

Surah Qadr, Chapter 97

(The Night of Honour)

Number of Verses: 5

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بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

As it is understood from the name of the Surah, it refers to the revelation of the Holy Qur'an on the Night of Honour and then, it describes the importance of the night and the Blessings thereon.

The chronological order of this Surah has no significance. Among the commentators it is known as a Meccan Surah, although some hold that it was revealed in Medina; as a narration denotes that the holy Prophet (S) dreamed that the Ommayyides were climbing his pulpit. This was disturbing to the Prophet, to have such a dream, and he disliked it. Then, Surah Qadr was revealed to comfort him.

(Therefore, some believe that the verse:

“The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months”

refers to the length of time that the Ommayyides governed, which was about one thousand months), and we know that Mosques and pulpits were established and formed in Medina, not Mecca. [1](#)

But, as it was said above, the Surah is known as Meccan and this narration may be a kind of application, not an occasion of revelation.

The Virtue of Studying this Surah:

On the virtue of studying this Surah, there is a narration from the holy Prophet (S) which says:

"He who recites it (Surah Qadr) will be rewarded like the one who has fasted the whole month of Ramadan and has kept vigil the night of Qadr, (the Night of Honour)." [2](#)

Another narration from Imam Baqir (as) says:

"He who recites Surah Qadr loudly and openly like a person who fights in the Holy War on the path of Allah and he who recites it hiddenly like a person who swims in his own blood for the sake of Allah". [3](#)

It is obvious that these rewards are for he who recites the Surah and comprehends its real meaning, or they are for he who studies it, understands it and acts accordingly with regard to the Qur'an, and in his life obeys its verses.

Surah Qadr, Verses 1-5

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

In The Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

اِنَّا اَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِیْ لَیْلَةِ الْقَدْرِ

وَمَا اَدْرَاکَ مَا لَیْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ

لَیْلَةُ الْقَدْرِ خَیْرٌ مِّنْ اَلْفِ شَهْرٍ

تَنْزَلُ الْمَلَائِکَةُ وَالرُّوحُ فِیْهَا بِاِذْنِ رَبِّهِمْ مِّنْ کُلِّ اَمْرٍ

سَلَامٌ هِیَ حَتّٰی مَطْلَعِ الْفَجْرِ

1. ***"Surely, We sent it (the Qur'an) down on the Night of Honour,"***
2. ***"And what makes you know what the Night of Honour is?"***
3. ***"The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months."***

4. ***“The Angels and the Spirit descend therein by their Lord's leave for every affair.”***

5. ***“Peace! It is till the rising of the dawn.”***

The Night When the Qur'an Was Revealed...

It is completely evident, in the verses of Qur'an, that the Holy Qur'an was revealed in Ramadan:

“Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an...” [4](#)

and apparently, it seems that the whole Qur'an was descended in this month.

But, the first verse of Surah Qadr says:

“Surely We sent it (the Qur'an) down on the Night of Honour.”

The word 'Qur'an' is not clearly mentioned in this verse, but it is certain that the objective pronoun existing in the verse refers to the Qur'an and its seeming ambiguity is for stating its importance.

The phrase

“Surely We sent it”

is another sense to show the importance of this great heavenly Book of which Allah has attributed its descent to Himself especially with the plural pronoun,

'We',

which proves its greatness.

The descent of the Qur'an on the Night of Honour (Qadr), the very night on which the fates of men are decided, is another reason to show the importance of this great Divine Book in the destiny of men in this world.

With the combination of the senses of this verse and the above said verse from Surah Baqarah, it is concluded that the Night of Honour (Qadr) is in Ramadan. It is not clearly understood, from the Qur'an, which night of the nights of this month is the Night of Honour and has been left a mystery. But, there are many ideas about it in the narrations which will be dealt with later in this present Surah.

Here, a question arises regarding the history and the content of the Holy Qur'an in connection with the events in the life of the holy Prophet (S) which evidently denote that this heavenly Book was sent down gradually and during the entire period of 23 years, then, how does this coincide with the above verse which says:

“Surely We sent it (the Qur'an) down on the Night of Honour”,

and in Ramadan?

