

Surah Inshirah, Chapter 94

(The Expansion)

Number of Verses: 8

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

It is commonly said that this Surah was revealed soon after Surah Duha and its contents confirm this since, again in this Surah some of the Divine Bounties are counted for the holy Prophet (S).

In fact, there were three important Bounties mentioned in the previous Surah (Duha) and there are three magnificent Bounties mentioned in Inshirah too. Those Bounties were material and spiritual Bounties, whereas in this Surah, all are spiritual ones.

The theme in this Surah, mainly pivots on three different subjects:

The first is the expression of these triple Bounties; the second is the good news for the Prophet (S) informing him that his burden and difficulties of his prophetic mission will be removed soon; and the third is that attention should be paid to Allah, alone, and be hopeful and encouraged in worship and supplication to Him.

As it was mentioned before, according to the traditions of Ahlul-Bait (as) these two Suras are considered as one and then, in recitation of prayers, both of them are recited to form one complete Surah.

A careful examination of the contents of these two Suras leaves no doubt that they are quite closely related to each other. Again, a similar case is found for Surah Fil and Surah Quraish which will be dealt with later.

The above statements make it clear that this Surah (Inshirah) has been revealed in Mecca, but with regard to the verse:

"And We exalted for you your reputation",

some believe that it has been revealed in Medina when the name of the Prophet (S) and Islam had been known everywhere. But, this statement is not enough to prove their idea, because the Prophet (S), with all the problems that he had in Mecca, was completely known and his rise and invitation to Islam were talked about everywhere and in most gatherings, and also his reputation was spread in all parts of Arabia, especially in Medina, by the annual gathering of Hajj pilgrims.

The Virtue in Studying Surah Inshirah:

On the virtue of studying this Surah, the holy Prophet is reported to have said:

*"He who recites this Surah will be rewarded the same as the one who met Muhammad unhappy and brought the grief out from his heart."*¹

Surah Inshirah, Verses 1-8

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

أَلَمْ نَشْرَحْ لَكَ صَدْرَكَ

وَوَضَعْنَا عَنكَ وِزْرَكَ

الَّذِي أَنْقَضَ ظَهْرَكَ

وَرَفَعْنَا لَكَ ذِكْرَكَ

فَإِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

إِنَّ مَعَ الْعُسْرِ يُسْرًا

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ

وَإِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ فَارْغَبْ

1. ***"Have We not expanded for you your breast?"***
2. ***"And We removed from you your burden,"***
3. ***"Which weighed down your back?"***
4. ***"And We exalted for you your reputation?"***
5. ***"Then, surely with hardship comes ease: "***
6. ***"Surely, with hardship comes ease,"***
7. ***"So when you have finished (with your immediate task), still strive hard, (then toil),"***
8. ***"And to your Lord turn (all) your attention."***

We Endowed You With Various Bounties!

The verses are stated in a loving and affectionate tone which shows the extreme grace of Allah to the holy Prophet (S).

In the first verse, pointing to the greatest bounty of Allah, it says:

"Have We not expanded for you your breast?"

The term /nasrah/ is based on /sarh/ which, according to Raqib cited from his book, Mufradat, means 'to stretch pieces of flesh and produce the thinner layers'. Then, he adds that the objective point of 'expansion of the breast' is its expansion with the Divine Light and His bestowed stillness and tranquility.

Further, he says that 'explaining the difficulties of speech' means its expansion and to explain its hidden meanings. In any case, undoubtedly, the objective point of 'expansion of the breast' is its metaphorical meaning, here which refers to the expansion of thought and the holy spirit of the Prophet (S).

The very expansion can have a broader meaning that consists of both the expansion of knowledge of the Prophet (S) through inspiration and revelation, and the expansion of his patience and perseverance against the sabotage and obstructions of his enemies and opponents.

It is in the same light as when Moses is told

"Go thou to Pharaoh, for he has indeed transgressed all bounds"²

The response is:

"(Moses) said: O my Lord! Expand me my breast"³

In another Surah the Prophet (S) is told:

"So wait with patience for the command of thy Lord. and be not like the companion of the fish... "

(Jonah met with hostility, but fled from his enemies and suffered so much trouble⁴).

In fact, the phrase

'expansion of the breast'

is in contrast with the phrase 'distress of the breast', as this verse:

"We do indeed know how your heart is distressed at what they say"⁵.

Basically, no great leader can face his difficulties without the expansion of his breast.

In this process he whose mission is the most important among the others, like the holy Prophet (S), should have the greatest expansion of breast of all in order to be strong enough to withstand all difficulties and obstructions of the enemies; and be capable of answering any complicated question and solve the grievous problems standing in his way and this was the greatest divine gift endowed to the Messenger of Allah.

That is why the Prophet (S) in a tradition said:

I asked a favour from Allah but I wished I had not done it.

I said:

O, Allah! Some of the prophets before me had the ability to order the wind to blow or to make the dead come alive; and I was told by Allah

'Did He not find you an orphan and sheltered you?'

I answered that I was.

