



SURA YASIN AS A
MEDITATION ON
TIME



*Ex Tempore Reflections on the Fleeting Nature of
Life, and its Swift Passage in Human Individuals
and Societies*



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INTRODUCTION

There follow a series of short contemplations and reflections on Sura Yasin, specifically what it teaches humans about the fleetingness of life and the swift passage of time, by Shaykh Dr Asim Yusuf. They were delivered spontaneously during the WinterSpring Mawlid in 2020, during the first twelve nights of Rabi' al-Awwal 1442, upon the recitation of the Sura at the commencement of the program.

The meditations, one each night, were unplanned and usually inspired by a word, passage or pattern observed by the Shaykh during his leading the participants in recitation. As such, it is an example of the Sunnaic principle of reflecting deeply on the Quran during one's recitation and applying the meanings to one's circumstance or situation. This is not tafsir per se, but rather an individual discovery of meaning in the profound depths of the Quranic mystery.

Organically, over the nights, a theme emerged: that of the passage of time, and most of the meditations reflect this in some way, though it was not pre-planned. On reflection, this might

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have been because the Mawlids took place in the very teeth of the COVID-19 pandemic, at a time when many Muslims were losing family members, and many others were in a states of fear.

As such, the meditations focussed around this topic, serving both as an admonition about one's inevitable onward journey, as well as a consolation that death was not an end to be feared in its own right.

The *ex tempore* talks, most only 5-10 minutes, were later transcribed and collated by Ustadh Habib Rafiq, and serve as the basis for this short work. Thus one will find the meditations are presented in a conversational, discursive style, with their point (or relationship to the underlying theme) emerging (or being discovered) as the talk itself progressed.

The ten short reflections are presented here as a gift to the believers, that they might find what wisdom there might be to discover.

1

SURA STRUCTURE

Sura Yasin drives towards the end result, it recounts the journey that you are taking, being moved along like you're on a conveyor belt towards your final destination. It is divided up into:

- » An introduction
- » Three parts: the past, the present and the future
- » A conclusion

Part 1: there is an introduction which maybe we'll talk about some other time, but the first major part of the Sura provides a parable of messengers who were sent to a town. Without getting into the details of where the town was, we are thus being reminded about something that happened in the **past**.

So this is a story about these messengers – here, of course, not Prophets but rather the disciples of a Prophet. They are like the sahaba of a Prophet, in this case the disciples or apostles of Isa عليه السلام according to the tafsir works, who came to the town to teach them about tawhid. So that's the first section: it's about reflecting on the past – what happened both to people who disbelieved as

well as to people who believed in that message.

Part 2: the heart or middle of Sura Yasin is about the present, it is about observing and reflecting on the signs of nature that are all around you, and the lessons that you learn from these natural signs. For example:

- » Do you not see the dead earth, how it is revived with the rain it brings forth crops?
- » Do you not see how Allah creates all things?
- » Do you not observe the night and contemplate the way that the daylight is stripped out from the sky and then you are left in darkness?
- » Then you have the sun and the moon – these heavenly signs that you see in the sky.
- » Then you have the human handiwork, the fruit of human endeavour and ingenuity: ships that can float on water and travel across the sea.

Part 3: The third part of the Sura is about the hereafter, where we start hearing about when the trumpet is blown and the dead are resurrected, and then the Day of Judgment, heaven, hell and so forth.

So this Sura deals with the past, the present and the future, that we experience as those who are listening to it. It's a *tanzil*, a sending down; it comes at the hands of a Prophet (*min al-mursalin*) the one who is rightly guided (*'ala sirat mustaqim*). This, then, is revelation – a true word that has come down – about those who pay heed and those who don't. So what are we asked to pay heed to?

- » Our past and the lessons arising from the fate of those who

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came before us

- » The signs that are around us in the present
- » The news we have been given about our future

In other words, Sura Yasin is a revelation about our yesterday, our today, and our tomorrow.

2

AFTERLIFE

One of the reasons this Sura is recited over those who are passing away and for the deceased is to give them a sense of comfort about the next life: that it is indeed coming, that what awaits them is not extinction.

I mentioned that this theme of death and resurrection is something that pervades the whole of the Sura. One of the things that is emphasized is that there are those who lack this awareness of their past (their origin) and therefore of their future (their destination). As such, they only live in the present.

Hence there is this opening analogy of the halter being placed on necks, comparing such heedless people to animals, that comes in the beginning of the Sura. It is premised on the idea that animals live in the moment, that they are instinctual beings.

Allah is saying: we have placed a halter, *we have placed chains, shackling them from the necks up to their chins, so their heads are forced up.* This is the idea that the haltered animal can't turn its head to one side to the other. Additionally, *We have placed a barrier before them and behind them and so blocked their vision.* So

this is the idea that you cannot reflect on the past, because there is a barrier behind you, nor can you reflect on the future, because there is a barrier there too, and you also cannot look around you, and reflect on the signs of nature in the present moment, because there are chains that are fixing you to look in one direction only. As such, all the admonitions and signs in your yesterday, today and tomorrow go un-reflected upon.

