

Surah al-Ma'arij, Chapter 70

(The Places of Ascent)

Section (juz') 29

Number of Verses: 44

General Overview of the Chapter

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

The blessed Chapter has forty-four Verses and is regarded as one of those revealed in Mecca, though some of the Verses were revealed in Medina. The designation of the Chapter, connoting the angels' places of ascent, derives from the third Verse. Similar to other Meccan Chapters, it mainly treats of Resurrection and warning to the polytheists and opponents.

It also deals with the states of the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection and the characteristics of the peoples of Paradise and Hell. The opening Verses of the Chapter concerns sending down torments in this world whereby one of the deniers of Imam 'Ali's (as) guardianship (wilaya) was afflicted and lost his life whose detailed account will be mentioned under the first Verse.

The Merit of Reciting the Chapter

It is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) that whoever recites the Sura Sa'ala Sa'il [namely, the chapter in question], God Almighty will grant him the Rewards of those who keep their covenants as well as those who are attentive toward the establishment of their ritual prayers. 1

In this vein, it is narrated from Imam Baqir (as) that whoever recites the Chapter constantly, he shall not

be investigated on the Day of Resurrection regarding his sins, but he shall abide in Paradise beside Muhammad (S).² The bestowal of such Rewards is dependent on fulfilling one's religious obligations.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 1-3

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, the Most Gracious, the Most Merciful

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ

لِلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ

- 1. A questioner asked for befalling a torment which befell.**
- 2. They are in store for disbelievers and none may avert them**
- 3. They are from Allah, the Lord whose angels ascent to the heavens.**

The late 'Allama Amini (rh), in his invaluable work titled al-Ghadir, enumerates thirty eminent Qur'an exegetes and traditionists flourishing in the third/ninth and fourth/tenth centuries who maintain that the occasion of the Revelation of the blessed Verse 1 concerns a man who addressed the Noble Prophet (S) as saying:

"You ordered us to fulfill our obligations regarding pilgrimage to Mecca (hajj), fasting (sawm), and paying the alms tax (zakat) on the day of Ghadir to which we consented, but you are not content yet as you appointed your cousin to rule over us."

Then, he added:

"O Lord! If such appointment is true, send down rocks from the heaven [such that we be destroyed and do not witness such day]."

A rock was sent down and he killed him.

Then the blessed Verse

'A questioner asked for befalling a torment which befell'

was revealed."³

It would be of significance to make mention of some individual and seemingly insignificant events so that others may take lessons. Likewise, it was an individual disobedience which led to Divine Wrath and his affliction and perdition.

The Qur'anic Verse makes a reference to the incident so that mankind may take lessons and be aware that partial, obdurate, and inappropriate requests may entail afflictions. It would be of interest to mention that the inquirer in question is maintained by some Qur'an exegetes to be Nu'man ibn Harith or Nadhr ibn Harith.

The blessed Verse 2 is saying that such torment is in store for the disbelievers and non one may impede it. The blessed Verse 3 makes a reference to the Source of such torment, saying that the torment was inflicted by Allah, the Lord of the heavens where angels ascend.

The Arabic word ma'arij is the plural form of ma'arij denoting place of ascent which herein connotes the heavens where the angels ascend or descend proceeding toward nearness to God Almighty following a certain hierarchy.

Such angels who are vested with afflicting the disbelievers and sinners with torments were the same angels who descended upon Abraham (as) informing him of their appointment to cause the perdition of the people of Lot (as).

They destroyed the cities of those people who had plunged into sins and disgrace. They are also vested with inflicting torments upon other sinners as well. It is to be noted, however, that some Qur'an exegetes maintain that the word ma'arij implies Divine Bounties and some others hold that it connotes angels, though the former further befits the lexical meaning of the word.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verse 4

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ

4. The angels and the spirit (an archangel) ascend toward Him on a Day the measure whereof is fifty thousand years.

Following the narrative of the person who had asked for Divine torment, the blessed Verse in question treats of Resurrection and the torments in store for sinners on that Day, saying that the angels and the spirit ascend toward God Almighty on a Day whose measure is fifty thousand years.

The ascension of the angels indubitably implies spiritual ascent rather than the physical one.

