

1. In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Compassionate:

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

- The Prophet is related to have said, “ Prayer is the *mir‘aj* of the *mu‘min*.”
الصلاة معراج المؤمن
- The message of the *mi‘raj* is that by true servanthood to Allah we ascend to reach the knowledge of Him

Bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim

- Imam al-Qushayri has a 3-volume tafsir in which he gives a different explanation of each *bism Allah al-Rahman al-Rahim* (113 in total, except for surat al-Tawba)
 - the point is that one changes as one reads the book of Allah
- “*In the name of Allah*, whoever says it encounters its beauty and whoever beholds it with presence beholds its sovereign majesty. Not everyone who utters it attains to it, nor does just anyone who tries everything he can come to realise its unspeakable majesty (i.e., by his cleverness): a mighty word exalted, bounded, and fortified from the grasp of even the subtlest mind; a mighty word that denotes the mighty reality of Allah being the recourse for all needs; a mighty need that the servant must remember to say in every circumstance.”

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- In other words, the *adhkhar* of Allah change the person. Not just anyone who says it can know what is intended by it. They are with Allah, pulling the *dhakir* from the name to the Named. And this is a *mi'raj* also
- This sura deals with *sifat al-nufus*, the attributes of human souls: which souls are beloved by Allah and which souls are hated by Allah. The ones with Allah are loved and the ones with their *nafs* are hated by Allah

Bism Allah is a mighty dhikr

- A man was riding a camel when the camel suddenly shied away from the path. The man said, “May Allah curse the *shaytan*.” The Prophet said, “Don’t say ‘May Allah curse the *shaytan*,’ for the *shaytan* will feel more important because of that. Rather, say ‘Bism Allah.’”

Sura Context

- One of the *kafirs* was mocking the Prophet and saying, “If this is the truth, then send down a punishment upon us.”
- Its theme is the day of resurrection, warning scoffers from hastening the day of judgement, and giving an idea of its tremendousness by mentioning the unutterable might and sovereign power of its master, Allah. It confirms the prophethood of the Prophet, but also focuses on the nature of the human *nafs*/mind

A suppliant has asked in mocking prayer
for a terrible chastisement that shall inevitably befall

سَأَلَ سَائِلٌ بِعَذَابٍ وَاقِعٍ

- ***Sa'ala***
 - to ask in prayer, made clear by the preposition that comes after
 - past tense means that this supplication already took place. Allah is telling us something that happened
 - the one making the prayer was someone from the Quraysh and his intention was to mock the Prophet
- ***Bi 'adhabin***
 - the beginning *bi* means to pray for something before its time, hoping that it will happen soon
 - indefinite of *'adhab* denotes horror (*tahwil*) and unheard of, unrelenting severity (*tashdid*)
- ***Waqi'***
 - something impossible to prevent; unsparing and whose occurrence is absolutely certain
 - who will it befall? Answer in the next verse

2. Disbelievers: None may repel it;

لِّلْكَافِرِينَ لَيْسَ لَهُ دَافِعٌ ﴿٢﴾

- ***Kafirin***

- two interpretive meanings:

- 1) adjectival: as if Allah is describing it as something “prepared and readied in ambush for disbelievers.”

- 2) a predicate of an omitted subject: a punishment for who? Disbelievers

- English translation reflects that it is a second description for chastisement: it shall inevitably happen *and* befall unbelievers

- Allah is reconciling the Prophet to people he is faced with that are doing such things. Allah is sending this sura describing some of Allah’s greatest attributes, showing the ignorance as well as the insolence of the one making the “prayer”

- ***Dafi***‘

- to turn away; defend; persist (*istidama*); force in extirpating something (*al-quwwa fi tamḥiyyat shay’*)

3. From Allah of the mighty inclined Ascending Pathways.

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ

- ***Min Allah***

- returns to the last word of verse 2
- As if one were wondering from who the punishment is from? From Allah

Dhi al-ma'arij

- ascending-inclined pathways taken by the angles to Allah or the throne; to go upward at an incline as opposed to strictly vertical trajectory straight up
- disbelievers do not understand anything about whom they are addressing and the one whose punishment they think is far-fetched
- these are the ascending ways of the sky and upward paths of the angels and the places and sites where angels ascend to the Most Merciful; ways of ascent into the celestial realm

Angels

- The angels are something we certainly believe in. Abu al-Hasan al-Shadhili asks in his Hizb al-Kabir for Allah to aid him with a *ruh*
- Allah helps people when they ask Him to send an angel to help

3. From Allah of the mighty inclined Ascending Pathways.

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ ﴿٣﴾

- ***Dhi, dha, and dhu***
 - Allah of the mighty ascending pathways: denote firm possession of an attribute or thing which the owner is renowned by
 - the person owning it is greater than the thing that is owned
 - different from “*sahib*, ” which means a mere owner
- What it implies is the magnitude and greatness of their creator—a greatness that overmasters sane minds and human description.
 - Sheikh Abd al-Rahman al-Shaghouri used to say, “annihilating anyone who can describe, so there is no description.”
- Allah is showing us merely some fleeting facets of His greatness with implications so that we may intuit the rest by the *nur* of our *mu‘amala* with Allah. A heart filled with the light of Allah—that is the heart of the *dhakir* and that is the heart that worships Allah