Some of the scholars of tafsir say: this idea of their heads are forced up is that this a posture of arrogance. Arrogance is the key here: the person who disbelieves or who refuses to see the signs of Allah—whose heart is dead to their own reality, to the reality of the world in which they live and to the reality of the akhira into which they are going to be born—is blind to the signs that indicate these realities **because** of their arrogance. The halter and the barriers are all formed of a person's arrogance and wilful blindness, and Allah explains that this choice to not see becomes a literal chain around your neck, such that eventually, it's not that you **will** not see, but that you **cannot** see.

Allah talks about this again right at the end of the Sura. Allah says that the same man who has been created from an egg and a sperm is now trying to draw a false analogy, looking at bones that have dried up and turned into dust, and concluding that *none can revive these dead bones*. Allah responds, saying *the one who created them in the first place is the one who will revive them the second time*.

Humans are trying to make an analogy about things that we simply have no knowledge about. This in turn relates back to the analogy at the beginning of the sura about arrogance leading to a refusal to see, which inevitably becomes an inability to see.

So this idea that comes right at the beginning of the Sura—this picture that is drawn for us—of a person who has a wall in front (and so cannot see in the future that awaits), a wall behind them (and so cannot learn the lessons of the past), and are additionally shackled in place (and so that they cannot look about them or take the lessons from their present moment). The root of this is not recognising the limitations of the intellect, and the need for a supra-rational revelation through *one of the Messengers*.

This is uncannily similar to the allegory of Plato's cave, in his work 'The Republic', which talks about something quite similar: people who have lived all their whole lives shackled in place in a dark cave. There is a fire behind them, and they are shackled in such a way that they can only look in front of them. All they can see are their own reflections and silhouettes on the wall, but they can't look around them. They refuse to recognise even the possibility that there is an entire world outside the cave, nor even that they are in a cave, nor even their own realities.

This extended philosophical allegory is expressed in inimitable Quranic style, via dramatic imagery, in two pithy verses in the Quran, with the messengers who are sent from outside the cave to teach the prisoners about reality being the preceding address to the Prophet ﷺ himself (*innaka la-min al-mursalin*), as well as the messengers sent to the town in the subsequent section of the sura. For good measure, the Quranic analogy also expresses the **reason** for their captivity.

This is the idea of wilful blindness that comes from arrogance; Allah is encouraging us to remove that blindness by dealing with what causes it: arrogance, a sense of self satisfaction. What removes the blindness is openness and hearkening to the ayat: the signs of God; the messages of God that are written in the histories

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of humanity and of individuals, the messages written all around you in nature, and the messages about the hereafter found in the Quran and the words of the Truthful Prophet ﷺ.

So the whole point and theme of this Sura is to awaken our hearts to the reality of the hereafter. This is the reason we recite it over those who are passing away and for those who have passed away: it is both a consolation for them, but also for us to remember our own mortality and our own reality.

3

THE SIGNS OF ALLAH

I've mentioned the idea of the structure of Sura Yasin in these three different parts – past, present, future. I've also mentioned briefly, the idea of blindness and sight: seeing the world in terms of the forms and the images that we observe; then seeing the world as an ayah, a sign of Allah – and the tremendous difference there is between these two forms of seeing.

I was recently asked a question by somebody (I'm a psychiatrist, and I see people often with depression and so forth). One of them; a very religious Muslim lady, brings this verse to me:

وَمَنْ أَعْرَضَ عَن ذِكْرِي فَإِنَّ لَهُ مَعِيشَةً ضَنْكًا وَنَحْشُرُهُ يَوْمَ
الْقِيَامَةِ أَعْمَى

(20:124)

Which she translated – and she's someone who had studied the religion – as: *'whoever turns away from my signs or whoever turns away from my remembrance, their life will be depressed'*. She said to me, 'am I depressed because I have turned away from

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the signs of Allah, because I've turned away from God's remembrance, because there's something wrong with my prayer, because I'm not fasting properly or I'm not reading enough Quran or what whatever it happens to be?

I said: 'that's not the meaning of the word *danka*. It means constricted, it doesn't mean depressed'. She says: 'what is it in reference to?' I said: 'what it means is, when you turn away from the remembrance of Allah – which means here, in this verse and in Sura Yasin, turning away from the signs of God that are manifest all around you – then your view of reality is very restricted.

As we mentioned yesterday, it's like you exist only in the present and the near past and future. You're not considering all the history that has come before you, the reality of the world that exists around you, or the reality of the hereafter. So your world view is a very restricted one, because you simply see the world as forms images and events, which have no real rhyme or reason – there's no real purpose, there's no real meaning to it. The universe is a dangerous place, it is a place where bad things happen, or maybe good things do happen, but there's no reason to those things. They just happen. That is a world view and a way of living that is very restricted.

She said: 'no, but that's not what other people have said. Other people have said I'm depressed because I've turned away from God'. I said, 'well, the clue to what I am talking about comes in the second half of the very same verse—*they'll be raised blind on the day of Judgment*.

What does a depressed life have to do with blindness? Compare that to: what does a world view that is so constricted that you can basically only see the nose in front of your face have to

do blindness? They're obviously very closely connected. If your view of the world is such that you only see the world for what it appears to be; if you only see it as the trappings of illusion, being about wealth and family, and events that occur in this life you live: things occur, and then you die. Basically, if that's all you see the world as, then you are blind to its reality. And because you are blind to the reality of the world in this life, you will be raised on the Day of Judgment blind. As you were blind in this life, that will manifest in the next life.

