

Surah Lail, Chapter 92

(The Night)

Number of Verses: 21

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

This Surah is a Meccan Surah and has the same qualities that other Meccan Suras have; short verses. Their contents are expressive and awakening and they are generally about the Hereafter and Divine chastisement.

At the beginning, after making three oaths, the verses divide people into two groups: Those pious believers who give in charity and fear Allah; and those disbelievers who are greedy misers and think themselves self-sufficient. The fate of the first group is introduced as being in ease and happiness, and the destiny of the second group is affliction and misery.

At one point in the Surah, after mentioning the fact that Allah guides His servants, the Qur'an warns all of us of a blazing fire. Then, it introduces the conduct of those who enter the fire and that of those who are kept away from it.

The Virtue in Studying Surah Lail

On the virtue of this Surah, the holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said:

*"He who recites it (Surah Lail) Allah awards him so much so that he is satisfied, and He protects him from toil, and makes (the path of his life) smooth for him."*¹

Surah Lail, Verses 1-11

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

وَاللَّیْلِ اِذَا یَغْشٰی

وَالنَّهَارِ اِذَا تَجَلّٰی

وَمَا خَلَقَ الذَّكَرَ وَالْاُنثٰی

اِنَّ سَعِیْكُمْ لَشَتٰی

فَاَمَّا مَنْ اَعْطٰی وَاتَّقٰی

وَصَدَّقَ بِالْحُسْنٰی

فَسَنَیْسِرُهُ لِّلْیُسْرِی

وَاَمَّا مَنْ بَخِلَ وَاسْتَغْنٰی

وَكَذَّبَ بِالْحُسْنٰی

فَسَنَیْسِرُهُ لِّلْعُسْرِی

وَمَا یُغْنِیْ عَنْهُ مَالُهُ اِذَا تَرَدّٰی

1. ***“By the night when it enshrouds,”***
2. ***“By the day when it brightens up,”***
3. ***“By Him Who created the male and the female,”***
4. ***“Verily (the ends) you strive for are diverse.”***
5. ***“Then as for him who gives (in charity) and fears (Allah),”***
6. ***“And (in all sincerity) testifies to the Best,”***
7. ***“We will ease him to the state of ease.”***
8. ***“But he who is a greedy miser thinks himself self-sufficient,”***
9. ***“And gives lie to the Best,”***
10. ***“We will ease him to the path of affliction,”***
11. ***“And his wealth will not avail when he perishes.”***

The Occasion of the Revelation of Surah Lail

Commentators have cited an occasion of revelation for the whole Surah on the authority of Ibn-Abbas.

Here is what the late Tabarsi has said in Majma'-al-Bayan:

There was a man among the Muslims who had a palm tree, a branch of which was bent towards the house of a poor man who had a large family. Sometimes the owner of the palm tree would collect the fruit and if by chance some dates fell in the poor man's yard and his children picked them up, the owner would come and snatch them away from their hands and even from their mouths.

The poor man complained to the holy Prophet (S) who, in turn requested that the man leave until he (S) could investigate the situation.

Then, it happened that the Prophet (S) met the owner of the palm tree and asked him if he would give him (the holy Prophet) the tree in question, in return for a palm tree in Paradise. The man declined with the plea that the dates of that tree, among all his numerous trees, were so delicate that he could not give it up.

There was another man, according to some narrations, named Ahul-Dahdah, who heard what the holy Prophet (S) promised the owner.

He said,

“O Messenger of Allah! Would you promise the same to me if I get the palm tree from the owner and give it to you?”

The holy Prophet (S) said,

“Yes”.

So, the man went to the owner of the palm and talked with him and questioned him as to if he knew that the Prophet (S) had offered a palm tree in Paradise instead of the one he had and he answered that he had many palm trees but, the taste of the dates of that tree was the most delicious.

Then, the man asked the owner whether he wanted to sell it, and he refused unless he received a sum that he supposed no one would pay. The man asked about the price and the owner answered that it was forty palm trees.

The buyer was astonished and told him that it was an expensive price that he demanded for a bent palm tree—forty palm trees!