In other words, they hasten toward nearness unto God Almighty and on that Day, namely the Day of Resurrection, they are prepared to receive Divine Commands and implement them, as it was mentioned above under 69: 17 that

"and the angels will be on its sides"

implies that they will surround the heaven and will be prepared on that Day to act upon Divine Commands.

The spirit (ruh) herein implies the archangel, namely the trusted spirit (ruh al-amin) or Gabriel, to whom there is a reference elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an4:

"Therein descend the angels and the spirit by Allah's Permission with all Ordainments."

The angels and the 'spirit' descend by Divine Permission on the night of Ordainment (laylat al-qadr) to implement Divine Ordainments and Decrees. It is worthy of note, however, that the word ruh implies different senses according to the contextual meaning, e.g. man's spirit, the Holy Qur'an, the Holy Spirit (ruh al-qudus), the archangel of Revelation, as attested in different Qur'anic Verses.

The expression

"fifty thousand years"

reflects that the Day of Resurrection shall last fifty thousand years, taking into account the passage of time in this world which does not stand in disharmony with the

"one thousand years"

mentioned elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an5, since according to traditions, there shall be fifty stations on the Day of Resurrection each of which shall last one thousand years.6

Some Qur'an exegetes have also suggested that the number

"fifty thousand"

herein implies multiplicity rather than quantity, namely that Day shall last long.

At any rate, it concerns the sinners, wrong doers, and disbelievers. In this vein, it is narrated on the authority of Abu Sa'id Khudri that following the Revelation of the blessed Verse in question, someone

asked:

"O Allah's Messenger (S)! How long shall be that Day?"

He replied:

*"By the One in Whose Hands lie Muhammad's life, that Day shall be convenient for the disbelievers, more convenient than one obligatory ritual prayer established in this world."*⁷

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 5-7

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا

وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا

5. So be patient with a good patience.

6. They behold that Day from afar.

7. And We see it near.

Addressed to the Noble Prophet (S), the blessed Verse 5 asks him to be patient with a good patience against their denial and harassment. The Arabic phrase *sabran jamilan* literally denotes becoming patience which calls for according attention to the same. Such patience entails steadfastness and constant forbearance unadulterated by despair, desolation, restlessness, and remonstrance.

The blessed Verse 6 is saying that they regard that Day as far remote, though, according to the following blessed Verse, God Almighty regards it to be close by. They actually do not believe in the existence of such Day wherein the records of deeds of all people as well as the least of their words and deeds shall be accounted.

That Day shall last fifty thousand years according to this worldly time measurement. However, they do not believe in God Almighty and they entertain doubts as to His Omnipotence, saying that it will be impossible for rotten bones and scattered dust to assemble once again in bodily form. Such unfounded doubts are to be met elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an.

They also raise questions about the duration of fifty thousand years for one single day. It would be of interest to note that according to modern science, time measurements are different on different celestial bodies, since they follow the time of their rotations on their axes.

Thus, one day on the moon equals two weeks on the earth. It is even suggested that through the passage time, the earth may reduce the velocity of its rotation on its axis, as a consequence of which one day may turn into one month, one year, or hundreds of years.

It is said that the Day of Resurrection will be at that time, but it is said that one day which equals fifty thousand years is not incredible as per our worldly measurements and analogies. At any rate, the present order of the earth and the heaven shall undergo alterations prior to the Day of Resurrection. The disbelievers regarded Resurrection as a remote possibility that may not stand to reason, though it is certain and close by according to the blessed Qur'anic Verse.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 8-9

يَوْمَ تَكُونُ السَّمَاءُ كَالْمُهْلِ

وَتَكُونُ الْجِبَالُ كَالْعِهْنِ

8. The Day that the heaven shall be like molten metal.

9. And the mountains shall be like dyed wool.

The blessed Verses in question further treat of Resurrection, saying that on that Day, the heaven shall be like molten metal and the mountains shall be like flakes of dyed wool. The Arabic word muhl herein denotes molten metal and at times it is applied to the sediment of olive oil. The former sense befits the contextual meaning, though, taking into account the use as a simile, the latter is not that different.