She said: 'but blind to what?' This is where we come back to Sura Yasin. In that second section of Sura Yasin, which talks about the present, what do you find? *Here is a sign for you*, Allah says, *here is a sign for them, here is a sign for them, here is a sign for them*. What Allah is saying is: look around you.

Allah talks about this middle section of Sura Yasin, which is about our present. Remember the first section is about our past, the middle section is about our present, and the final section is about our future, the day of judgment, Heaven and Hell. *There is a sign for them in the lifeless Earth, we have revived it and brought forth from it grains* and so forth. Then a little bit further on: *a sign for them is the night, we strip out the day from it and suddenly they are in darkness*. And a little bit further on: *a sign for them is that we carried their offspring in the laden ship*.

What Allah is saying here is: look at the earth, look at the heavens and then look at your handiwork, the ships that you build. What do you find? Each of these things is a form, an image, a thing, an event. But behind that each is a sign of God. The key is to see them as a sign of God. When you see the things of this world, the events of this world, as signs of Allah, then you find meaning and purpose, to the things that happen to us in this

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life, and the things that we come across in this life, whether in the natural things of this world, like the Earth that is revived, whether in the signs of the heavens, or in the things that we build, like ships to carry us across the sea.

See this world, and the events that occur in it, as communication, because this is what an ayah is: a communication from Allah to creation. From Allah to you, everything that happens to you in your life, is a communication from Allah to you. And to ask yourself the question: 'what is Allah communicating to me?' This is the fundamental question for you to ask, not simply in your worship, in your dhikr and other formal worship, but in your **interaction** with the world and your daily life.

This present life that you are living is a sign from God, your life is an ayah, and the ayah that Allah sends you, the communication that Allah sends you, through this world, through things that happens you in your life, is explained in the Ayat (or verses) of the Quran. The Quran, in this sense, functions as a translation guide; the Book of Allah translates the Book of Nature, of creation, as well as the Book of Destiny into words and meanings that the mind can grasp, contemplate and be transformed by.

4

SIGNS IN THE HEAVENS

We've spoken about the theme of this Sura being beginnings, middles and ends; your past, your present, and your future. You see in verse 22 exactly this:

- » *Why should I worship not the One...* – that's your present.
- » *...Who originated me...* – that's your past.
- » *...And to Whom you all are returned* – that's your future

So in this verse, you see in the microcosm, the message of this Sura. We come from Allah, we are returning to Allah. The period in between that is spent in preparation for the return.

In verse 33, you see something about beginnings. There's the dead earth – of course it isn't, but the earth that is apparently barren, fallow, with nothing is growing on it. Then life emerges from it – there is a suddenness to the appearance of the life, and it brings forth that which nurtures us and everything else.

Book 11 of the *Ihya Ulum al-Din*, which is the book on the etiquettes of eating and drinking, has an intimation of the cyclical nature of life, death and rebirth.

This is the biological carbon cycle, and its relationship to the **metaphysics of eating**: the transformation of light into light through the biology of carbon based life-forms.

The light of the sun enters plants and is converted to food through photosynthesis; it is eaten by animals that break it apart, remake it and store it in their bodies, which are then eaten by humans, where the glucose is split apart in cells and transformed back into energy. When this energy is used for worship of any kind, it is further transformed into metaphysical light which then endures forever. So light becomes light—sunlight becomes nur.

Thereafter the second sign, in verse 37, where we have a series of triplets mentioned. There are three heavenly signs: the day and night, the sun, and the moon. In each of these three things, you see a change:

- » The light is stripped out of the day and it leaves the night and its darkness behind.
- » The sun is rushing towards its destination, which is the place of its setting. Many of you who come from sort of Urdu speaking or Mirpuri speaking families, you know the word taqdir means destiny, but here it means the measuring out, this is God's decree.
- » Then you have one more sign, which is the moon, which also goes through stages through the month, from a new crescent to an old one.

Each of these three signs is about change: ascent, splendour and decline. We know that our lives go through these exact same stages, all of these are mentioned for us to reflect on ourselves. Allah says in verse 36 - Glory be to God, who created all things in pairs, that which comes up from the Earth, within yourselves

and that which you know not.

So we are meant to reflect or to look at what we see outwardly, and reflect on what that means inwardly. As the day turns to night, so youth turns to maturity, maturity turns to old age, old age turns to death, death turns to the hereafter, the hereafter turns to resurrection, the resurrection turns to the life eternal.

The Sun dawns, grows in strength, reaches its fullness at noon, and then slowly declines, and its light becomes less and less, weaker and weaker, until it sets. So too we have a youth, an adulthood, an old age – a birth and a death.

Just as the Moon begins as a crescent that you can barely see, and grows over the course of half a month to a full Moon. Then over the course of another half a month, it declines and declines, until it becomes the diametric opposite of the crescent. The new crescent and the old crescent: so too our life passes through these stages. Allah later on talks about this explicitly: the one who to whom we give old age, we reverse them in their creational form. Note – he reverses us in our *khalq* (our physical form) but not necessarily our *khuluq* (our inward form).