Then, after a short pause the buyer agreed to give him forty palm trees. The greedy seller asked him to call some people as witnesses for the exchange and the buyer did. After that, he went to the holy Prophet (S) and presented the palm tree to him.

The Messenger of Allah went to the poor man and told him that the palm tree was in his and his children's possession.

It was there that Surah Lail was descended and stated what it declared about the righteous and the wrongdoers.

Piety and the Divine Assistance

At the beginning of this Surah, again, we find three reflective oaths about the 'creation' and the Creator of the world.

It says:

"By the night when it enshrouds,"

The use of the term

/yaqsal 'enshrouds'

is because night, like a creature, covers half of the globe and brings it under her authority, or is for the reason that the light of the day or the rays of the world—illuminating sun 'hides' when night comes forth.

In any case, it is an evidence to the importance of Night's effective role in men's lives, including the adjustment of the sun's heat, the resting of the living creatures in it, and the adoration of the night by awake, vigilant believers.

Then, our attention is attracted to another oath.

It says:

"By the day when it brightens up,"

'Day'

begin from the moment that the light of dawn breaks the curtain of the gloom of night and removes the darkness and dominates the expanse of heaven, filling everywhere and everything with its glory and light; the very light that is the secret of the life of all living things.

In the Qur'an, the contrast of 'light' and 'darkness' and their effect in Man's life is repeatedly stated and emphasized upon, because they are two perpetual great blessings and are also two Divine Signs.

Then, the last oath of this Surah is mentioned.

It says:

"By Him Who created the male and the female,"

The existence of the mystery of the sexes runs through all life in human beings, animals and plants. The process of development that occurs in the life-germ from the very beginning until the time of birth, the characteristics of both sexes due to their functions and actions, and the secrets hidden in the sex phenomena are all Signs of the glorious world of creation through which we may understand the greatness of its Creator.

The term /ma/ 'something, a thing' used, here for Allah is for the extraordinary greatness or His Entity that has an ambiguous state which is beyond the imagination and human concept.

Some have also said that /ma/, here in Arabic is 'masdariah'. If so, the sentence means: 'By the creation of male and female'. But, this interpretation seems feeble.

In fact, the first two oaths refer to the celestial Signs while the third oath points to the human signs.

The conclusion of the aforementioned oaths is stated in the next verse.

It says:

"Verily the (ends) you strive for are diverse."

People have different or diverse aims in life for which they strive. One might be talking of the pleasures of this world while another may be mindful of the life in the Hereafter. No one lives aimlessly, but we should be careful of the way in which we use our divine talents and powers in order to understand if it is for good or evil.

The term /satta/ is the plural form of /satit/ and is derived from /Satt/ which means 'separate, divided'.

Then, the Qur'an, dividing people into two groups; addressing the first says:

"Then as for him who gives (in charity) and fears (Allah),"

"And (in all sincerity) testifies to the Best,"

"We will ease him to the state of ease."

The purpose of using the term /a'ta/ is for the meaning of charity in the way of Allah and helping the needy.

Then, immediately after that, it emphasizes on 'piety' which may refer to the necessity of pure intention in practicing the action lawfully and with permitted wealth, without any reproach or harm or hurt, because all of the meanings are gathered in the sense of 'piety'.

Some have said that /a'ta/ refers to financial actions done for Allah, and /atqa/ refers to other religious actions of worship. However, the first commentary is better, because it adapts both to the appearance of the verse, and to the occasion of revelation that was mentioned before.

The idea of 'testifying to the Best' indicates 'the faith in the Divine blessed rewards', as Abul-Dahdah, the believing man mentioned in the story on the occasion of revelation of the Surah, who with faith in the Divine blessed rewards spent his wealth.

This meaning is also mentioned in Surah Nisa, No. 40, verse 95

"...unto all (in Faith) hath Allah promised good..."

Some have said the phrase means 'the best religion', i.e. 'the faith in Islam' which is the best religion.

Some have rendered the words thus:

"I testify that there is no god besides Allah, and I testify that Muhammad is the apostle of Allah."

But, regarding all conditions, the first commentary seems more fitting.

The sentence:

"We will ease him to the state of ease"

may refer to the success given by Allah and making the path of obedience for such persons easy; or paving the road to paradise for them and the act of relieving and greeting them by angels; or it may include all of them.