The reply to this question as many scholars have said is to say that the Qur'an has two kinds of revelation:

One kind is that the whole Qur'an came down, at once, in one night to the holy heart of the Prophet (S) or to Bait-ul-Ma'mur, or from the 'preserved tablet' to the lowest heaven of this world.

The second kind of revelation is that the Holy Qur'an came down in portions, gradually, during the entire period of the Call which was twenty three years.

Some have also said that the beginning revelation of the Qur'an began on the Night of Honour; not the whole Book.

But, the idea does not fit with the apparent meaning of the verse which says:

"Surely We sent it (the Qur'an) down on the Night of Honour."

It is noteworthy that in some verses the descent of the Qur'an is used with the word /inzal/ and in some others, with the word /tanzil/.

The difference between these two Arabic terms is that /inzal / has a broad meaning and here it implies 'bringing down all at once', while /tanzil/ implies 'bringing down gradually'. This difference, which is seen in the verses of Qur'an, can be taken as an indication to the above two kinds of descent.

In the next verses, referring to the greatness of the Night of Honour it says:

"And what makes you know what the Night of Honour is?"

"The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months".

This sense shows that the importance of this night is so much so that even the holy Prophet (S), with his vast knowledge, did not know it before the revelation of these verses.

We know that a

'thousand months'

is equal to more than eighty years. Truly, what a great night it is which values as much as the length of a fairly long blessed life.

It is cited in some commentaries that the holy Prophet (S) has said:

"One of the members of the Israelites had spent one thousand months having his fighting dress on and being always prepared for the Holy War on the path of Allah."

The companions of the Prophet (S) became surprised and wished that there might have been that sort of virtue and honour for them, too.

Then, the above verse came down and said.

“The Night of Honour is better than a thousand months.”⁵

Another tradition denotes to what the holy Prophet (S) had said about the four Israelites who had worshipped God for eighty years without offending His Limits and then his companions wished they would have had such a success, and the above verse was revealed in this connection. ⁶

Some have said that the figure

'a thousand',

mentioned in this verse, is for augmentation denoting that the value of the Night of Honour is more than thousands of months, but the above said narrations indicate that the figure is used in order to show the amount, and generally figures are used to show numbers except for the time when clear evidence for augmentation is available.

Then, describing the Night of Honour (Qadr) in details, it says:

“The Angels and the Spirit descend therein by their Lords leave for every affair”.

Regarding the term /tanazzala/ which is originally /tatanazzala/ and which is a future tense verb with the sense of continuity, makes it clear that the Night of Honour (Qadr) is not only for the period of the Call and the descent of the Qur'an, but it is a permanent fact and it is a night that repeats annually.

For the meaning of

/ruh/ 'spirit'

some have said that it refers to Gabriel, the trustworthy, who is also called /ruh-ul-amin/, while some others have rendered /ruh/ to mean 'inspiration' in comparison with:

“And thus, have We, by Our Command, sent inspiration to thee...”⁷.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse becomes thus:

“The Angels of Divine inspiration descend therein for every affair”.

Here, there is a third commentary which seems the most appropriate of all. It says: /ruh/ is an important creature greater than Angels.

It is said in a tradition from Imam Sadiq (as) that a person asked him whether 'Ruh' is the same as

Gabriel and he replied:

*"Gabriel is one of the Angels and Ruh (Spirit) is greater than angels. Has Allah, the Exalted, not said: 'the Angels and Spirit descend'?"*⁸

This means that in the sequence of comparison those two are different. There are also other commentaries cited here on the word 'Ruh', but they do not have supporting reason so we do not mention them here.

The objective meaning of

/min kull-i-amr/ 'for every affair'

is that the Angels descend to proportionate and assign the fates, and to bring any blessing and goodness on that night. The fulfillment of these actions is the purpose for their descent.

Or, they bring with them any good affair and any fate.