The Arabic word 'ihan denotes dyed wool. The heavens shall be torn asunder and they shall melt. Mountains shall be shattered and scattered through the wind like flakes of wool. Mountains are herein likened to dyed wool owing to their different colors. Such destruction shall antedate the creation of a new world wherein mankind shall be revived.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 10-14

وَلَا يَسْأَلُ حَمِيمٌ حَمِيمًا

يَبْصُرُونَهُمْ ۚ يَوَدُّ الْمُجْرِمُ لَوْ يَفْتَدِي مِنْ عَذَابِ يَوْمِئِذٍ بِبَنِيهِ

وَصَاحِبَتِهِ وَأَخِيهِ

وَفَصِيلَتِهِ الَّتِي تُؤْوِيهِ

وَمَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ جَمِيعًا ثُمَّ يُنْجِيهِ

10. And no intimate friend shall ask a friend about his condition,

11. They shall be made to meet one another [but they are preoccupied with their own affairs], such that he sinner would desire to ransom himself from the chastisement of that Day by his children,

12. And his wife and his brother,

13. And his tribe who protected him at all times,

14. And all the people on the earth, so that he may find deliverance.

On Resurrection day in the new world, mankind shall be so preoccupied with the records of their past deeds that they never think about others, even their intimate friends, but they think about their own deliverance from torments.

The same theme is reflected elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an8:

"Everyone on that Day shall have enough to make him careless of others."

The blessed Verse 11 is saying that people shall recognize their intimate friends, since they shall be made to meet their friends, but they are careless of them owing to being preoccupied with their own affairs and they shall stand in such awe that they shall never think about others.

Proceeding with further depiction of that awe inspiring scene, the blessed Verse further adds that the sinners would desire to victimize their children so that they may find deliverance from the torments in store for them on that Day.

The blessed Verses 12–14 say:

"And his wife and his brother, his tribe who protected him at all times, and all the people on the

earth, so that he may find deliverance."

The torments to be inflicted upon them on that Day shall be so awe inspiring that man shall desire to ransom himself by victimizing his beloved ones, his children, wives, brothers, and kith and kin who used to protect him at all times. He shall even desire to victimize all the people so that he may find deliverance from the torments on the Day of Resurrection.

The Arabic verbal form

yawaddu ("he would desire")

derives from w-d-d denoting "desire."

The Arabic verbal form

yaftadi ("ransom oneself from")

derives from f-d-' implying protecting oneself from afflictions against some payment.

The Arabic nominal form fasila is used in the sense of the tribe and family from whom one descends (literally: is cut off), though it connotes offering shelter and safe haven. At any rate, filial ties as well as those with one's spouse, brothers, and kith and kin shall all fall victims to deliverance from torments, though they shall be of no avail.

It is noteworthy that we are supposed to turn into the people of Hell for the sake of the welfare of our spouse and children and obtaining the satisfaction of our friends and relatives, since they shall be of no avail to us on the Day of Resurrection.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 15-18

كَلَّا ۚ إِنَّهَا لَظَىٰ

نَزَّاعَةً لِّلشَّوَىٰ

تَدْعُو مَنَٰدِبَرٍ وَتَوَلَّىٰ

وَجَمَعَ فَأَوْعَىٰ

15. ***By no means! It shall be flames of fire.***
16. ***Taking away hands, feet, and head skin!***
17. ***Calling those who turned their backs to Divine Command***
18. ***And those who amassed wealth and concealed it.***

Addressing all such desires, the blessed Verse 15 says:

"By no means! No ransom shall be accepted. There shall be burning flames of fire constantly ablaze consuming whatever lies beside it.

The blessed Verse 16 says that the flames take away hands, feet, and skin head. The Arabic word *latha* implies "flame" and it is also one of the names of Hell, both senses are possible in the blessed Verses in question. The Arabic word *naza'a* is applied to something which is consecutive.

Shawa is used in the sense of "hands and feet and the sides of the body," though it also connotes broiling; the former sense is herein intended, since when burning flames touch something, they first burn its sides and extremities and take them away.

Some Qur'an exegetes maintain that the word is here in used in the sense of skin (of the body), though some others hold that it is applied to head skin and calf (foot). All these senses are applicable to the context, taking into account the aforesaid broad semantic domain. It would be surmising to note that despite all these afflictions, the victims shall not die.

The blessed Verse 17 makes a reference to those who fall prey to such fire, saying that these burning flames call unto themselves those who turned away from Divine Commands and disobeyed him.

