

Al-Najm [The Star]

Makkan Period

In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Most Compassionate

[1] By the star when it sets:¹

[2] your companion has neither strayed nor is he deluded;²

[3] nor does he speak out of his desire.

[4] This is nothing but a revelation that is conveyed to him,

[5] something that a very powerful one has imparted to him,

[6] one endowed with immense wisdom.³ He came forth and stood poised,

[7] being on the higher horizon.⁴

[8] Then he drew near and hung above suspended,

1. That is, when the bright aurora of the morn appears after the setting of the last star.

2. "Your companion" here refers to the Prophet (peace be on him). He was so called because he was no stranger to the unbelievers of Makkah. He was born among them, spent his childhood and youth in their midst, and attained maturity before their very eyes. The upshot of the verse is that the Makkans knew him in and out. Hence it should be as clear as a resplendent morn that he had neither strayed nor was he deluded.

3. Here the words "one endowed with immense wisdom" are said with regard to Gabriel rather than God. This is quite evident from what follows. (See vv. 5 ff. Ed.)

4. The word "horizon " means the eastern edge of the sky wherefrom the sun rises and the day dawns. This means that when the Prophet (peace be on him) spotted Gabriel for the first time it was on the eastern edge of the sky.

[9] until he was two bows' length away, or nearer.⁵

[10] Then he revealed to Allah's servant whatever he had to reveal.

[11] His heart added no untruth to what he saw.⁶

[12] Are you, then, going to contend with him regarding what he sees with his eyes?

[13] Indeed he saw him a second time,

[14] by the lote-tree at the farthest boundary,⁷

[15] near which is the Garden of Abode.

5. *This means that after appearing on the uppermost eastern edge of the sky. Gabriel kept advancing towards the Prophet (peace be on him) until he stood suspended in mid-air above him. Then he leaned towards the Prophet (peace be on him) and reached a point quite close to him: at just two bows' length or even less. Since all bows are not of equal length, the approximate distance is expressed: " he was two bow lengths away, or nearer".*

6. *The Prophet (peace be on him) had observed all this in broad daylight when he was fully awake and his eyes were wide open. It did not occur to him that his observation was a mere illusion. Nor did he think that the figure he was observing was a **jinn** or satan. Nor did he think for a moment that his observation was a hallucination. Far from all this, for his heart fully believed that his observation was true. He did not entertain any doubt, not even for a moment, regarding the fact that he had seen Gabriel; nor did he have the least doubt that the Message which he had delivered was any other than what God had revealed to him.*

7. *Literally **sidrat al-muntaha** means "the lote-tree at the farthest boundary". It is difficult for us to appreciate what kind of lote-tree is found at the farthest boundary of this physical world, as also what the true nature or state of that lote-tree is. All these are hidden secrets of the Universe which are beyond our comprehension. What we can feel sure about is that the word "lote-tree" represents God's own description of that object in the human lexicon.*

[16] (This was) when the lote-tree was covered with that which covered it.

[17] His eye did not waver, nor did it stray,

[18] and he certainly saw some of the greatest Signs of His Lord.⁸

[19] Have you ever thought about al-Lat and al-'Uzza,

[20] and about the third deity, al-Manat?⁹

[21] Shall you have the male issues, and He the female issues?¹⁰

[22] That is indeed an unfair division!

8. *This verse confirms, in categorical terms, that the Prophet (peace be on him) saw God's Great Signs rather than God Himself. This is also evident from the context. For the one whom the Prophet (peace be on him) met on this occasion was the same he had met earlier. Thus there is no escaping the conclusion that neither he whom the Prophet (peace be on him) saw on the "highest horizon" (see v. 7 above) nor he whom he saw "by the lote-tree at the farthest boundary" (see v. 14 above) was God. Had the Prophet (peace be on him) seen God Himself on any of the two occasions the incident would be far too important not to be categorically mentioned here.*

9. *The unbelievers were wont to denounce the teachings of the Prophet (peace be on him) as false and erroneous. This despite the fact that he had been vouchsafed these teachings by God Who had enabled him to observe at first hand the truths to which he testified. Now it was for them to consider the utter unreasonableness of the beliefs to which they clung with such adamance. It was also for them to think whether they were not hurting their own selves by opposing the person who was directing them to the Right Way.*

10. *The unbelievers claimed that their goddesses were God 's daughters. While inventing this vile untruth they even ignored the fact that they themselves considered the birth of a daughter a matter of disgrace and that they desired instead only male issue. Was it not odd, then, that such people should assign daughters to God?*

[23] These are nothing but names that you and your forefathers have invented, for which Allah has sent down no authority. They are merely following their conjectures and their carnal desires although guidance has come to them from their Lord.

[24] Does man imagine that whatever he wishes for is right for him?¹¹

[25] To Allah belong both the Next World and the present.

[26] Numerous are the angels in the heavens; yet their intercession shall be of no avail, except in regard to those whom He grants the leave of intercession and whose plea He is pleased to accept.

[27] Those who do not believe in the Hereafter give angels the names of females,

[28] although they have no knowledge regarding that. They only follow their conjecture and conjecture can never take the place of the Truth.