Furthermore, some have also said that the meaning is that they descend by the command of Allah, however, the very first meaning is more fitting.

The sense of

/rabb-i-him/ 'their Lord',

of which the emphasis is on the subject of Lordship and assignment of the world, has a close agreement with the action of these angels, saying that they descend to proportionate and assign the affairs, and their accomplishment is a part of the Lordship of the Lord.

And in the last verse of the Surah, it says:

"Peace! It is, till the rising of the dawn."

It is a night on which both the Qur'an has descended and worship and vigilance, therein, is equal to a thousand months. On this night, the divine blessings come down, and His special Grace covers the creatures, and the Angels and Spirit descend.

Thus, it is a night full of safety from the beginning to the end in which, according to some narrations, even Satan is fastened in chains, and from this point of view, that night is in security, too.

Therefore, the use of

/salam/ 'peace'

which means safety (instead of safe) is, indeed, a kind of emphasis, here.

Some have also said that using

Isalam/ 'peace'

on that night is for the reason that on that night the Angels greet each other or greet the believers, or attend at the presence of the Prophet and his sinless substitutes (as) and greet them.

To combine these commentaries is also possible. In any case, it is a night with light, grace, mercy, blessing, goodness, spiritual safety and felicity that which is unique in any respect.

It is cited, in a tradition, that Imam Baqir (as) was asked if he knew which night the Night of Honour, Qadr, was and he replied:

"How do we not know it whereas the angels go round us therein?"⁹

In the story of Abraham (as) we find that a few of the divine angels came to him and greeted him¹⁰, and gave him glad tidings of a son (Isaac). It is said that all this world was worthless in comparison with the delight that Abraham (as) took in that greeting. Now, we may consider that the Night of Honour is one on which Angels come to the believers, in groups, and greet them. How delightful it is!

When Abraham was thrown into the fire which Nimrod ordered, for persecution, Angels came and greeted him and he remained safe. Does not the Fire of Hell, under the grace of Angel's greeting to the believers on the Night of Honour, become cool and a means of safety for the believers?

Yes, this is the sign of the importance of Muhammad's (S) followers that, there, they appeared to Abraham (as) like that and here to the believers of Islam.¹¹

Explanations

Which Affairs are to be Fixed on the Night of Honour?

To answer this question of why this night is called the Night of Honour, a lot of ideas are stated, including the following:

(1) the night is called the Night of Honour because all the affairs and the destinies of men for a years' time are determined on that night.

Surah Dukhan, No. 44, verses 3–4 serve as witness to this idea, saying:

"We sent it down during a night: For We (ever) wish to warn (against Evil)".

"On that (night) is made distinct every affair of wisdom".

This meaning harmonizes with the numerous narrations that say: On that night the affairs and destinies of men are determined; sustenances, the end of lives and other affairs are made distinct and clear.

This matter, of course, does not contradict 'man's free-will' because Divine Wisdom is carried out by the angels based on men's efficiencies and abilities on the level of their Faith and virtue in purity of their intentions and actions.

That is, everyone is sustained with what he deserves, or in other words, the path is paved by the person, himself; and this not only does not contradict his 'free-will', but, also, emphasizes it.

(2) Some have also said that the night is called the 'Night of Honour' because it is of great importance and honour, like the case that is stated in Surah Hajj, No. 22, Verse 74:

"No just estimate have they made of Allah..."

(3) Some others have said that it is called the 'Night of Honour' because the Holy Qur'an, with all its grand rank, was descended to the grand Apostle of Allah by the means of His grand angel.

(4) Or, it is a night on which the descent of the Qur'an is appointed.

(5) Or, the person who keeps vigil on that night obtains a grand rank.

(6) Or, one of the meanings of /qadr/ is 'restriction' used in Surah Talaq, No. 65, Verse 7:

"...and the man whose resources are restricted...",

there descend so many angels on that night that the expanse of the Earth is restricted and does not have enough room for all of them.

The combination of all these commentaries on the vast meaning of the

'Night of Honour'

is quite possible, yet the first commentary is the most appropriate and common.