The blessed Verse 18 says that they amassed wealth and concealed it without expending it in Allah's Cause. Thus, the burning fire constantly calls unto itself the sinners by the God given verbal or non-verbal language.

The victims shall be those who turned away from faith disobeying God Almighty and His Messenger (S) on the one hand, and were preoccupied with amassing lawful and unlawful wealth and concealing it without according attention to the rights of the needy or even comprehending the reason behind the bestowal of Divine Bounties upon them.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 19-23

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا

إِذَا مَسَّهُ الشَّرُّ جَزُوعًا

وَإِذَا مَسَّهُ الْخَيْرُ مَنُوعًا

إِلَّا الْمُصَلِّينَ

الَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ دَائِمُونَ

- 19. Man was created impatient and avaricious,**
- 20. Irritable when evil touches him,**
- 21. And impeding others when good touches him.**
- 22. Except those who establish their ritual prayers.**
- 23. Those who remain steadfast in establishing their ritual prayers.**

Having recounted some of the torments in store for sinners on the Day of Resurrection, the blessed Verses in question treat of the character traits of the disbelieving and the truly believing, stating the reasons behind the torments and the deliverance in store for them.

The blessed Verses 19–21 reflect that man is created avaricious and impatient, irritable when evil touches him impeding others when good touches him. Some Qur'an exegetes and lexicographers maintain that the Arabic word hulu' denotes "avaricious," though some others hold that it implies "impatient."

The blessed Verses 20 and 21 provide further explanation as to the meaning of the Arabic word in question. The former meaning makes a reference to three moral vices of such people, namely avarice, restlessness, and niggardliness. The latter refers to restlessness and niggardliness. Both senses may be implied by the word hulu', since the two are dependent on each other. In other words, avaricious people are oftentimes niggardly and impatient against incidents and vice versa.

The blessed Verses 22 and 23 treats of further character traits of the believing preceded by the conjunction "except" (illa), saying that those who establish their ritual prayers are exceptions, those who are steadfast in the establishment of their ritual prayers.

Such characteristic of theirs establishes and maintains their constant ties with Divine Threshold. Such

nexus is created and maintained by the establishment of ritual prayers that impede man from committing vices, fostering his heart and spirit, makes him remember God Almighty at all times, and thereby impedes him from plunging into vanity, arrogance, concupiscent desires, and bondage in satanic shackles and fetters.

It is needless to say that steadfastness in establishing prayers does not entail their establishment at all times, but it indicates that they establish their ritual prayers at certain times. Generally speaking, steadfastness in doing any good deed positively affects man's heart.

In this vein, it is narrated from the Noble Prophet (S) as saying:

*"The most beloved of acts before God Almighty is what is done constantly, even if it happens to be seemingly insignificant."*⁹

It is narrated from Imam Baqir (as) that what is intended herein is that whenever man regards one of the supererogatory things as an obligation and constantly does the deed.¹⁰ Another tradition narrated from the Noble Imam (as) reflects that the blessed Verse in question concerns the establishment of obligatory ritual prayers.¹¹

The difference may lie in the fact that "protection" befits the establishment of obligatory prayers which must be performed at certain times, though "constancy and steadfastness" befit supererogatory prayers, since man may perform them and fail to do likewise at other times.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 24-28

وَالَّذِينَ فِي أَمْوَالِهِمْ حَقٌّ مَّعْلُومٌ

لِلسَّائِلِ وَالْمَحْرُومِ

وَالَّذِينَ يُصَدِّقُونَ بِيَوْمِ الدِّينِ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ مِنْ عَذَابِ رَبِّهِمْ مُشْفِقُونَ

إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّهِمْ غَيْرُ مَأْمُونٍ

- 24. And those in whose wealth there is a recognized right**
25. For the mendicant and the deprived,
26. And those who stand in awe against Divine Recompense,
27. And those who find no deliverance from the torment of their Lord.
28. The torment of their Lord is that before which none can feel secure.

Following a treatment of the establishment of ritual prayers as the best deed and the best state of the believing, the blessed Verses 24 and 25 dealt with those in whose possessions there is some recognized right for the mendicant and the deprived. Thus, they maintain their ties with both the Creator and the created.