3. From Allah of the mighty inclined Ascending Pathways.

مِّنَ اللَّهِ ذِي الْمَعَارِجِ ﴿٣﴾

This sura gives us many deep insights of what we are made of, our *nafs* or talking mind, and in what lies our true success forever, and which of our attributes belong to Allah's perfecting our souls' matchless nature. It does so by telling us and instilling in us a sense of the soul's evil and its godfearingness, and telling us that if we enlist His omnipotent help by obeying Him, pleading to Him, remembering Him, and worshiping nothing but Him, we, too, will ascend to our heavily stations and not remain in the lowlands of the godless *nafs*, ever miserable and ever selfish.

4. The angels and the supreme angelic Spirit of them ascend unto Him in a single day that would take fifty thousand human years to traverse.

تَعْرُجُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ وَالرُّوحُ إِلَيْهِ فِي يَوْمٍ كَانَ
مِقْدَارُهُ خَمْسِينَ أَلْفَ سَنَةٍ ﴿٤١﴾

- At this point, Allah has described the incredible height of these ascending pathways, because the human soul can intuit the height of its own trajectory from the height of breath-taking vistas
- Allah has also described the sacrifices for the divine by other people who put Him before themselves in their worship
- ***Ruh***
 - Gabriel
 - he is called the *ruh* because he bears the soul-reviving scripture, without which humans would be like animals, following the dictates of their *nafs*, while religion brings them to life, rising to answer Allah's call, each according to their resolve
 - he imbues people with a soul because he is the bringer of the *wahi*
- ***Ilahyhi***
 - unto Allah: exalt Allah above all attributes that pertain to mere creatures and so do not befit Allah
 - or we can say, as Abu Su'ud said, that *ilahyhi* means “to the throne”: the pronominal suffix is “unto it” the throne of Allah, because it is where the divine commands descend from
 - one reason to adopt the former is because Allah is mentioned in the previous verse while the throne has not been previously mentioned in this *sura*

4. The angels and the supreme angelic Spirit of them ascend unto Him in a single day that would take fifty thousand human years to traverse.

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- ***Fi yawmin***
 - an adverb of time modifying the time of ascent
 - according to most ulama of tafsir, this day is in the time span of this world. The meaning of this is that the angels ascend upward with the *ruh*
 - the angels traverse the distance in a day, while if we wanted to traverse the distance it would take us 50,000 years to traverse
- ***Sana***
 - connoting a hard, miserable year. A good, easy year is called a '*aam*

5. So bear up with patient grace:

فَاصْبِرْ صَبْرًا جَمِيلًا

- As this sura opens with reconciling the prophet, the *fa* that commences this verse is *fa fasiha*, the conjunctive *fa* following the omission of something too obvious to be mentioned, namely, that scoffers will be punished in due course, “*fa isbir.*”
- ***Sabr***
 - patience without objection: people who were scoffing at the prophet only showed his greatness
- ***Sabran jamilan***
 - patient forbearance from trying to get even because of the knowledge that Allah will take care of them. Do not complain to anyone else or exonerate oneself. Be patient with their delusions while knowing better
 - they knew that the Quran was not an ordinary human mind production, just like our *mufasssin* can tell
 - attributes of felicity entail patient grace: patience at its best is not mixed with agitation, complaint, or rash haste
 - grace is not a magical Christian idea, but rather it is *nafs* control and not just bleeding out the irritation in one’s mind or throwing a tantrum, but to have good manners and patience, just like Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Ya‘qub
 - patience and graciousness are Islamic virtues and flying off the handle is a vice
 - we have to follow the example of Prophet Muhammad and Prophet Ya‘qub and be gracious in dealing with others

6. Verily they see it as completely far-fetched;

إِنَّهُمْ يَرَوْنَهُ بَعِيدًا ﴿٦﴾

- Verses 6 and 7 give the reason for bearing up with patience, because what they have coming is about to take place
- **Ba'id**
 - does not refer to location but to improbability (*ihala*) or impossibility
 - something far-fetched; unrealistic, far from happening; far from possible (*mustab'ad*)
- But Allah's rejoinder to them in the next verse does not answer them in the same way

7. And We see it as about to take place;

وَنَرَاهُ قَرِيبًا ﴿٧﴾

- Allah has changed the sense of *ba'id* and *qarib*: it is going to happen soon, let alone it being impossible
- *Wa*
 - *waw al- 'atf lil muqabala*: conjunctive *waw* of contrasting comparison. In English, this is marked in emphasis by tonal emphasis
 - the *waw* of comparison means that there is no comparison between the *kufar*'s assertion that there is no judgement day to Allah's answer that it is about to happen