَّا يَقْضِ مَّا أَمَرَهُ ﴿٢٣﴾

That is, nay, for he is inattentive and lethargic. He has not yet carried out what Allah ordered him to do, in terms of belief and good deeds.

The thread then turns to remind man of some of the signs in creation, as evidence of His existence, glory be to Him – beginning with signs within himself and then listing some 'signs of the horizon'.

So the human should regard his food: (24)

فَلْيَنْظُرِ الْإِنْسَانُ إِلَىٰ طَعَامِهِ ﴿٢٤﴾

That is, he should consider the origin of its creation, and who created it, and thus be better able to control his transgression and deviations.

Indeed We made the water gush forth in a gush, (25)

أَنَا صَبَبْنَا الْمَاءَ صَبًّا ﴿٢٥﴾

That is, Allah made the water descend from the sky in abundance.

Then We split the earth with splits, (26)

ثُمَّ شَقَقْنَا الْأَرْضَ شَقًّا ﴿٢٦﴾

That is, Allah split the earth with the growth of plants from it. With splits, so that the tiny, feeble plants can grow out of solid ground.

Then We make grains grow therein, (27)

فَأَنْبَتْنَا فِيهَا حَبًّا ﴿٢٧﴾

That is, in the earth grains are made to grow, like wheat and barley and suchlike.

And grapes and clover, (28)

وَعِنَبًا وَقَصْبًا ﴿٢٨﴾

Grapes are mentioned in particular owing to their abundance delicious nature and their numerous benefits. Clover is given for *qadb*, which means the lush tall greenery that is cut time and again and used for animal feed.

And olives and date palms, (29)

وَزَيْتُونًا وَتَخْلًا ﴿٢٩﴾

The meaning is clear.

And gardens, richly gardened, (30)

وَحَدَائِقَ غُلْبًا ﴿٣٠﴾

'Gardens' is given for *hda>iq*, meaning gardens enclosed by a wall, or small gardens with trees and flowers. Richly gardened is given for *ghulb*, meaning huge gardens with densely massed trees. The word suggests a garden dominated by tall trees seeking to benefit from the air and light.

And fruits and herbage; (31)

وَفِكْهَةً وَأَبَاً ﴿٣١﴾

Herbage: pasture or grasslands grazed by animals.

As provision for ye and for your livestock. (32)

مَتْنَعًا لَكُمْ وَلِأَنْعَمِكُمْ ﴿٣٢﴾

That is, all has been made to grow for man's benefit and his livelihood.

The flow then turns from the issue of the Origin to the Return, with the Most High's word:

So when comes the roar, (33)

فَإِذَا جَاءَتِ الصَّاحَةُ ﴿٣٣﴾

'The roar' is given for *al-shkhhah*, which is one of the names of the resurrection, for it shall ring in people's ears, as its noises are severe, like the trumpet, the sound of the fire, the voices of the angels, and suchlike. The consequent is not given, that mankind shall be in two groups on that day, for it is clear from the passage beginning with His word 'Faces...'

The day when a man flees from his brother, (34)

يَوْمَ يَفِرُّ الْمَرْءُ مِنْ أَخِيهِ ﴿٣٤﴾

That is, everyone shall flee from one another, fearing to be afflicted by them, in that they ask for something, or affect them with their consequences.

And his mother and his father, (35)

وَأُمِّهِ وَأَبِيهِ ﴿٣٥﴾

That is, he will flee from them in fear that he has been neglectful of their rights; or in fear that they will seek something from him.

And his wife and his sons, (36)

وَصَاحِبَتَيْهِ وَبَنِيهِ ﴿٣٦﴾

Wife is given as an example, for otherwise a wife will also flee from her husband. The meaning is that everyone will want nothing to do with even their most beloved relatives and relations.

Every one of them that day has a circumstance sufficing him: (37)

لِكُلِّ أَمْرٍ مِّمَّهِمْ يَوْمَئِذٍ شَأْنٌ يُغْنِيهِ ﴿٣٧﴾

'Circumstance' is given for *sha'nun*. It means that for all of those who flee, or for everyone present at the resurrection, is a grand affair and enough concern that suffices him, in that it totally occupies him to the exclusion of the affairs of others. He will be concerned with his own account, which will prevent him from giving importance to the others.

Faces that day are bright, (38)

وُجُوهُهُمُ يَوْمَئِذٍ مُّسْفِرَةٌ ﴿٣٨﴾

'Bright' (*musfirah*): radiant, glowing; and they are the faces of the believers, for joy and glee will appear on their faces.

Laughing, rejoicing; (39)

صَاحِكَةٌ مُّسْتَبْشِرَةٌ ﴿٣٩﴾

Laughing in delight, rejoicing at the goodness, the reward.

And faces that day have a dust upon them, (40)

وُجُوهُهُمُ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَلَيْهَا غَبَرَةٌ ﴿٤٠﴾

On the day of resurrection the disbelievers' faces will have a 'dust' upon them. That is, they shall be covered in sorrow, grief and distress.

Overspread by smokiness. (41)

تَرَهَقُهَا قَتَرَةٌ ﴿٤١﴾

Their faces that day will be mounted by a dark smokiness, which word is given for *qatarah*, meaning the darkness of smoke. This smoke and dust and melancholy will all settle on their faces, and the satisfaction of Allah and His mercy will not clean them, as He cleans the faces of the believer – if we assume that the believers pass through the smoky stages of the resurrection.

Those, they are the disbelievers, the brazen. (42)

أُولَئِكَ هُمُ الْكَافِرَةُ الْفَجْرَةُ ﴿٤٢﴾

Those described with such evil characteristics, they are the disbelievers, who are brazen and shameless in disobedience. It is the disbelievers and the brazen whose faces will be covered with a film of dust and smoke.