In this respect, some Qur'an exegetes maintain that

"recognized right"

herein implies alms tax (zakat) whose measure is apportioned and it should be paid to the mendicant and the deprived. It is known that the Chapter in question is Meccan and the Divine Decree as to the payment of tax alms had not been revealed in Mecca, or even if it had been revealed, the measure had not been apportioned.

Thus, some other exegetes hold that

"recognized right"

herein implies something other than alms tax which one feels obliged to pay to the needy. In this respect, a tradition is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) that upon being asked as to the exegesis of the blessed Verse, he said that it was something other than the alms tax and the blessed Verse concerned those upon whom God Almighty bestowed wealth and they paid one to three thousand of which to help their next of kin and help with the removal of adversity from amongst their people.¹²

Regarding the difference between the mendicant and the deprived, it may be said that the former express their needs and ask for assistance, whereas the latter may not act likewise owing to shame and dignity. It is narrated from Imam Sadiq (as) as saying that the deprived are those who take troubles to earn a living, though they are involved with financial straits.¹³

The blessed Verses 26–28 make a reference to the third and the fourth characteristics of theirs, saying that those who believe in the Day of Recompense and stand in awe against Divine torment, since they find no deliverance from Divine Chastisement. They believe in the Day of Recompense.

In this respect, it may be mentioned that the Arabic present verbal form yusaddiqun reflects progression,

implying that they are attentive at all times that the records of past deeds shall be taken into account on that Day. Some Qur'an exegetes hold that the verbal form is indicative of the confirmation of certain acts, namely acting upon obligations and abstaining from committing unlawful acts.

However, the contextual meaning of the blessed Verse implies theoretical and practical confirmation.

Since some people may believe in the Day of Recompense but imagine that they shall not be chastised, the blessed Verse is saying that the believers find not deliverance from Divine torments, namely they feel obliged at all times to act upon Divine Commands and regard their righteous good deeds as insignificant and their sins as grave.

In this vein, it is narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, Imam 'Ali (as) that providing his child with admonitions, he said:

*"O my child! Stand in awe before God Almighty such that even if you happen to have done all the righteous deeds in this world, He may not accept them and set your hopes on Him, such that even if you have had committed all the sins in this world, He may forgive your sins."*¹⁴

Even the Noble Prophet said:

"No one shall be admitted to Paradise for his deeds."

Upon being asked:

"Even you?"

He replied:

"Yes, even me, unless I will be granted Divine Graciousness."

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 29–31

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِفُرُوجِهِمْ حَافِظُونَ

إِلَّا عَلَىٰ أَزْوَاجِهِمْ أَوْ مَا مَلَكَتْ أَيْمَانُهُمْ فَإِنَّهُمْ غَيْرُ مَلُومِينَ

فَمَنْ ابْتَغَىٰ وَرَاءَ ذَلِكَ فَأُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الْعَادُونَ

29. And those who guard their chastity.

30. And do not engage in sexual intercourse, except with their wives and female slaves [who are like their wives], but they are not blameworthy for having been engaged in sexual intercourse with them.

31. But whoever seeks beyond that shall be a trespasser [of Divine Bounds].

The preceding blessed Verses treated of four characteristics of the true believers and those who will be the people of Paradise and the blessed Verses in question deal with further characteristics.

The blessed Verses 29 and 30 say:

"They are the people who protect themselves from unchastity and do not engage in sexual intercourse, except with their wives and female slaves and they will not be blamed for such engagement."

The sexual drive is one of the easily unchecked human drives and the source of many a sin, such that some hold that its trace may be found in all serious criminal cases. Thus, checking the drive serves as a significant token of fear of God Almighty.

It is worthy of note that checking the drive follows acts like establishment of ritual prayers, helping the needy, believing in the Day of Resurrection, and fearing Divine torments.

The exception following the check reflects that the drive is not to be totally removed and people are to move against the laws of creation like monks, nuns, and some priests; it is logically impossible, since many a monk and nun have failed to remove the drive from their lives and even if they do not officially marry, but many of them privately engage in sexual activities.

Such instances of disgrace and ignominy abound in the world and Christian historians, e.g. Will Durant, have unveiled instances of such unchastity and indecency.

The Arabic plural nominal form *azwaj* comprises permanent and temporary wives. Some have imagined that the blessed Verse negates temporary marriage, since they do not notice that it is also a kind of marriage.