Which Night is the Night of Honour?

No doubt the Night of Honour is taken to be a night in the month of Ramadan since the combination of the verses of the Qur'an attests to this very fact.

Once in Surah Baqarah, No. 2, Verse 185 it says:

"Ramadan is the (month) in which was sent down the Qur'an...",

and in the Surah under discussion it says:

"Surely We sent it (the Qur'an) down on the Night of Honour".

But, which night of the nights of Ramadan does it refer to? Commentators and literalists point to some

particular night on the calendar, but there is no agreement as to which it is. The 1st, 17th, 19th, 21st, 23rd, 27th, or 29th night of Ramadan have all been suggested.

But, the most popular in the narrations is that it is in the last ten nights of the month, emphasizing on the 21st or 29th night. The evidence is referred to in a narration which says that the holy Prophet (S) kept vigil and was busy praying all the nights of the last ten nights of Ramadan.

A narration from Imam Sadiq (as) denotes that the Night of Honour is the 21st or 23rd night of Ramadan, and when a man insisted and asked that if he could not worship on both of them, then, which one he would choose, he (as) replied:

"How easy is two nights for what you seek!"[12](#)

But, in numerous narrations, from Ahlul-Bait, the 23rd night is emphasized, while the narrations of Sunni scholars tend toward the 27th night.

Further, a narration from Imam Sadiq (as) also says:

"Determining the proportions is in the Night of Honour, the 19th night; its confirmation is on the 21st night, and its signing is on the 23rd night". [13](#)

Thus, the senses of all narrations gather together. However, a kind of mystic ambiguity covers the Night of Honour and the reason will be discussed later.

Why is the Night of Honour a Mystery?

Many commentators believe that the Night of Honour, being hidden among the nights of the year or in the nights of Ramadan is for the reason that people consider all the nights as important, because Allah has hidden His pleasure in all kinds of obedience and worship so that people practice all of them, and He has hidden His wrath in sinning, in general, so that they avoid all kinds of sin.

He has hidden His votaries among all members so that the whole people will be honoured. He has concealed the supplication to which He listens, among all supplications and devotees refer to all of them when they call on Him. He has hidden /ismi-a'zam/ His Greatest Name, among His several universal names so that they will remember and consider all the divine names of the Lord. The time of their death is hidden so that they will always be prepared.

And this is a fitting philosophy.

Was there the Night of Honour for Former Nations?

The verses of this Surah apparently show that the Night of Honour is not specialized to the time of the descent of the Qur'an and the period of the Call of the Messenger of Islam, but it repeats annually until the end of this world.

The application of the verb /tanazzala/, in the Surah, which is in the future tense and indicates the continuity of the verb, and also using:

"Peace! It is till the rising of the dawn",

which is a noun phrase, shows perpetuality, both conform to this idea, too.

Besides, there are also many narrations which, perhaps, on the frequency of successive transmission attest to the idea.

Now, the question is that whether the old communities, too, had it or not.

Many narrations clearly indicate that this is of the divine blessings endowed to this group of people, Muslims.

In a tradition, the holy Prophet (S) is narrated to have said:

"Surely Allah has bestowed on my community the Night of Honour which He did not give to any of those (peoples) who were before them". [14](#)

In commenting on the above verses there are some other narrations that indicate the same idea.

How is the Night of Honour Better Than a Thousand Months?

Apparently, this night as being better than a thousand months is for the value of worshipping and keeping vigil on that night. The narrations on the virtue of the Night of Honour and the virtue of worship on it are abundantly mentioned in the books of both major groups of Muslims, Shi'ite and Sunnite, that certify this meaning.

Furthermore, the descent of the Qur'an on this Night and the descent of the divine blessings and Grace cause the night to be better than a thousand months.

A tradition says that Imam Sadiq (as) told Ali bin abu Hamzah Thamali:

"Seek the virtue of the night of Honour on the 21st and 23rd night and do say one hundred rak'at prayers on either of them and if you can, do keep vigil both nights till the break of dawn, and perform ritual bathing therein".