No doubt, those who give charity and alms piously and believe in the Divine rewards, their difficulties will be changed into easy affairs for them and will have enjoined a special calmness both in this world and the next.

In the beginning the payment of the alms-tax and giving charity may seem difficult for us, but with

continued and frequent practice it will become easy, so that we will gain enjoyment from it.

There are many generous people who are happy to have guests present at their meals but, if they do not receive anyone on a particular day, they will be rather sad. Therefore, for them to receive guests is a kind of ease in their lives.

We should not neglect that, in principle, belief in the Resurrection and in Divine, immense rewards changes Man's tolerance of different hardships and makes them easy for him. This kind of believing man will spend eagerly not only his wealth, but will also give up his dear sweet life for the love of martyrdom on the path of Allah.

The term /yusra/ is derived from /yusr/ that basically means 'to saddle a horse and make it ready to ride on', and the term has been used for any easy deed.

In the next verse attention is paid to the contrary group and says:

"But he who is a greedy miser and thinks himself self-sufficient,"
"And gives the lie to the Best,"
"We will ease him to the path of affliction."

Here, the term

/buxl/ 'miser'

is mentioned opposite to /a'ta/ 'being generous' which we find in the first group; and

/listaqna/ 'demands self-sufficiency'

is either an excuse for the conduct of avarice and a means of heaping up wealth, or it refers to an imagination of being self-sufficient of the divine rewards. This characteristic is just opposite to that of the former group who always seek Allah's favour. Or, since the latter group think that they do not need to obey their Lord, then they always commit sin.

Among these three commentaries the first one seems more appropriate, though all of them may be combined.

The purpose of the phrase

"gives the lie to the Best"

is for signifying disbelief in the rewards of the Next World or rejecting the religion and the good ways of the prophets.

The sentence:

"We will ease him to the path of affliction"

is a state opposite to the case in the sentence: "We will ease him to the state of ease" where Allah brings forth his favor and the righteous succeed on a smooth path of obedience and charity which makes them free from the difficulties of life.

But, the members of the other group are in absence of success, and travelling the path is difficult for them. They will be involved in hardships in this world and the next.

In general, the fulfillment of good deeds and especially payment of charity and the alms-tax in the way of Allah is difficult for the disbelieving, greedy misers, while it is easy, exciting and pleasant for the righteous.

At the end of this part of the Surah, the blind-hearted, greedy misers are warned:

"And his wealth will not avail him when he perishes."

He can neither take anything of his worldly property with him, nor could it prevent him from the fire of Hell.

The term /ma/, at the beginning of the verse, may be a negative sign (as it was mentioned above), or for questioning in the negative. If so, the sentence means: 'What benefit can he take from his wealth when he falls in the grave or Hell?'

The term /taradda/ is based on /rida 'at/ and /radaya/ which means 'to perish, to fall' and since falling from a high place usually causes one to perish, it is also used in the sense of 'perdition'. In the current verse it may mean 'to fall into the grave, or Hell, or perdition as a punishment'.

Thus, the Qur'an, in these verses, speaks about two groups of people: the first is the righteous who are pious, generous believers; and the second is the group of unbelievers who are impious and miserly. The examples of both groups are clearly pointed out in the description of the occasion of revelation.

Surah Lail, Verses 12-21

إِنَّ عَلَيْنَا لَلْهُدَىٰ

وَإِنَّ لَنَا لَلْآخِرَةَ وَالْأُولَىٰ

فَأَنْذَرْتُكُمْ نَارًا تَلَظَىٰ

لَا يَصْلَاهَا إِلَّا الْأَشْقَى

الَّذِي كَذَّبَ وَتَوَلَّى

وَسُيِّئَتْهَا الْآتَقَى

الَّذِي يُؤْتِي مَالَهُ يَتَزَكَّى

وَمَا لِأَحَدٍ عِنْدَهُ مِنْ نِعْمَةٍ تُجْزَى

إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ وَجْهِ رَبِّهِ الْأَعْلَى

وَلَسَوْفَ يَرْضَى

12. "Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide,"

13. "And certainly to Us (belongs the End) the Hereafter and (the Beginning) the first (life)."