Laying further emphasis on the issue, the blessed Verse 31 says:

"But whoever seeks beyond that shall be a trespasser [of Divine Bounds]."

Thus, the Islamic faith plans a society in which innate natural drives may find vents without entailing unchastity and indecency. It is noteworthy that female slaves used to possess many a legal right of wives, but dealing with such issue is presently out of the question.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 32-35

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ لِأَمَانَاتِهِمْ وَعَهْدِهِمْ رَاعُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ بِشَهَادَاتِهِمْ قَائِمُونَ

وَالَّذِينَ هُمْ عَلَى صَلَاتِهِمْ يُحَافِظُونَ

أُولَئِكَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ مُّكْرَمُونَ

32. And those who keep their trusts and covenants.

33. And those who stand firm in their true testimonies.

34. And those who guard their ritual prayers.

35. Such shall be honored in the Gardens.

Reference is made to another characteristics of their in the blessed Verse 32, saying

"Those who keep their trusts and covenants."

It is noteworthy that the Arabic word

***amana* ("trust")**

encompasses a broad range of meanings implying not only different earthly trusts of people but also Divine ones and also those of the Prophets and Infallible Imams (as). Each of the Divine Bounties is one of His trusts. Likewise, social positions, particularly leadership, are amongst the most important trusts.

Thus, it is narrated from Imam Baqir (as) and Imam Sadiq (as) concerning the exegesis of the blessed Verse

"Verily Allah commands you to restore the trusted things to their owners"

that people are commanded to restore rulership and guardianship to their worthy guardians. 15

It is attested elsewhere in the Holy Qur'an¹⁶

"Verily We did offer the trust to the heavens and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it and were afraid of it; but man bore it. He was unjust and ignorant."

Above all, it is incumbent upon Muslims to preserve Divine religion and His Book, as His Greatest of trusts.

The Arabic term

'ahd ("covenant")

implies a wide semantic range, including both people's and Divine covenants, since the term is applied to any kind of obligation vested with someone. Therefore, one who believes in God Almighty and His Messenger (S) has indubitably accepted great obligations. Great emphasis is laid by the Islamic faith on keeping one's trusts and covenants as one of the most significant tokens of true faith.

The blessed Verse 33 adds that it is the characteristic of the believers and those who rise bear true testimony, since bearing just witness and refraining from concealing the same are most significant pillars of administering justice in human society.

They inquire as to the reasons behind bearing testimony against people entailing in their animosity and thereby creating problems for themselves. Such people are indifferent toward human rights, devoid of social spirit, and irresponsible toward administration of justice.

It is in this vein that the Holy Qur'an recurrently calls Muslims unto bearing true witness and regards its concealment as a sin¹⁷. The issue is of particular significance in Islamic law serving as the pillar of proving many an individual and social law governed by particular laws and rulings.

The last characteristic of the good is mentioned in the blessed Verse 34, which once again refers to the establishment of ritual prayers, mentioned above in the opening blessed Verses, saying:

"those who guard their ritual prayers."

Reference was made above of the point as per which obligatory ritual prayers are herein intended by salat. Reference was already made of supererogatory ritual prayers.

The first characteristic alludes to steadfastness in establishing such prayers, though the one in question make mention of acting upon the rules, pillars, and the characteristics of the same through which such prayers are preserved from corruption and the spirit of salat, the presence of mind while performing it, is reinforced.

Thus, the moral impediments to its acknowledgement are removed and it is regarded by no means as a repetition. Such beginning and end reflect that above all, according attention to the establishment of

ritual prayers is the most significant characteristic of the believers, since it is the most exalted school of spiritual growth and the most significant means of the purification of the soul and society.

Finally, the blessed Verse indicates the final goal of those who possess such characteristics.

In the same manner that the preceding Verses were indicative of the final goal of the sinners, the blessed Verse 35 reflects tersely that those who possess such characteristics shall dwell in the Gardens of Paradise and shall be cherished from all respects, as they are Allah's guests for whom all means of comfort and hospitality will have been available by the Most-Compassionate and the Omnipotent Allah.