Abu-Hamzah says that he asked Imam Sadiq (as) that if he could not pray so many prayers in the standing position, what should he do and he (as) replied:

"Pray in the sitting position".

Again, he asked that if he could not do that, what should he do and he (as) answered:

"Pray in bed, and it does not matter if you sleep a little at the beginning of the night and then begin praying because, in Ramadan, the gates of Heaven are open, Satans are bound in chains and the deeds of the believers are accepted. What a good month Ramadan is!"¹⁵

Why Was the Qur'an Descended on the Night of Honour?

Since, on the Night of Honour, the destiny of one year of ours is determined based on our worthiness, we should keep vigil the whole night and repent of our sins, practice self-perfection and refer to Allah to gain more and better worthiness for His mercy.

Yes, we should be aware of the moments that our fate forms and not spend the time in negligence and sleeping, otherwise our destiny will be regretful.

As the Qur'an is a book of destiny and leads to the path of happiness and guidance, for Man, it should be sent down on the Night of Honour, the night of determining fates. What a nice connection there is between 'the Qur'an' and the Night of Honour! And how meaningful their relation with each other is!

Is the Night of Honour the Same Night in Different Zones?

We know that the beginning of the months is not the same in all parts of the world, that is, in one zone today is, for example, the first day of a month, but in another zone that very day is the second day of the month. Therefore, the Night of Honour cannot be a definite night in the year as, for instance, the 23rd of a month in Mecca may be the 22nd of that month in Iran, or Iraq, and hence, each of them must, as a rule, have a Night of Honour for itself, separately.

Does this fact fit with the meaning understood from the verses and the narrations that say the Night of Honour is a definite night? Taking note of the following point, the answer to this question will be clear:

The words 'rotation' and 'revolution' mean nearly the same thing. But, in describing the Earth's movements, each word is used for a different kind of motion.

Revolution refers to the motion of the Earth in its yearly orbit around the Sun. Rotation refers to the spinning around of the Earth on its own axis every 24 hours in relation to the Sun. It is 24 hours from high noon on one day to high noon on the next.

In its permanent rotation on its axis, half of the surface of the Earth is towards the sun, whereon it is day, and on the opposite part, at the same time, it is night. Night, which is the shade of the Earth, itself, turns around in a complete circle for 24 hours all over the Earth.

Therefore, the Night of Honour may be a night of a complete circle round the Earth; that is, during 24 hours, where darkness covers all the points of the Earth, itself, is the Night of Honour whose beginning starts from a point and it ends at another one.

Supplication

O Lord! Bestow on us such a wakefulness and acknowledgement that we take sufficient benefit from the virtue of the Night of Honour.

O Lord! We hope, only, that our predestined fates be determined based on Your Grace.

O Lord! Do not put us among those who are deprived from this month, because it is the worst deprivation.

- [1.](#) Ruh-al-Ma'ali, vol. 30. p. 188; and Durr-al-Manthur, vol. 6, p. 391.
- [2.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 516.
- [3.](#) Majma'-al-Bayan, vol, 30, p. 516.
- [4.](#) Surah Baqarah, No. 2, verse 185
- [5.](#) Durr-al-Manthur. vol. 6, p. 371.
- [6.](#) Durr-al-Manthur, vol. 6. p. 371.
- [7.](#) Surah Shura, No. 41, verse 52
- [8.](#) Tafsir-i-Borhan, vol. 4. p. 481
- [9.](#) Borhan, Commentary, vol. 4, p. 488, tradition 29.
- [10.](#) Surah Hud, No. 11, verse 69
- [11.](#) Tafsir-i Fakhr-i-Razi, Commentary, vol. 32, p. 36.
- [12.](#) Nur-ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 625, Tradition 58.
- [13.](#) Nur-ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 626, Tradition 62.
- [14.](#) Nur-ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5, p. 626, Tradition 62.
- [15.](#) Nur-ath-Thaqalayn, vol. 5. p. 626, part of tradition 58.

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