14. "Therefore, I warn you of a Fire that blazes:"

15. "None shall reach it but the reprobate,"

16. "Who gives the lie (to Truth) and turns away,"

17. "And from which shall the most devoted to Allah be kept away,"

18. "Who gives away his wealth, purifying himself;

19. "And bestows no favour on anyone for the sake of reward,

20. "But only the desire to seek for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High,"

21. "And he shall soon be well-pleased."

Payment of Charity Causes the Fire to Be Kept Away

In the former verses, people were divided into two groups; pious, generous believers and impious, miserly unbelievers, and then, their different fates were pointed out. Now, in the following verse, we are told that Allah guides us to the straight way, so, the choice is up to us without being obliged to it. It is our own duty to decide and act accordingly. Going along the right path is beneficial for us, ourselves; Allah has no need of it at all.

"Verily We take upon Ourselves to guide."

This guidance is irrespective of guidance by way of genesis (through natural position and intellect) or guidance by way of religion (through books and traditions). All other necessary means of guidance have already been provided.

"And certainly to Us (belongs the End) the Hereafter and (the Beginning) the first (life)."

'We are not in need of your Faith and obedience. Neither does your obedience profit Us nor does your sinning hurt Us.' All things and the means of guidance are provided, fully, for the use of Man to take benefit from.

According to this commentary 'guidance' means 'showing the way'. It is also probable that the purpose of these two verses is to encourage the generous believers, and to say that they are guided better by Allah and their way is easy for them in this world and the Next World, and since all this world and the Next World are in His possession, He is completely capable of this.

It is true that this world comes before the Next World but, because of its importance and because it is the main, final goal, the Hereafter is mentioned first.

And since one of the branches of guidance is the act of warning, in the next verse it says:

"Therefore, I warn you of a Fire that blazes."

The term /talazza/ is derived from /laza/ in the sense of 'a smokeless flame or fire', and we know that this kind of fire has a hotter heat. The term /laza / has sometimes been used for Hell, itself.

Then, it points to those who enter this blazing fire, saying:

"None shall reach it but the reprobate,"

"Who gives the lie (to truth) and turns away,"

So, the scale for happiness and unhappiness is Faith and disbelief, respectively, and the fruit that each of them brings forth. Allah, in His infinite Mercy, has provided full guidance to His creatures. Man, having mental and spiritual faculties and talents, with all the inspired prophets and heavenly Books, and all Divine signs and possibilities of guidance at his disposal, rejects the truth and goes astray. So, such a person is surely the clear example of the reprobate.

In the sentence

"Who gives the lie (to truth) and turns away",

the idea

"gives the lie"

may refer to 'blasphemy' and

"turns away"

to 'the negligence of doing good'; as this is a condition of blasphemy.

Or both of them may refer to the negligence of Faith, in this way that at first, they reject the prophet and then turn their backs and go away from him forever.

The commentators have a question and answer thus: the above mentioned verses indicate that the fire of Hell is only for disbelievers, but, this idea does not adapt to what the other verses of the Qur'an and the Islamic narrations say from which it is understood that the sinful believers will have a share from the fire, too. That is why some misled classes, taking these verses as their evidence, believe that with the existence of Faith sinning is possible without punishment.

In answering the question, two points should be made: the first is that the purpose of the phrase

'reaching the fire',

here is the same as 'being immortal in Fire' that we know it belongs to disbelievers, with reference to the verses that mean besides blasphemers, there are some who enter Hell.

The second point is that the idea that the above verses and the following ones say that being kept away from the fire is only for the most God-fearing people, i.e. on the whole the situations of the two groups are to be indicated thus: the miserly unbelievers and the generous, pious believers. From these two groups only the first one reaches Hell and the second group enters Heaven. Thus, the third group, that is, the sinful believers is not in question at this point.

In other words, limitation, here is 'an additional limitation'; as if Heaven is created only for the second group. This statement makes other objections clear in connection with the contradiction of the current verses and the next ones which restrict salvation to the righteous.

Then, the words are about some people who are kept away from this blazing Fire. It says:

"And from which shall the most devoted to Allah be kept away."