All of these signs – the day and the night, the Sun and the Moon – are perceived over the course of brief stretches of time: 12 hours, 24 hours, and 30 days. But we do not so easily perceive the same changes in ourselves, because they happen over the course of a lifetime. All of these celestial signs are thus ‘sped-up’ indications about the real lesson of this Sura: change, transformation, and then what is constant beyond that. That lesson is this:

- » Just like the Sun is being driven to its destination, we too are rushing towards our place of settling (*mustaqarr*);

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- » Just like the Moon's phases have been determined, clear phases have been determined for our life – birth, youth, maturity, age, death;
- » And just as the light is stripped from the day, leaving only the night, so too our life eventually will be stripped away from us.

Yes, our soul will be stripped away from our bodies, leaving only physical death. But just the light of day endures beyond the horizon of night, lasting forever – just beyond the ken of our physical senses, blocked only by the turning away of the world – so too our souls endure forever beyond physical death.

So this lesson is perhaps the central one to learn in life: don't be like those that were spoken about at the beginning of the Sura, who think that this today is all there is. There is a night that is coming after this day, there is a setting that is coming after this noon, and there is a waning that is coming after this full moon. Don't be bedazzled by the things of this world, whether it is wealth, spouses and children, honor and esteem, because it is the Sunnah of Allah in creation that things are reversed, that there is a time for this and a time for that. So prepare yourselves for what is yet to come.

5

THE SEED OF LOVE

Verse 81 - *is not the one who created Heaven and Earth, capable of creating the like of them? Yes, indeed He is, the All-Creating and the All-Knowing.*

This idea of creation, destruction and recreation – the idea of past, present and future – is something that we have been reflecting on as we have been talking about this Sura. Your yesterday, your today and your tomorrow.

Verse 55 describes the state of the believers in paradise, where Allah says: *the inhabitants of the garden today are busy in joy, they and their azwaj (spouses) reclining on couches.* Then Allah says three things:

- » *For them are fruits therein*
- » *For them is whatever they ask for, and*
- » *Peace! Is a word from a Lord bestowing of mercy.*

Keep that in mind for now—this is the state of the believers in Paradise. Now I want to show you an example of what’s called Quranic concordance or coherence—how a theme or motif is repeated later on and re-emphasised.

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In verse 36, Allah says: *Glory be to God, exalted is He, who created all things in pairs, what the Earth brings forth and of their own selves, and of that which they do not know.*

I'll take you back again – just slightly – to the lifeless land or barren Earth that is brought to life (with the rainfall); from it come seeds from which they eat. We brought forth gardens and foods from them (but not the seeds, of course, which remain in the soil) and rivers flowing forth.

Now in this analogy, the apparently lifeless Earth represents your heart. The grains can represent two things:

- » The seeds are your actions, which are planted in the soil, which then bear their fruit in the hereafter.
- » The qualities, intentions and sincerity from which your actions themselves come forth

They are produced as the gardens of date palms, the grapevines and so forth, and the produce that is then enjoyed.

The word '*habb*' – which is the source of all of this greenery and vegetation – is linguistically linked to the word '*hubb*'. This relationship between '*habb*' (seed) and '*hubb*' (love) gives us some idea about the answer to a question someone had asked the question earlier on: what is love and what is its nature?

There is a clue here in the Arabic word, that '*hubb*' (the word for love) is linked to the word '*habb*' (the word for seed). The idea is that love is the seed that lies at the core, and what that love produce are these actions. Sincerity for God, and other such qualities, produces these beautiful actions, that in turn have their parallel or consequence in the next life. In other words, their produce is observed, witnessed and enjoyed in the next life.

Back to verse 36—Allah created all things in pairs, later on

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Allah says that *they and their spouses*, their azwaj (same word), *reclining on couches, enjoying themselves*. What the Earth germinates, what comes forth from the Earth, that links to when Allah says *they will eat of the fruits*, and then, as Allah describes, *what they themselves call for*, as mentioned; then *what they do not know*, which relates to the next thing Allah says.

You see here that Allah is Glorified because in this world, He brings about these things:

- » Freely given produce from the earth,
- » The work of your own hands, and then
- » What you do not know anything about.

Then in the next world you and your spouses, reclining on your couches, have three delights:

- » The fruits freely given, without even being asked for: which represents your actions that you performed in this world
- » What you ask for: which represents that which is within you, your desires and so forth, that you call for – because they are delights that you can imagine.
- » Then something that is so mysterious and so marvellous and so amazing that you cannot even conceive of it, and that thing, Allah explains in that next part of the Sura:

سَلَامٌ قَوْلًا مِّن رَّبِّ رَحِيمٍ

That thing that God brings forth that you cannot even imagine and you don't even know anything about it—that is the **greeting** from the ineffable, transcendent Lord. Now that is something that truly, *no eye can ever see, no ear can ever hear, and no mind can ever conceive of*.

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So work in this world towards making your actions ‘love’ and ‘seeds’; make your ‘*habba*’ ‘*hubb*’—let the seed of your actions be love, and what it will produce for you in the next world is three-fold:

- » The fruits of your actions,
- » What you desire in your heart
- » That which is so elevated, sublime and ineffably joyful that you cannot even imagine it.

