



إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْءًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيْلًا



Verify, the rising by night (for Tahajjud prayer) is very hard and most potent and good for governing (the soul), and most suitable for (understanding) the Word (of Allāh).

Quran English Translation & Commentary

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المُزَّمِّل

Introduction and Summary

This is one of the earliest Surahs to have been revealed. This first was Surah 96:1-5 (Iqra), in the fortieth year of the Prophet's life, say about 12 years before the Hijrah. Then there was an interruption (*Fatrah*), of which the duration cannot be exactly ascertained, as there was no external history connected with it. The usual estimate puts it at about six months, but it may have been a year or two years. The years were then counted by the luni-solar calendar: see Appendix IX. The second Surah in chronological order was probably a great portion of

Surah 68. (Al Qalam), which came after the *Fatrah* was over. About the same time came this Surah (say third) and Surah 74, which follows (say fourth), and the remainder of Surah 96. We may roughly put the date of this Surah at about 11 to 10 years before the Hijrah.

The subject matter is the significance of Prayer and Humility in spiritual life and the terrible fate of those who reject Faith and Revelation.

C.253 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Devote yourself to the service of Allah
In the stillness of the night, but not
All night. In the world's persecution rely
On Allah, Who will deal with His enemies fittingly.
Let not Allah's service be a matter
Of difficulty to you: do all your duties
In whole-hearted remembrance of Allah.
And ever seek His bountiful Grace.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمُرْمَلُ (١)

1. O thou folded in garments!

C5754. Muzzammil: Some Commentators understand by this, "properly dressed for prayer", or "folded in a sheet, as one renouncing the vanities of this world.

Muzzammil is one of the titles of our holy Prophet.

But there is a deeper meaning in this and the address "Thou wrapped up" of the next Sura. Human nature requires warm garments and wrappings to protect the body from cold or heat or rain. But in the spiritual world these wrappings are useless: the soul must stand bare and open before Allah, in the silence of the night, but not too austerely, as the following verses show.

فَمِ اللَّيْلِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا (٢)

2. Stand (to pray) by night, but not all night --

C5755. The Prophet was prone to austerities in the cave of **Hiraa**, both before and after he received his mission, spending days and nights in prayer and contemplation. Midnight and after-midnight prayers have technically received the name of **Tahajjud**.

See also [verse 20](#) below; also [17:79](#).

نِصْفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ قَلِيلًا (٣)

3. Half of it -- or a little less,

أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ ...

4. Or a little more;

... وَرَتَّلِ الْقُرْآنَ ...

... and recite the Qur'an in slow, ...

C5756. At this time there was only Surah 96., Surah 68, and possibly Surah 74, and the opening Sura (Al-Hamd).

For us, now, with the whole of the Quran before us, the injunction is specially necessary. The words of the Quran must not be read hastily, merely to get through so much reading. They must be studied, and their deep meaning pondered over. They are themselves so beautiful that they must be lovingly pronounced in rhythmic tones.

... تَرْتِيلًا (٤)

... measured rhythmic tones.

إِنَّا سَنُلْقِي عَلَيْكَ قَوْلًا ثَقِيلًا (٥)

5. Soon shall We send down to thee a weighty Message.

C5757. The Quran as completed by degrees, after the Fatrah (see [Introduction](#) to this Sura).

إِنَّ نَاشِئَةَ اللَّيْلِ هِيَ أَشَدُّ وَطْءًا وَأَقْوَمُ قِيلًا (٦)

6. Truly the rising by night is most potent for governing (the soul), and most suitable for (framing) the Word (of Prayer and Praise).

C5758. For contemplation, prayer, and praise, what time can be so suitable as the night, when calm and silence prevail, the voices of the market-place are still, and the silent stars pour forth their eloquence to the discerning soul.

إِنَّ لَكَ فِي النَّهَارِ سَبْحًا طَوِيلًا (٧)

7. True, there is for thee by day prolonged occupation with ordinary duties:

C5759. A prophet of Allah, as a man, a member of a family, or a citizen, has many ordinary duties to perform; and his work may be made difficult and irksome in protecting those who listen to his preaching and are therefore molested and persecuted by the world. But while discharging all his ordinary duties, he should work as in the presence of Allah, and in all matters and at all times retain the sense of Allah's nearness. His work may be on earth, but his heart is in Heaven.

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَتَبِيلًا (٨)

8. But keep in remembrance the name of the Lord and devote thyself to Him wholeheartedly.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا (٩)

9. (He is) Lord of the East and the West:

there is no god but He:

take Him therefore for (thy) Disposer of Affairs.

C5760. Allah is Lord of all places. He rules the world. Therefore be not discouraged by the plots or enmity of wicked men. Leave all things to Allah; trust Him; He is just and will do justice. Only turn away from the unjust, but in a worthy and noble way; i.e., to show them clearly that you do not fear them, but that you leave all affairs in Allah's hands.

If we divide the world into hemispheres from north to south, "East and West" will cover all directions.