"He who gives away his wealth, purifying himself"

The usage of the term /yatazakka/ is in fact for the meaning of 'purity of intention' since the Arabic root word /zaka/ implies both increase and purification in morals and wealth, as:

"Of their goods take alms, that so thou mightest purify and sanctify them; and pray on their behalf. Verily prayers are a source of security for them..."²

Then, to emphasize on their pure intention in their giving of charity, it says:

"And bestow no favour on anyone for the sake of reward,"

"But only the desire to seek for the countenance of his Lord, the Most High."

In other words, many charities or good deeds are done with a motive; that of returning someone else's favour and compensating and rewarding someone for some service done or expecting some reward in return for one's own good deeds. But the above mentioned verses denote that the sole motive in a pious, believing man's mind is that he desires the Countenance or, Good Pleasure of the Lord, the Most High.

This countenance or

/wajh/ 'face',

here with the meaning of 'essence', implies good pleasure or the approval of Allah.

The phrase

'his Lord, the Most High'

shows that the act of 'giving charity' is done with a good understanding of His Lordship and that He is the Most High.

Finally, in the last verse of the Surah, the unique great reward of these good believers is pointed out in a short sentence.

It says:

"And he shall soon be well-pleased".

Yes, one who is whole-heartedly devoted to Allah shall find Allah's pleasure as he expects; an absolute pleasure, vast, illuminated and conditionless which contains all the blessings, of His Bliss. It is something that, today, we cannot imagine at all; and what a grand, splendid blessing this reward is!

Some commentators have thought that the pronoun in the term /yarda/ may refer to Allah. If so, the verse means: 'And Allah shall soon be well-pleased (with him), which is, itself, a great, unique gift that the Lord, the Most High, has bestowed upon His servant, and certainly such a pious believing servant will be well-pleased with Him, because these two correlate with each other. Surah Bayyinah, No. 98, verse 8 verifies this idea.

It says:

"...Allah is well-pleased with them and they are well-pleased with Him...";

and also the verse:

"Come back to your Lord well-pleased (with Him) and well-pleasing".[3](#)

But, the first commentary is more appropriate.

Explanation:

The Moral Excellence of Spending in the Way of Allah:

Spending in the Way of Allah and giving financial help to the needy; especially to the respectable ones, with pure and good intention, is one of the themes that is repeatedly mentioned in the Holy Qur'an and is one of the characteristics of 'True Faith'.

There are many Islamic narrations on this subject so much so that the culture of the religion indicates that financial spending, which has no motive but for the countenance of Allah and which is free from any hypocrisy, reproach and hurt, is the best of deeds.

Here are some meaningful traditions on the matter:

1. A narration from Imam Baqir (as) says:

"The best actions with Allah is the bringing of joy to the soul of a believing Muslim, feeding him until he is satisfied, or clearing his debt".[4](#)

2. The Messenger of Allah (S) is narrated to have said in a tradition:

"Good temper, feeding (others) and blood shed (offered in sacrifice for the sake of Allah) are (signs) of Faith".[5](#)

3. Imam Sadiq (as) is narrated to have said:

"I have not seen anything equal to visiting a (Muslim) believer but that of feeding him, and it is for Allah to feed from Heaven the (believing) one who feeds a believer."

4. In another tradition the holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have answered the man who asked him what the best actions were:

"Feeding (others), and (saying) good words."[6](#)

Again, a tradition from the holy Prophet (S) says:

"The one who maintains a Muslim family (entertaining them) for a day and a night's time, Allah forgives his sins."

Supplication

O Lord! Give all of us the success of having a share of this great, good action.

O Lord! Cause the purity of our intention to be increased.

O Lord! We seek your Grace and Mercy so that You will be well-pleased with us and we will be well pleased, too.

- [1.](#) Bihar-al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 395, Traditions 35 and 38.
- [2.](#) Surah Tauba, No. 9, Verse 103
- [3.](#) Surah Fajr, No. 89, verse 28
- [4.](#) Ibid.
- [5.](#) Usul al-Kafi, vol. 2, on 'Feeding a Believer', Tradition 17.
- [6.](#) Bihar-al-Anwar, vol. 74, p. 388, Traditions 113.

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