

Surah al-Qadr (97)

سورة القدر

'The Decree'

This surah derives its name from the prominence within it of the word *qadr*, meaning 'decree', 'determination', or 'ordinance'. The surah is either Makkan, as its content would suggest, or Madinan. In either case, it comprises matters of faith, and as Surah al-⁶Alaq concluded on the theme of seeking nearness to Allah, glory be to Him, so this surah clarifies that to seek proximity on the night of Qadr is superior to seeking proximity to Him, glory be to Him, at other times.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

By the name of Allah ... We seek help by the name of the God, that He be a helper to us in our affairs.

The Compassionate, the Merciful, who bestows mercy on the servants and graces them with what conceals their slips and with what fills their voids.

Indeed We sent it down on the night of Qadr;
(1)

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ ﴿١﴾

'It' refers to the Qur'an, as is clear from the tone of the surah. The use of the plural form 'We' is for the sake of magnification and gravity, as it is customary for every leader to speak of himself and his followers, and from this the plural form is borrowed to deliver a sense of grandeur. The night of Qadr is the nineteenth or the twenty-first or the twenty-third of the blessed month of Ramadhan; it was on one of these three nights that the Qur'an descended in its entirety to the 'constructed house' (*bayt al-ma⁶mur*) in the fourth sky. It was then sent down to the Messenger in stages over a period of twenty-three years. Or perhaps the meaning is that its descent in its entirety to the heart of the Messenger was on this night, and then Gabriel brought it in instalments on the appropriate occasions over twenty-three years. The night is called 'Qadr' so as to give gravity to the acts of worship performed during this night. [It is reported that when the *ma⁶sum* (impeccable) Imam was asked to specify which of these was the night of Qadr, the Imam replied do whatever you can in terms of supplications and humbleness before Allah during these nights. [This was to encourage the people to spend more time seeking nearness to the Almighty.]]

It is recorded in the narrations that each year on this night masses of angels descend with the ordinances for the following year to the living Imam of the twelve Imams, *peace be upon them*, who succeeded the Messenger, may Allah bless him and his family, so that the Imam knows what Allah, glory be to Him, has determined for every soul for that year in the way of their appointments with death, their sustenance, their actions and the other matters concerning them. This does not mean the Imams are like the Messenger in receiving the revelation, for Gabriel descended to Maryam who was not a Messenger. Rather this is an honour accorded by Allah, glory be to Him, to the Imam who is His successor or vicegerent on the earth after the Messenger. In this age of ours the angels descend with the ordinances, on the night of Qadr, to the Imam Mahdi the Awaited, *may Allah expedite his reappearance*.

And what will make thee comprehend what is the night of Qadr? (2)

وَمَا أَدْرَاكَ مَا لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ ﴿٢﴾

This affords an intensified sense of magnification of its rank and value.

The night of Qadr is better than a thousand months; (3)

لَيْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَيْرٌ مِّنْ أَلْفِ شَهْرٍ ﴿٣﴾

That is, good deeds performed during the night of Qadr are better than good deeds performed throughout a thousand months, more than eighty years. For certain periods are superior to other periods in regard to the actions that take place within them. Or it may mean that this night in which the Qur'an descended is better than a thousand months on account of the magnificent event that then took place, namely, the descent of the Qur'an.

The angels and the Spirit descend within it with the permission of their Lord on every affair; (4)

تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِيهَا بِإِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ أَمْرٍ ﴿٤﴾

The Spirit, who is the greatest angel, or the archangel Gabriel, and the other angels descend during the night of Qadr with the permission of Allah, who grants them permission to visit the Messenger and after him the Imams so as to explain the ordinances of the servants.

On every affair: Gabriel and the other angels present themselves to the Messenger during this night bearing news of every earthly affair concerning the guidance, the order, the arrangements, the justifications, good fortune and misfortune. And in the same way the process continues and they present themselves with the same gifts to the living Imam.

Peace it is until the break of dawn. (5)

سَلَامٌ هِيَ حَتَّىٰ مَطَلَعِ الْفَجْرِ ﴿٥﴾

On this night is determined the path of universal peace for the world: security of the soul from pollution, of the body from illness, the security of society from corruption, and the security of the intellect from nonsense. Or the meaning is that the night is itself peace, in that it is free of distress and affliction, and that nothing is determined except peace. All this until the break of dawn, when the angels stop their descent and the task is completed. It is amongst the beloved acts to supplicate and implore during this night, in remembrance of the commencement of the revelation, and seeking for goodness to be determined for oneself in the year ahead.