وَاصْبِرْ عَلَىٰ مَا يَقُولُونَ وَأَهْجُرْهُمْ هَجْرًا جَمِيلًا (١٠)

10. And have patience with what they say,

and leave them with noble (dignity).

وَدَرْنِي وَالْمُكَذِّبِينَ أُولِي النَّعْمَةِ ...

11. And leave Me (alone to deal with) those in possession of the good things of life, who (yet) deny the Truth;

C5761. Men who enjoy the good things of life have special cause for gratitude to Allah, Who bestowed them. When they are in the ranks of Allah's enemies, none but Allah can adequately deal with them.

... وَمَهْلَهُمْ قَلِيلًا (١١)

and bear with them for a little while.

إِنَّ لَدَيْنَا أَنْكَالًا ...

12. With Us are Fetters (to bind them),

C5762. Cf. [13:5](#); [34:33](#); [40:71](#) and [69:30-32](#).

... وَجَحِيمًا (١٢)

and a Fire (to burn them),

C5763. Cf. [44:47](#) and [56:94](#).

... وَطَعَامًا ذَا غُصَّةٍ ...

13. And Food that chokes,

C5764. Cf. [44:43](#); [56:52](#); [69:36-37](#), and [88:6](#).

... وَعَذَابًا أَلِيمًا (١٣)

and a Penalty Grievous.

C5765. In general terms, the Penalty of sin may be described as a Penalty Grievous, an Agony. It may come in this very life, but that in the Hereafter is certain! See next verse.

We can also consider punishments from another aspect.

- The first object of punishment is to protect the innocent from the depredations of the criminal: we have to bind him.

- The next object is to produce in his heart the fire of repentance, to consume his evil proclivities and to light his conscience. Where that is not enough, a more drastic punishment for the callous is something which causes him pain in things which ordinarily cause him pleasure, such as food, drink, and the satisfaction of physical needs.
- People in whom the higher spiritual faculties are dead may perchance be awakened through the lower physical features of their life, which appeal to them. Where this also fails, there is finally the complete agony, a type too terrible to contemplate.

يَوْمَ تَرْجُفُ الْأَرْضُ وَالْجِبَالُ ...

14. One Day the earth and the mountains will be in violent commotion,

... وَكَانَتِ الْجِبَالُ كَثِيرًا مَّهِيلًا (١٤)

and the mountains will be as a heap of sand poured out and flowing down.

C5766. The Judgment is described as a **violent commotion** which will change the whole face of nature as we know it. Even the hard rock of mountains will be like loose sand running without any cohesion.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَيْكُمْ رَسُولًا شَاهِدًا عَلَيْكُمْ ...

15. We have sent to you, (O men!) a messenger, to be a witness concerning you,

C5767. Our holy Prophet has to warn his age, i.e., the present age, reclaim it from sin, and be a witness for the righteous and against evil, as Moses did his office in his age.

... كَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا إِلَى فِرْعَوْنَ رَسُولًا (١٥)

even as We sent an messenger to Pharaoh.

For Pharaoh, his arrogance, and his punishment, see [10:75-92](#).

فَعَصَى فِرْعَوْنُ الرَّسُولَ ...

16. But Pharaoh disobeyed the messenger;

C5768. Pharaoh the earthly king faces Moses the prophet of Allah. In earthly eyes it was Moses who disobeyed Pharaoh. In spiritual relations, it was Pharaoh who disobeyed Moses.

Pharaoh represented an ancient and mighty kingdom, with a long history behind it, and a pride in its learning and science, art, organisation, and power.

Moses led a depressed people, hewers of wood and drawers of water. But the might of Allah was behind him.

What became of the wisdom, power, and armies of Pharaoh? They were rent asunder when the day came, and the terror and surprise must have been the same as if the heavens had been rent asunder, and children's hair had turned grey! But formidable revolutions turn children grey-haired in another way. Nations that were as children became wise before they in their turn decayed, and from similar disobedience to the laws of Allah. For Allah's law must stand and be fulfilled when all else is swept away.

... فَأَخَذْنَاهُ أَخْذًا وَبِيئًا (١٦)

so We seized him with a heavy Punishment.

فَكَيْفَ تَتَّقُونَ إِن كَفَرْتُمْ يَوْمًا يَجْعَلُ الْوِلْدَانَ شِيبًا (١٧)

17. Then how shall ye, if ye deny (Allah), guard yourselves against a Day that will make children hoary-headed? --

C5769. If already you deny and disobey Allah in this life of probation, how can you stand up to the Day of Judgment, the Day of the terrible Reality?

That Day is described in two metaphors:

- It will be a time of such stress that even children will become like hoary-headed men;

- What we look upon as the eternal sky, ever the same, will be cleft asunder; cf. 82:1.

In other words, the shape of things will be completely altered, both within man and in outer nature, and all true values will be restored. For the Promise of Allah, in this as in all other respects, cannot but be fulfilled.

السَّمَاءُ مُنْفَطِرٌ بِهِ كَانَ وَعَدُهُ مَفْعُولًا (١٨)

18. Whereon the sky will be cleft asunder?

His Promise needs must be accomplished.

