

Surah al-Takathur (102)

سورة التكاثر

‘Rivalry’

The surah derives its name from its containing the word *takathur*, meaning the worldly increase that is competed for. Over whether it is sent down at Makkah or at Madinah there is disagreement. As Surah al-Qasas concluded on the theme of the fire, this surah opens on the topic of man's heedlessness of the fire.

By the name of Allah, the Compassionate, the Merciful

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

A beginning *by the name of Allah*, whose is everything, and than whom none is more worthy of beginning by his name.

... *the Compassionate, the Merciful*, who bestows mercy on the servants with grace and bounty.

Rivalry distracts ye (1)

أَلْهَنكُمْ التَّكَاثُرُ ﴿١﴾

You are distracted from obedience to Allah and from worshipping Him, O people, by your wealth, your sons, and other things connected to the world, and by the pride and rivalry they evoke in you.

Until ye visit the graves; (2)

حَتَّىٰ زُرْتُمُ الْمَقَابِرَ ﴿٢﴾

When visiting graves a person realizes the finite nature of the world, and the futility of rivalry and competition over worldly things and affairs. Or it may mean until you are overtaken by death, in which case the term ‘visit’ the graves denotes that the graves too are not eternal, for those in them are transported to the hereafter.

Nay, soon ye shall know, (3)

كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٣﴾

Things are not as you suppose for you to engage in rivalry. Soon you shall know the result of your being engrossed in the world, and of your neglect of the hereafter. This is a warning.

Again nay, soon ye shall know. (4)

نُفٍّ كَلَّا سَوْفَ تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤﴾

Repeated for the sake of emphasis and to suggest self-restraint from worldly rivalry on account of its dire consequences.

Nay, if ye knew with a knowledge of certainty, (5)

كَلَّا لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عِلْمَ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٥﴾

Nay, the affair is not as you people think. If you knew with a sure and certain knowledge, so that you were certain of the hereafter rather than having a mere deductive knowledge of it, you would know that worldly rivalry is futile, and that attention to the hereafter is the important matter.

You would surely see the inferno; (6)

لَتَرَوُنَّ الْجَحِيمَ ﴿٦﴾

You would see it with the vision of the heart, as if you are witnesses of it, and would fear being occupied with other than its affairs and concerns. Then you would see no benefit in worldly rivalry and pride.

Then you would surely see it with the eye of certainty, (7)

ثُمَّ لَتَرَوُنَّهَا عَيْنَ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٧﴾

Then, after much deliberation on the hell and seeing it with the heart, you see the hell with the eye of certainty, a certainty that is just like seeing it. This is as stated by the Amir-al-Mu'minin, Imam Ali, *peace be upon him*, describing the righteous and their attributes that: ‘Their faith in Paradise is like he who has seen it and has enjoyed its bliss, and their faith in Hell is like he who

has seen it and has suffered its torment'. For the first stage is the deductive knowledge; then the experiences the heart encounters of true certainty; the certainty then ascends in the heart until the person sees that which he knows.

Then ye shall surely be questioned that day as to the blessings. (8)

ثُمَّ لَتُسْأَلُنَّ يَوْمَئِذٍ عَنِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿٨﴾

O people, when your knowledge increases until it reaches the level of the eye of certainty, you will be questioned. For when a person's certainty increases he deliberates about his affairs, whether they are forbidden or could seem forbidden. He asks himself as to whence comes his rank and status. From the legal or from the forbidden? Thus he is like someone questioned about these affairs though it is he who questions himself. Or it is possible that the meaning is that man is questioned in the hereafter, and so too the vision of the fire, as has been narrated in some reports.