[29] So leave alone those who turn away from the remembrance of Us and who seek nothing but the life of the world –

[30] that being the utmost of their knowledge.¹² Surely your Lord fully knows those who have strayed away from His Path and He also fully knows those who are rightly guided.

[31] To Allah alone belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth.¹³ He will requite the evil-doers for their deeds and bestow a goodly reward on those who have done good,

11. *It is possible that this verse contains some other meanings as well. For example: "Does man have the right to take whomsoever he wishes as his deity?" Or: "Can man's desire to have his wishes fulfilled by these deities ever come true?"*

12. *This is a parenthetical statement. It is inducted here even though it interrupts the current theme in order to elucidate the preceding verse.*

13. *The earlier theme is resumed here and is connected with v. 29. If one were to disregard the parenthetical statement mentioned above (see n.12 above), the text would read as follows: "So leave alone those who turn away from the Remembrance of Us...so that He may requite the evil-doers for their deeds "*

[32] on those who avoid grave sins and shameful deeds, even if they may sometimes stumble into lesser offences. Surely your Lord is abounding in His Forgiveness. Very well is He aware of you since He produced you from the earth, and while you were still in your mothers' wombs and not yet born. So do not boastfully claim yourselves to be purified. He fully knows those that are truly God- fearing.

[33] (O Prophet), did you see him who turned away (from the Path of Allah),

[34] who gave a little, and then stopped?¹⁴

[35] Does he have any knowledge of the world beyond the ken of sense-perception, and therefore, clearly sees (the Truth)?

[36] Has he not been informed of what is in the Scrolls of Moses,

[37] and of Abraham, who lived up to the trust?¹⁵

14. *This alludes to Walid ibn Mughirah, one of the prominent chiefs of the Quraysh. He initially felt inclined to accept the Prophet's invitation to embrace Islam. But when one of his friends, who was a polytheist, came to know of this, he argued strongly against his renouncing his ancestral faith, enquiring if he was afraid of chastisement in the Hereafter. If that were the case, he said, Walid should pay him a certain amount of money and he would be ready to suffer the chastisement in his stead, Walid accepted the offer, choosing thereby not to embrace Islam. Interestingly, Walid paid his friend only a part of the amount he had agreed to, denying him the rest.*

15. *The verses that follow (vv. 38-55) contain the gist of the teaching embodied in the Scrolls of the Prophets Moses and Abraham (peace be on them).*

[38] "That no bearer of a burden shall bear the burden of another,¹⁶

[39] and that man shall have nothing but what he has striven for,¹⁷

[40] and that (the result of) his striving shall soon be seen,

[41] and that he shall then be fully recompensed,

[42] and that the final end is with your Lord,

[43] and that He it is Who causes people to laugh and to cry,¹⁸

[44] and that He it is Who causes death and grants life,

[45] and He it is Who created the two kinds, the male and the female,

[46] from a drop of sperm when it was emitted,

[47] and that it is for Him to grant the second life,

[48] that He it is Who bestowed wealth and riches,

16. The point stressed here is that every person is responsible for whatever he does; the responsibility of one person cannot be placed on any other. Even if a person so wishes, it is not possible for him to assume responsibility for others' actions. Nor can a criminal be absolved of his guilt on the grounds that someone else offers himself to suffer chastisement on his behalf.

17. This enunciates some basic points regarding the way man will be recompensed in the Hereafter. Each person will receive the fruit of his deeds. An obvious corollary of this proposition is that a person will not receive the fruit of anyone else's deeds. Still another corollary of it is that no one will receive anything in the Hereafter unless he has some striving and action to his credit.

18. That is, in the ultimate, the causes of happiness and grief are traceable to God. Good luck and misfortune all rest with Him. None other than He has any power to make or mar destinies.

[49] that He is the Lord of Sirius,¹⁹

[50] that He it is Who destroyed the ancient 'Ad,

[51] and Thamud, leaving no trace of them,

[52] and that He it is Who destroyed the people of Noah before for they were much given to iniquity and transgression.

[53] And He brought perdition upon the subverted cities

[54] and caused them to be covered with that which He covered them with.²⁰

[55] So, which of your Lord's bounties will you doubt?"

[56] This is a warning among the warnings of yore.

[57] The imminent Hour has drawn near,

[58] and none but Allah can avert it.

[59] Will you, then, wonder at this?

[60] Will you laugh at it rather than weep?

[61] Will you occupy yourselves simply in merriment?

[62] Prostrate yourselves before Allah, and serve Him.

19. *Sirius, (the dog-star), is the brightest star in the sky. The people of Egypt and Arabia believed that this star impacted on people's destinies. Hence Sirius was accepted as one of their deities.*

20. *"The subverted cities" (v. 53) refer to the settlements of the people of Lot. As for the expression: "He caused them to be covered with that which He covered them with" (v. 54), presumably refers to the water of the Dead Sea which spread over the settlements of Lot's people after they were made to cave in the earth. Interestingly, that water continues to cover the area even now.*