إِنَّ هَذِهِ تَذَكُّرَةٌ ...

19. Verily this is an Admonition:

C5770. This is no empty threat. It is an admonition for your good. If you have the will, you can at once come for the Grace and Mercy of Allah, and obtain it. For Repentance and Amendment are the straight Way to the nearness of Allah.

... فَمَنْ شَاءَ اتَّخَذْ إِلَىٰ رَبِّهِ سَبِيلًا (١٩)

Therefore, whoso will, let him take a (straight) path to his Lord!

Section 2

إِنَّ رَبَّكَ يَعْلَمُ أَنَّكَ تَقُومُ أَدْنَىٰ مِنْ ثُلُثِي اللَّيْلِ وَنِصْفَهُ وَثُلُثَهُ ...

20. The Lord doth know that thou standest forth (to prayer) nigh two-thirds of the night, or half the night, or a third of the night,

C5771. Cf., above, 73:2-4.

The Prophet, and a zealous band of his disciples, were often up, two-thirds of the night, or a half, or a third, rejecting sleep and giving themselves up to Prayer and Praise and the reading of the Quran. They are told that this was too severe a tax on them, especially if their health was affected, or they were on a journey, or they were striving, with might and main, in other ways, for the cause of Allah.

See the lines following.

...وَطَائِفَةٌ مِّنَ الَّذِينَ مَعَكَ ...

and so doth a party of those with thee.

...وَاللَّهُ يُقَدِّرُ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ عَلِيمٌ أَن لَّنْ نُحْصُوهُ ...

But Allah doth appoint Night and Day in due measure. He knoweth that **ye are unable to keep count thereof**.

C5772. The usual meaning taken is that the counting of the exact hours of night and day may not be possible for ordinary people, in order to determine exactly the half, or the third, or the two-thirds of a night.

The length of the night and the day varies every day of the solar year, and the precise hour of midnight can only be determined by exact observation in clear skies or by chronometers, which is not possible for everyone.

But I understand it in a wider meaning. Allah fixes night and day in due proportions; for rest and work, and according to seasonal variations. For prayer and praise no meticulous observations of that kind are necessary or possible. Allah's service can be done in many ways as detailed below. But we must give some time to devotion, as may be most easy and convenient to us, in various circumstances of health, travel, and the performance of various duties.

..... فَتَابَ عَلَيْكُمْ فَاقْرَءُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنَ الْقُرْآنِ ...

So He hath turned you (in mercy): read ye therefore, of the Quran as much as may be easy for you.

C5773. The reading of the Quran here is a part of Prayer and religious devotion. This is not to be made into an obsession or a burden.

Cf. 20:2: -We have not sent down the Quran to thee to be an occasion for thy distress.-

We must do it whole-mindedly, but not by formal mechanical computations.

...عَلِمَ أَن سَيَكُونُ مِنْكُمْ مَّرْضَىٰ وَآخَرُونَ يَضْرِبُونَ فِي الْأَرْضِ ...

He knoweth that there may be (some) among you in ill-health; others travelling through the land,

...يَبْتَغُونَ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَآخَرُونَ يُقَاتِلُونَ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ...

seeking of Allah's bounty; yet others **fighting** in Allah's Cause.

C5774. This refers to **Jihad**.

The better opinion is that this particular verse was revealed in Madinah, long after the greater part of the Surah.

The reference, further on, to canonical Prayers and regular Charity (Zakat), points to the same conclusion.

...فَاقْرَؤُوا مَا تَيَسَّرَ مِنْهُ...

Read ye, therefore, as much of the Qur'án as may be easy (for you);

...وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَآتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَأَقْرِضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا...

and establish regular Prayer and give regular Charity; and loan to Allah a Beautiful Loan.

C5775. Cf. 2:245, and n. 276, where the meaning of "a Beautiful Loan" is explained.

See also 57:18.

The "Beautiful Loan" should be that of our own souls. We should expect no returns in kind, for that is not possible. But the reward we shall find with Allah will be infinitely greater and nobler.

Cf. the biblical phrase, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (Matt. vi. 20).

...وَمَا تُقَدِّمُوا لِأَنْفُسِكُمْ مِنْ خَيْرٍ تَجِدُوهُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ هُوَ خَيْرًا وَأَعْظَمَ أَجْرًا...

And whatever good ye send forth for your souls, Ye shall find it in Allah's presence -- yea, better and greater, in Reward.

C5776. Any good that we do raises our own spiritual status and dignity. We must not think that when we speak of Allah's service or Allah's Cause, we are doing anything for His benefit: He is independent of all needs whatsoever.

... وَاسْتَغْفِرُوا اللَّهَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (٢٠)

And seek ye the Grace of Allah: for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

C5777. This emphasizes the need of Allah's Grace. Whatever good we do, our own merits are comparatively small. Allah's Grace must lift us up and blot out our shortcomings. Even in piety there may be an arrogance which may become a sin. We should always seek Allah's Mercy in all humility.



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