Then, I was told further:

'And He found you wandering and guided you?'

and I answered that I was;

then, He questioned:

'Have We not expanded for you your breast?'

and I answered:

'Yes, my Lord'".[6](#)

This tradition shows that the gift of the

'expansion of the breast'

is something beyond the miracles of the prophets.

If a person studies the Prophet's conditions, carefully, and sees the amount of his

'expansion of the breast'

in difficult, complicated situations in his life, he will, indeed, be certain that it could not be done through ordinary ways, but it was surely with divine approval.

Here, some have said that the objective point of the phrase

'expansion of the breast'

is the event that happened to the Prophet (S) when he was a child or youth in which the angels of Heaven came, (and spiritually) opened his breast, took out his heart, washed it purified and filled it with knowledge, mercy and grace. [7](#)

It is obvious that the tradition does not mean his bodily heart. It metaphorically points to the divine assistance to the Prophet (S) from the point of spirit and intention, and his purification from any frailty or devilish temptation.

But, whatever the case may be, there is no reason that the current verse relates particularly to this event. It has a broader meaning of which this story may be considered one of its examples.

It was by the very

'expansion of the breast'

that the holy Prophet (S) could solve all the problems of his prophecy most successfully, and fulfilled, very well, all the duties concerned.

Then, attention is paid to another gift of His great gifts bestowed on the Prophet (S).

It says:

"And We removed from you your burden,"

"Which weighed down your back?"

The term /wizr/ means 'weight'; the term /wazir/ 'minister' is derived from the same meaning, since he

carries the weight of responsibility of the government. Sins are called /wizr/ because they are weights on the back of the sinner.

The term /anqada/ is based on /naqd/ which means 'to untwist, to untie the knot of a rope', then, the word means 'to untwist, as a load, getting loose on the back. '

Thus, the above verse means that Allah took that heavy load from your back.

What kind of load was it that Allah took from the back of His Messenger? The evidences from the verses clearly show that its objective meaning has been the difficulties of the path of prophecy and the invitation to the monotheism and unity of Allah, and removing the traces of corruption in that environment.

Not only the Prophet of Islam (S) but, also, all the prophets were faced with such great difficulties at the beginning of their missions. They overcame those difficulties by only the help of Allah, with the difference that the conditions of time and environment, for the Messenger of Islam, were more grave and heavier.

Some have commented on the term /wizr/ with the sense of the 'weight of revelation' at the onset of its descent. Others have rendered it to mean the misled and enmity of the pagans. Still others have related it to their extraordinary tortures. Yet still, some have related it to the grief caused by the death of his uncle, Abu- Talib, and his wife, Khadijah and finally, some have commented on it as his sinlessness and infallibility.

But, apparently, the first commentary is the most fitting among all and the others are its embellishments.

For the third gift, it says:

"And We exalted for you your reputation?"

'Your name, accompanied with the name of Islam, stands the highest everywhere and among all leaders. A higher rank is that your name is always mentioned with the name of Allah all mornings and evenings at the time of prayer-call', that is, the profession of your prophecy is completed together with the profession of Allah unity which is the only phrase needed, in Islam, denoting the evidence of being Muslim.

What a magnificent honour it is! And what a lofty rank higher than this could be thought of!

On commenting about this verse, there is a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) that says:

"Gabriel told me that Allah says:

'Whenever My name is mentioned your name is also mentioned following it (which itself is enough to show your high rank)'."

The word /laka/ is used as an emphasis to say that, inspite of all those impediments and enmities, the

name and fame of the Prophet (S) were wide spread.

A question arises, here as to whether this Surah was revealed in Mecca or not, however, the spread of Islam, the removal of the difficulties of prophethood, the conversion of the prophet's galling burden into joy and triumph, and the expansion of his reputation, all over the world, happened in Medina.

To answer this question, some have said that the Prophet (S) was previously informed of its glad tidings and it removed the burden of grief from his heart. Some others have said that the verb, in the past tense, here conveys the future meaning, which is glad tidings for the future.

Some parts of these affairs happened in Mecca especially during the last year of the thirteen years, there, when the Prophet (S) was busy inviting people to Islam and the divine religion penetrated into the hearts of many individuals and consequently, the difficulties partly decreased. Then, he was known everywhere and the way was fairly paved for the future great triumphs.

In the next verse, Allah gives His Messenger the most important glad tidings of hope:

"Then, surely with hardship comes ease".

Again, it emphasizes that:

"Surely, with hardship comes ease".

O, Prophet! Do not grieve for the difficulties and troubles. They will convert to ease and comfort. The impediments of the enemies do not last too long, and the financial deprivation and economical difficulties of Muslims will not continue with the same form of poverty for ever.

He who suffers the hardships and stands against the storms of miseries with patience will surely taste the sweetness of its fruit. It will be the day when the voice of the enemies faints, their impediments remain in vain, the ways of success and progress are paved, and following the path, the path of Allah, is easy.

Although some of the commentators have rendered these verses into the general financial poverty of Muslims at the beginning of Islam, the broadness of the meaning of the verses envelops all the difficulties. These two verses are stated in a style which shows that they are not allotted only to the holy Prophet (S) himself or his time.