The twain expressions,

jannat ("gardens")

and

mukramun ("honored")

allude to the material and spiritual Bounties bestowed upon such people.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 36–39

فَمَالِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا قَبْلَكَ مُهْطِعِينَ

عَنِ الْيَمِينِ وَعَنِ الشِّمَالِ عِزِينَ

أَيُّطْمَعُ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ مِنْهُمْ أَنْ يُدْخَلَ جَنَّةَ نَعِيمٍ

كَلَّا ۚ إِنَّا خَلَقْنَاهُمْ مِمَّا يَعْلَمُونَ

36. What is the matter with the disbelievers who hasten to come to you,

37. In groups on the right and on the left expecting to be admitted to Paradise?

38. Does everyone of them aspire to enter the Paradise abounding in Divine Bounties?

39. No, that is not like that! We have created them out of that which they know!

The preceding Verses treated of the characteristics of the believers and the disbelievers and their fates. The blessed Verses in question deal with the disbelievers and their derision of sacred matters.

Some Qur'an exegetes maintain that these blessed Verses were revealed concerning some polytheists who upon hearing the Noble Prophet (S) reciting some Resurrection Verses to the Muslims in Mecca, gathered to utter that if there be Resurrection, they will enjoy a far better state in the Hereafter than those believing him, since they enjoy a further comfortable life compared to those believing in him.

The blessed Verses 36–38 respond to their claims saying:

"What is the matter with the disbelievers who hasten to come to you, in groups on the right and on the left expecting to be admitted to Paradise? Does every one of them aspire to enter the Paradise abounding in Divine Bounties?"

How do they expect to be admitted to Paradise with their unworthy deeds? The Arabic plural nominal form muṭi'in is the accusative plural form of muṭi' denoting one walking hastily with his neck raised up in quest of something and at times walks with his neck raised up searching for intelligence.

The Arabic nominal form 'izin is applied to scattered groups and at times to being related to others, since groups getting together are somehow related or they pursue one single goal, hence the application of the word 'iza to a group.

At any rate, the vain polytheists produced numerous, similar, unfounded claims and regarded their comfortable life, consequent to their unlawful acts like plunder as their exalted rank before Divine Threshold resorting to baseless analogies as to their elevated ranks in the Hereafter.

It is true that they did not believe in Resurrection as reflected in the Holy Qur'an, but at times they treated of it as a possibility, saying that had there been Resurrection, they would have such and such exalted positions in the Hereafter. They might have aimed at deriding such beliefs.

The blessed Verse 39 responds to their false claims, saying:

"No, that is not like that! We have created them out of that which they know!"

Such response aims to shatter their vanity, since it is said that they know from what they were created: a worthless drop of semen. So, what is the reason behind their vanity?

Furthermore, the blessed Verse responds to those who deride the belief in Resurrection by saying that if they entertain doubts as to the veracity of Resurrection, they may accord attention to the fact that God Almighty creates perfect beings out of a worthless drop of semen that undergoes developments in womb each and every day and it is created anew each time.

The other point is that such people whose record of deeds abounds with sins may not expect to be

admitted to Paradise, since a being created out of a worthless drop of semen is materially ignoble and nobilities are consequent to having faith and doing righteous good deeds which they lack. So, how do they expect to set foot in the Gardens of Paradise?

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 40-41

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِرَبِّ الْمَشَارِقِ وَالْمَغَارِبِ إِنَّا لَقَادِرُونَ

عَلَى أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ خَيْرًا مِنْهُمْ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ

40. Therefore, I swear by the Lord of all the points of sunrise and sunset in the east and the west that surely We are All-Able

41. To replace them by others better than them and We are Invincible.

Instances of the singular form of "east and west" are also attested in the Holy Qur'an, as in:

"And to Allah belong the east and the west"¹⁸.

The expression at times appears in the dual form, as in:

"The Lord of the two easts and the Lord of the two wests"¹⁹.

The plural form also appears, as in the blessed Verse in question. Some narrow-minded people have considered these expressions to be contradictory, whereas they harmoniously point to one point: the sun rises from a new point and sets in another new point each and every day, hence there are as many sunrises and sunsets as the number of the days of the year.

Furthermore, two easts and two wests are distinguished amongst so many easts and wests: the summer and winter solstices when the sun reaches its zenith in the tropic of Cancer and the tropic of Capricorn. Besides these two distinct solstices, there are two spring and autumn equinoxes when the day and the night are equal.

Some maintain that

"the Lord of the easts and the Lord of the wests"

alludes to the same phenomenon, a point which is noteworthy.