So you can see how something seeded (pun intended!) towards the beginning of the Sura – a trifold worldly blessing attributed to Allah – is harvested (or paid off) towards the end of the Sura with another trifold blessing, but this time an everlasting one. Each set of three relates to:

- » That which is freely given and accessible to one’s imagination
- » That which arises as the result of human endeavour and so also accessible to one’s imagination
- » That which is completely exalted beyond human imagining and ineffable.

This is a subtle example of Quranic concordance or coherence, which is the harmony of the different elements of the Quran as they come together. It all turns on a play on words: **love is a seed.**

6

WAYS OF RETURN

Over the last few nights, we've been discussing how this Sura is about beginnings and ends; yesterdays, today's, and tomorrow's. This is a running theme that goes through the Sura, and is part of the nature of Quranic eloquence.

One of the aspects of Quranic inimitability for those of you who are students of knowledge is its rhetoric. But when we study Quranic rhetoric, we are really applying a Hellenistic theory of rhetoric to the study of the Quran. We are looking at things like metaphor, analogy, similitudes, positioning and so on and so forth.

But there's a whole other scheme of rhetoric, which is Semitic – the rhetoric of the language of the Semitic peoples: Arabic, Akkadian, Hebrew and Aramaic. There are four Semitic languages, of which only one has been in continual usage over the last two thousand years: Arabic.

One of the aspects of Semitic rhetoric is that it is circular; what you find is that the rhetoric works in concentric circles, from small units to large ones, with the same repeating themes.

This is known as coherence or ring structure.

The grand theme of this Sura is the passage of time: where you began, where you are now and where you are headed. There is thus a forward momentum to the Sura. In the introduction, we are told that those who do not listen, there is a barrier behind them, there is a barrier in front of them, and their necks are lifted up. So that's: past (a barrier behind), present (they do not listen), and future (barrier in front). So that's the smallest unit of the Sura's theme.

Then we have the three grand phases of the Sura:

- » The first, talking about the story of the people of the town – this is about learning from the past.
- » The next, which is about the ayat of Allah in the universe around us, the natural world and so forth – this is about learning from the present
- » And then we have the account of death, resurrection, the Day of Judgement and the realm of eternity that follows it – that is about preparing for the future.

Thus your beginning, your middle and your end. You are being driven along towards the inevitability of the conclusion. One of the ways in which this is manifested, is in the very last words of the Sura: *to Him are you being returned* (right now).

إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ

The word means that you are being returned, all of you, O mankind! You are being returned and you will be returned. It has both meanings, and this word comes in different grammatical forms:

تُرْجَعُونَ رَاجِعُونَ يَرْجِعُونَ

All the different versions of رَجَعَ (return) come about seven or eight times through the course of this Sura. This word recurs, and for that word to keep on coming back in such a short Sura is an indication of its importance. It is an indication that Allah is trying to knock a nail in – tap, tap, tap – until it is understood: you are returning now, you are being returned, and you are going to be returned.

We are reminded about that at the very end of this Sura, in terms of these three themes – beginning, middle and end: your past, your present and the inevitable future that is coming to you.

We see this in the beginning of the third last verse of the Sura, where Allah talks about the creation and re-creation of the Heavens and the Earth, then God's nature. *He who created the Heavens and the Earth* (in the past tense), *He is the All-Powerful* (now and forever—present), and *He will re-create the likes of Heaven and Earth* (in the future). So we find the theme recurring again: past, present, future – but this time in relation to Allah.

Then, when *God wishes to create a thing, He says be and it is created*. He created the Heavens and the Earth, *so glory be to Him*, who at this moment in your life, *the utter dominion of all things is His*, and His alone, in the here and now – that's your present.

Then He created you with كُنْ فَيَكُونُ. His is the dominion, including dominion over you, and the dominion of all things is in His Power, right now and إِلَيْهِ تُرْجَعُونَ and to Him will you all be returned – in the future, it is coming. You are returning to Allah, so He is the future that awaits you. This is not just a warning – it is not just full of Jalal, but it is also full of Jamal, it is a promise,

and it is something to be hoped for: the thing that we are rushing towards is not the oblivion of death; it is the return to the One of absolute Beauty and absolute Majesty.

إِنَّا لِلّٰهِ وَإِنَّا إِلَيْهِ رَاجِعُونَ

means this – I have come from absolute perfection, absolute joy and I am returning to absolute perfection and absolute joy. Everything that you experience in between these two perfections, is preparing you for that ultimate return.

How this lesson of the Sura is manifest in the broad strokes of the Sura – O mankind, don't live in the here and now, just as you had a past, just as you live in the present, there is a future that is coming for you. Your future in the material world is unknown to you, and is absent from your perception – you're not present in your future now. It is only an imagined future, although it is a reality in the objective scheme of things. So too, your life after death, which you cannot see and you cannot perceive, is an objective reality that you will come to know.

This, by the way, for those of you studying religious studies, is called the Eschatological Proof of God. The proof of God that you will grasp when you experience it, which is the next life.

So you can see here the main theme is propounded in the broad structure of the Sura, but then exactly the same lesson is repeated at a micro-level in one or two verses, or even in a few words. This is an example of how Quranic Semitic rhetoric, or ring structure, works.