The rule is general and for all. They encourage the pure Muslim believers to know and be sure that whatever difficulties or troubles are encountered by men, Allah always provides a solution a way out, a relief, a way to lead to ease and happiness. Moreover, the solution or relief does not merely come AFTER the 'difficulty': it is provided WITH it.

It is the glad tidings or promise of Allah that enlightens the heart, makes it hopeful for triumph, and clears

Man's soul of the dirt of its hopelessness.

The holy Prophet (S) is reported to have said:

"Do know that surely with hardship comes ease, and surely with patience comes victory, and surely with distress comes relief"

There is a tradition from Hazrat Ali (as) which says that a woman complained about her husband to Hazrat Ali (as) that he did not provide anything for her but, it was in the case that he was, indeed, poor.

Hazrat Ali (as) withheld imprisoning him, and advising her to patience, replied to her:

"Surely, with hardship comes ease".

Finally, in the last verses of this Surah, it says:

"So when you have finished (with your immediate task), still strive hard, (then toil)".

Never be idle or lazy at all. Do not put striving and effort aside. Always be busy and when you finish one task, begin another.

"And to your Lord turn (all) your attention."

In any condition, seek His contentedness and try to approach His nearness.

According to what was said, the verse has a vast meaning that contains the sense of 'relieving of a task go to the next' which recommends the accomplishment of all activities for the sake of Allah. But most of the commentators have cited some limited meanings for the verse, each of which can be accepted as a justification.

Some have said that it means 'When you finish your obligatory prayers pay attention to supplication and ask Allah to give you what you want'.

Or, when you finish your religious duties, get up for night prayers.

Or, when you finish the affairs of the material world, refer to the spiritual world and say prayers and do religious duties.

Or, when you finish the religious duties, go to the recommended acts advised by Allah.

Or, when you finish the holy war against the enemy, stand up for worship.

Or, when you finish the holy war against the enemy, combat against your low desires.

Or, when you did finish your duty of prophecy, you would offer intercession'.

Among the numerous narrations that the famous scholar Hafiz Hakim Huskani has cited in Shawahid-al-Tanzil, there is one from Imam Sadiq (as) in which, commenting on the verse as a meaning, he said:

*"When you finish, appoint the leadership (williyah) of Ali (as)".*⁸

In his commentary, Qartabi has narrated from some that the meaning of the verse is that 'when you finish, do appoint an Imam, who is your substitute'. (Although he, himself, did not assume the meaning).

Regarding this fact that the verse does not define what matter he finishes, and furthermore, the term /fansab/ derived from /nasb/ meaning 'suffer and toil', the verse refers to a general principle of which the aim is to prevent the Prophet (S), as a model, from being in rest after finishing an important task and to notify him of the continuous effort in life.

Considering this idea, it is made clear that all the above commentaries are right, but, each of them is as one justification of this vast and general meaning.

What an instructive plan it is! It consists of the secret of success and development. Basically, leisure and full tranquility cause fatigue, decrease freshness, bring laziness and weariness; and in many cases they are the origin of corruption and many kinds of sin.

It is noteworthy that different statistics show that the scope of iniquity sometimes goes up to seven times as much when the schools and educational institutes are closed and the students are on holiday.

In any event, the whole Surah states the special favour of Allah to the holy Prophet (S) and encourages him to stand firm against the difficulties of his Mission and also, promises him victory on the path of divine prophecy.

Meanwhile, the statements are promising, hope-instilling, constructive and creative for all human beings, particularly those who follow on the road of justice.

Explanation

As it was stated in the aforementioned text, there are many traditions (cited by different groups of Muslim scholars) narrated on the meaning of this verse:

"So when you have finished (with your immediate task), still strive hard, (then toil)",

which say that the purpose of the verse is (as the statement of one justification) the appointment of Amir-al-Mo'mineen Ali (as) to the caliphate (leadership) after the fulfillment of the mission of prophethood. Still, some, suggesting various misleading ideas, show some prejudice on the opposite way.

Supplication

O Lord! Empty our hearts from self-love and fill them instead with love for you.

O Lord! You, Yourself, have promised that there is ease with any hardship. Relieve the present Muslims from the great difficulties and hardships originated from their enemies.

O Lord! Your gifts and bounties endowed to us are abundant. Bestow on us the success of being grateful for them.

- [1.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol, 10, p, 507.
- [2.](#) Surah Taha, No. 20, verse 24
- [3.](#) Surah Taha, No. 20, verse 25
- [4.](#) Surah Qalam, No. 68, verse 48
- [5.](#) Surah Al-Hijr, No. 15, verse 97
- [6.](#) Majma' -al -Bayan. vol. 10. p. 508.
- [7.](#) Tafsir-i Durr-al Manthur. (cited in Al-Mizan, vol. 20, p. 452) and Tafsir-i-Fakhr-i-Razi, vol 32, p. 2.
- [8.](#) Shawahid-al-Tanzil, vol. 2, p. 349 (Tradition 1116-1119).

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