However, the singular attestations solely lay emphasis on the east and the west without according any

attention to individual instances. Therefore, the aforesaid expressions convey certain points urging man to heed the alterations in the sunrise and the sunset and the regular alterations of the solar orbits.

Surah al-Ma'arij – Verses 42-44

فَذَرَّهُمْ يُخَوِّضُوا وَيَلْعَبُوا حَتَّىٰ يَلْقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي يُوعَدُونَ

يَوْمَ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ سِرَاعًا كَأَنَّهُمْ إِلَىٰ نُصُبٍ يُوفِضُونَ

خَاشِعَةً أَبْصَارُهُمْ تَرْهُقُهُمْ ذِلَّةٌ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ الْيَوْمُ الَّذِي كَانُوا يُوعَدُونَ

42. Therefore, leave them to plunge in vain talk and play about, until they meet their Promised Day.

43. The Day when they shall come out of the graves instantly as racing toward their idols,

44. With their eyes lowered in fear, enwrapped by humility and ignominy. [It shall be said unto them:] That is the Day which was promised unto you.

These closing Verses of the blessed Chapter warn the obdurate disbelievers mocking Resurrection and belief in the Islamic faith, saying:

"Therefore, leave them to plunge in vain talk and play about, until they meet their Promised Day. The Day when they shall come out of the graves instantly as racing toward their idols, with their eyes lowered in fear, enwrapped by humility and ignominy. [It shall be said unto them:] That is the Day which was promised unto you."

Such decisive arguments are sufficient, since they are neither sensible nor prepared to wake up. They are abandoned to plunged into their false beliefs and engage themselves in child play until the Promised Day, namely the Day of Resurrection happens.

The blessed Verse 43 depicts that Day and its awe inspiring tokens, saying that they shall leave their graves instantly on that Day as if they hasten toward their idols in celebrations or mourning. Such dramatic juxtaposition aims at deriding their false beliefs in this world.

The Arabic word ajdath is the plural form of jadath. Sira'an is an adverb of manner used in the sense of "instantly."

The Arabic nominal form nusub is the plural form of nasb denoting something installed somewhere, though it herein connotes the stone idols installed at certain places to be worshipped by idolaters by shedding the blood of sacrificial animals on them. The difference between nasb and sanam is that the latter had a particular form, but the former was a formless rock worshipped by idolaters.

The Arabic verbal form

yufidhun ("**race, hasten**"),

cognate with ifadha, implies rapid movement like that of water running from its fountainhead. Some Qur'an exegetes maintain that nusub implies the banners installed amongst armies or caravans at certain places toward which everybody hastens.

The blessed Verse 44 further treats of other tokens, saying that on that Day, their eyes shall be lowered owing to the intensity of horror looking at their surroundings with humility while they shall be enwrapped by ignominy and humility.

The blessed Verse closes by saying that that is the Day promised to them, though they used to deride it, saying that granted that such Day exists, they shall be far better in terms of convenience and comfort compared with the believers. Nonetheless, they dare not raise their heads owing to horror and disgrace. They shall be covered with the dust of humility. They shall plunge into sorrows, but their regrets shall be of no avail.

O Lord! Protect us by Your Compassion on that awe inspiring Day.

O Lord! Rank us amongst the believers who have kept their promise to You and have obeyed Your Commands.

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1. Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, the opening Verses of the Chapter.
 2. Ibid., vol. 10, p. 350.
 3. al-Ghadir, vol. 1, pp. 239-246.
 4. 97:4
 5. 32:5
 6. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, vol. 5, p. 413; Shaykh Saduq's Amali.
 7. Tafsir Majma' al-Bayan, vol. 10, p. 353; Tafsir Qurtubi, vol. 10, p. 6761.
 8. 80:37
 9. al-Mu'jam al-Mufahris li-Alfa al-Hadith, vol. 2, p. 160.
 10. Tafsir Nur al-Thiqalayn, vol. 5, p. 416.
 11. Ibid.
 12. Ibid, vol. 5, p. 417.
 13. Ibid.
 14. Jami' al-Akhbar, p. 113.
 15. Tafsir Burhan, vol. 1, p. 380.

16. 33:72

17. 2:140,283; 5:106; 65:2

18. 2:115

19. 55:17

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