7

A SINGLE SHOUT

As we're going through the Sura - I want to just draw your attention to something else, something that recurs frequently. We spoke about رَاجِعُونَ yesterday, today I want to talk about the صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً. We've spoken about the idea that this Sura has three parts to it:

- » the first dealing with the people of the city
- » the second dealing with the ayat of Allah in the Heavens and the Earth
- » and the third dealing with the Day of Judgment.

In each of these three parts we have a mention of the single shout:

إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً

In the first part, Allah says that when the time came for the destined and decreed destruction of the people who had rejected this message and had killed not the three messengers that came to them from God, but rather one of their own people, an innocent who only wanted what was in their own best interests and

they had slain him for it. Allah says: *We did not send down an army from the Heavens. That's not how I do things. There was but a single shout, then they were extinct, Alas for these humans.*

... وَمَا كُنَّا مُنْزِلِينَ
إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ خَامِدُونَ
يَا حَسْرَةً عَلَى الْعِبَادِ ...

In the second section (verse 48), again we are faced with rejection, and here the disbelievers are talking to the believers:

وَيَقُولُونَ مَتَى هَذَا الْوَعْدُ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ
When they say—so when is this promise of yours going to come if you are indeed truthful?

مَا يَنْظُرُونَ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً تَأْخُذُهُمْ وَهُمْ يَخِصِّمُونَ
All they can expect is a single shout, that will take them away while they are still in dispute.

In the third section: about the Day of Judgment, what does Allah have to say here:

إِنْ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَإِذَا هُمْ جَمِيعٌ لَدَيْنَا مُحْضَرُونَ
There was just a single shout and suddenly they were all present before Us.

Three mentions of this single shout:

- » One in relation to the people of the past
- » One in relation to the people of the present

» One in relation to all of us: the inhabitants of the grave.

The idea here is about the suddenness of the change of circumstance, how quickly one's situation can change. This is something that we need to be aware of in our lives, not to get too comfortable in our current circumstances because circumstances can change very quickly.

One of the reasons it's recommended to recite this Sura every day in the morning is that it is a reminder for us about the fragility of life and how quickly our life can turn to death, how quickly our death will turn to resurrection, but also how quickly our circumstances can change and so that we are prepared at every moment.

The Prophet ﷺ used to say: '*pray as though this is the last prayer you will ever perform*', and '*the believer is one who wakes up every morning and has no certitude that they will reach the evening and who goes to sleep in the evening with no certitude that they will reach the morning*'.

We should be prepared at any moment for that call to come for our Lord to take us away, because if you live your life prepared, then your death will be made easy for you. It won't come as a surprise to you when the Angel of death places his hand on your shoulder and says 'you ready?' because then you will not say: 'O Allah, give me one more minute, give me one more hour, I will go and do some righteous deeds', you will say: 'I'm ready, let's go'.

We will say like the Prophet ﷺ said at the moment of his departure, when the Angel of death – and the only person who has ever been asked permission for his soul to be taken, is the Prophet ﷺ – the Angel of death comes to him and says, 'Ya Rasulallah

Sura Yasin as a Meditation on Time

ﷺ, I have been sent by Allah, I seek your permission to remove your soul. But if you desire, I will not take your soul and you can live on the Earth for eternity, you can live on the Earth until the end of time.' The Prophet's ﷺ response – and these are his very last words – 'I go now to the Friend Supreme, I go now to the Beloved on high.

Let this be our closing sentiment, that when that صِيْحَةً وَّاحِدَةً comes for us we say, 'O Allah! To You. I choose You.'

8

THE THREE MESSENGERS

وَاضْرِبْ لَهُم مَّثَلًا أَصْحَابَ الْقَرْيَةِ إِذْ جَاءَهَا الْمُرْسَلُونَ

Narrate unto them the story of the people of the townsfolk, to whom messengers were sent, we sent two and then strengthened them with a third, and they said, 'verily we are messengers unto you'.

There is a deep spiritual allegory here – although this is an actual story which relates (according to most accounts) to the town of Antakya in south eastern Turkey, to whom disciples of Jesus were sent. That's the historical, what is called the historical tafsir.

As the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have said: 'every verse of Quran has an outer, an inner, a boundary and a horizon' (or a place of rising). This is sometimes understood as each verse having a historical, analogical, moral and experiential mode.

This too applies here, and the allegory here is founded on the fact that the people of the town is us, it's your **self**. So when Allah says: We sent unto the people of the town – this is about you! It's about your heart. Allah sends messengers to the heart; there are

two types of messengers sent to everybody, and then they are strengthened with the third:

The first type of message that God sends – is called the ‘*ayat Allah al-manzur*’. The signs of Allah that are witnessed in the creation, all around you. We’ve mentioned much about this in previous days and so forth. But the signs of God that are witnessed in creation, sometimes called *kalam Allah al-manzur*—the speech of God or the communication of Allah to you that is perceived with the senses.

The second is the ‘*kalam/ayat Allah al-maqdur*’ the signs of God or the Speech of God that comes through the things that happen to you in your life. This happens because human beings are meaning-seekers, we look for the meaning: why did this happen? The reason that we look for that is that Allah has granted us the faculty to reflect on our own life experiences and take that as an ayah of Him, as a sign pointing to Allah. This is called the ‘*ayat Allah al-maqdur*’.

So ‘*ayat Allah al-manzur*’—the signs of God that are witnessed in the external creation, and ‘*ayat Allah al-maqdur*’—the signs of Allah that are witnessed in your own life, in your responses to the events that occur in your life. To put that another way: space and time.

And then, *We strengthened them with a third messenger*. This is the ‘*kalam/ayat Allah al-mastur*’—the signs of Allah that are written on the page. That is to say, the Revelation that comes through the Prophets, that’s the strengthening (and explication) of the other two forms of Divine communication. All human beings are addressed by Allah, from the moment of our birth – or at least from the moment that we become aware and able to make

these sorts of judgments. So here, then, are the messengers sent from Allah to every single human:

The signs of Allah witnessed in the creation around us – the book of nature – His power, beauty and design that are manifest all around us and teach us about his attributes

The signs of Allah that are written in our own lives, the meaning that we find to things that happen in our lives – the book of destiny – His design for us, His raising and lowering of us, and so forth.

But then Allah recognizes this is not sufficient and so He strengthens these messengers with the third: the Revelation – this is the Prophet ﷺ, the Quran, the Sunnah that he brought. This is the third of the Revelations, the clearest of all of them that comes to us, that comes to human beings.

It is this third messenger that clarifies the way to read the other two signs and messengers: it serves as a rosetta stone, allowing us to translate what we witness and experience into the communication (or ayat) from Allah to us. This is the overwhelming proof (hujjat Allah al-baligha), which is an alternative reading of this verse: *We overwhelmed them with the third* (wa azaz-nahum rather than wa azzaz-nahum).

It is the Divine Revelation through the Beloved Herald ﷺ that clinches the argument and completes the communication – “what you see and experience has a deeper significance, and this is what that meaning is...”

So these three come and then we have two opposing forces:

We have those who say: you are just but people like us, there's nothing there, Allah has not revealed anything, etc. This is the 'nafs al-shaytan' – the response the human being has which urges

to evil, the response that says, 'I don't accept any of this, this is nothing, it doesn't mean anything, it's all coincidence, the world came about by itself, there's nothing mysterious or miraculous about it. It's all science, it's all physics and what not' (although physics is pretty miraculous!). This response denies the revelation and all the messengers; it causes you to see and experience things only at a superficial level – there is no meaning, purpose or lesson in any of it.

Then you have the other opposing side of that. Remember that you are the town; there are people in the town that are saying 'no, no!'; and then there is someone in the town saying 'yes, yes! *O my people follow these messengers that have come to you.* That is your 'nafs al-Rahman' – the angelic whisper that consoles and inspires the search for the hidden truth.

So the human being, then, when these three messengers are sent to you, you have the 'people of the town' that will reject – that is your inward devil – and the people of the town that will accept – that is your inward angel. Whichever one of those you hearken to will determine your destiny.

9

A WOLF IN SHEEP'S
CLOTHING

أَلَمْ أَعْهَدْ إِلَيْكُمْ يَا بَنِي آدَمَ أَنْ لَا تَعْبُدُوا الشَّيْطَانَ إِنَّهُ
لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

Did I not covenant with you, O children of Adam, that you shall not worship the devil? Indeed for you he is an evident enemy – this notion of ‘worship of the shaytan’ does not mean satanism, doesn’t mean you’re going to become a Satanist. What it means here is following that inner voice that commands to evil—the ‘nafs al-shaytan’, so following in the footsteps of the devilish whisper.

This message is one of the rare times in the Quran when the Bani Adam are addressed. We are therefore reminded about Adam and his story (upon him peace). When Allah talks about not following in the footsteps of the devil, not worshiping the devil, He says, ‘O Bani Adam’, not, ‘O mankind’, not ‘O believers’, but ‘O children of Adam, did I not take a covenant with you that

you would not worship the shaytan, you would not follow in the footsteps of the shaytan. Why?

إِنَّهُ لَكُمْ عَدُوٌّ مُّبِينٌ

He is a manifest enemy to you.

Allah says he is an enemy; when he is warning us about shaytan, he says he is an enemy to you. Why does Allah need to keep reminding us the shaytan is an enemy to us? Because the shaytan is an enemy that cloaks himself in the guise of a friend. For those of you of a Shakespearean bent, he is basically the character Iago in Othello; he says to Adam and Eve, *I am your sincere advisor*.

The story of Adam (a) comes several times in the Quran; certain different aspects are revealed at different points, but bear in mind, the very first story in the Quran – the first story of the Prophets that comes in the Quran right at the very beginning – is the story of the creation of Adam (a), his honoring and then the leading astray by the Shaytan, Prophet Adam's tawba and the acceptance of his tawba.

Why? Because right in the beginning of the Quran, Allah is addressing mankind, and all of us are in the image of Adam; so this is a story that is directly relevant to every single one of us. Why? Because the shaytan comes as an enemy in the guise of a friend and this is why Allah tells us, be careful, he is your enemy. Where is he located? In your mind, in your heart.

One of the mistakes that we often make is that we self-justify; we make justifications for the wrongs that we do, we make justifications for a comfortable blindness, and this is something we need to be aware of and Allah reminds us about this in this story. The theme of the story is about the inevitability of the future that

is coming to meet you. Even if you are walking backwards, but the future is still coming to meet you, the moment of your death, your afterlife, it's still coming.

This is the fundamental lesson of the Sura, one of the reasons for our blindness is exactly this. Allah tells us that he has led many astray. What is the cure to this?

وَأَنْ اعْبُدُونِي

Focus yourself on your worship to Allah, on being aware of the ayat, the signs of Allah in existence.

هَذَا صِرَاطٌ مُسْتَقِيمٌ

This is the straight path, as it was true for our eldest forefather, so too it is true for all of us, and just as when Adam and Eve were led astray, they turned to Allah seeking forgiveness and Allah turned towards them in repentance. Which is the end of that first story, the first version of Adam's (a) story, if you like, that comes in Sura Baqarah. So too it is true for us: that you if make a mistake, acknowledge it, recognize it and turn to Allah in repentance Allah will forgive you.

10

AN ADDRESS TO THE PROPHET ﷺ

فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ إِنَّا نَعْلَمُ مَا يُسِرُّونَ وَمَا يُعْلِنُونَ

This is a direct address in the Sura – Allah has been addressing us, He has addressed Bani Adam, as we mentioned previously, He has mentioned mankind in general, the believers and so forth. Here, Allah says: Do not let their words grieve you – here He is talking about the Prophet ﷺ. It is the practice of some of the scholars of Damascus, when they are reciting Sura Yasin and they reach

فَلَا يَحْزُنكَ قَوْلُهُمْ

then say ‘peace and blessings upon you’. Let not their speech grieve you, may God’s peace and blessings be upon you, because it is an address to the Prophet ﷺ.

This address is an echo of the address that occurred right at the beginning of the Sura:

WinterSpring Mawlid Reflections

Ya-Sin. By the all-wise Recital. You are indeed of the Messenger. Upon a straight path. Bestowed on high by the Almighty, the Merciful...

Many scholars say Ya-Sin is a direct address to the Prophet ﷺ. Some say it stands for Ya Sayyidul Bashir (O master of mankind). According to these ulema, the Ya is for addressing here.

The Prophet ﷺ is thus addressed at both the beginning and end of Sura Yasin. This entire Sura, therefore, is revealed to us as a communication between Allah and his Prophet ﷺ. Allah begins the Sura by talking to the Prophet ﷺ and ends the Sura by talking to him ﷺ.

At the beginning of the Sura, Allah gives a clarion call – he addresses the Prophet ﷺ with this honorific Ya-Sin, and He affirms that he is indeed one of these Messengers that are on the straight path. The end of the Sura, He is saying, O my beloved, let not the speech of the disbelievers grieve you. Why does the speech of the disbelievers grieve the Prophet ﷺ? Because he is personally hurt? No, because they have not accepted the message, and therefore they have bound themselves to their fate.

The mockery of the disbelievers did not provoke anger, it provoked pity, it moved his heart to sorrow – not sorrow for himself, but sorrow for the disbelievers. Why? Because he is their master. He is the master of mankind.

The greatest oath that Allah takes, Allah swears by the Quran. He says: by this Quran, indeed truly, you are a messenger, on a straight path, with a revelation bestowed by one who is all-Mighty and all-Merciful. The Prophet ﷺ personifies these attributes of Allah – Aziz: he is mighty, but also precious (both are a meaning of Aziz) and he is filled with mercy, he is Raheem.

Sura Yasin as a Meditation on Time

Allah is Aziz and Raheem – the Prophet ﷺ reflects these attributes and manifests these attributes of Allah, because of that, the Prophet ﷺ heart is filled with grief, for those that have not accepted the message.

This is the Sunnah that we should hold to especially in these times. When we see the Prophet's message – not just being ignored, but humiliated – the Prophet ﷺ being defamed and mischaracterised. What should our response be? Yes we have lots of feelings in our heart, and I understand all of those feelings. But the feeling of the Prophet ﷺ when this happened to him was the feeling of pity. Remember always that the heart of the Prophet ﷺ was moved to pity and mercy, not to rage and hatred.

So the whole Sura is an address to the Prophet ﷺ, it's an announcement of his Prophethood, and it's a consolation to the heart of the Prophet ﷺ when he is faced with rejection, seeing those he loves move away from the message. And his response is one of mercy and pity. May Allah take us to that stage. We feel how we feel because of the love we have of the Beloved Prophet ﷺ—what should we have an ambition to feel—pity.



THE WINTERSPRING MAWLIDS

The Winterspring Mawlid is a twelve night celebration of the advent of the Beloved Prophet ﷺ inspired by the twelve night gatherings of remembrance of Hazrat Ghulam Muhyi al-Din Kazi Chishti Habibi of Durban, South Africa. They have been running since 2010 in Birmingham, UK, under the supervision of Shaykh Dr Asim Yusuf, and regularly attract hundreds of men, women and children who attend to celebrate their love of the Most Blessed Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

They comprise recitations of the Qasida Burda and other qasidas, as well as a communal dhikr of the Names of the Prophet ﷺ, the recitation of the only original traditional Mawlid work in English—the Soliloquy of the Full Moon—as well as talks by scholars around a particular theme related to the history, character or relationship with the Prophet ﷺ. Additionally, there is a collective recitation of Sura Yasin at the outset, on the basis of which this series of ex tempore reflections were given.