

SURAH AS A STORY



Surah Al-An'am

The Cattle

The complete journey — revealed in a single night —
told the way a loving elder shares it with a child



Surah No. 6 • 165 Ayahs • Meccan

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The Surah at a Glance

Kataba 'alaa Nafsihir-rahmah

12. He has decreed upon Himself mercy.

*Wa 'indahoo mafaatihul-ghaybi laa ya'lamuhaaa
illaa Hoo*

59. And with Him are the keys of the unseen; none
knows them except Him.

*Wa maa min daaabbatin fil-ardi wa laa
taaa'iriny-yateeru bijanaahayhi illaaa umamun
amsaalukum*

38. And there is no creature on earth or bird that flies
with its wings but that they are communities like you.

*Qul innanee hadaanee Rabbeee ilaa
Siraatim-Mustaqeem*

161. Say: indeed, my Lord has guided me to a straight
path.

*Qul inna Salaatee wa nusukee wa mahyaaya wa
mamaatee lillaahi Rabbil-'aalameen*

162. Say: indeed, my prayer, my rites of sacrifice, my
living and my dying are for Allah, Lord of the worlds.

Man jaaa'a bilhasanati falahoo 'ashru amsaalihaa



160. Whoever comes with a good deed will have ten times the like thereof.

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Revealed in a Single Night

Beta, there is something you should know about this surah before we begin. The reports relate that it was revealed all at once, in a single night, escorted by a great many angels who filled the horizon with their glorification.

And most of the Quran came down in pieces over twenty-three years, responding to events. This one arrived whole.

And when you read it, you understand why. This surah is one sustained argument for tawheed — the oneness of Allah — from beginning to end. It is not a set of rulings; it is the foundation everything else stands on. And a foundation is poured in one go.



'AL-HAMDU LILLAHIL-LAZI KHALAQAS-SAMAWATI
WAL-ARDA WA JA'ALAZ-ZULUMATI WAN-NOOR —
PRAISE TO ALLAH, WHO CREATED THE HEAVENS AND
THE EARTH AND MADE THE DARKNESSES AND THE
LIGHT — THUMMAL-LAZINA KAFAROO BI-RABBIHIM
YA'DILOON — THEN THOSE WHO DISBELIEVE
EQUATE OTHERS WITH THEIR LORD.'

Beta, note the word 'thumma' — THEN. He created all of
this... and THEN they set up rivals to Him. The word
carries a sense of astonishment.

'HUWAL-LAZI KHALAQAKUM MIN TEENIN THUMMA
QADA AJALAN WA AJALUN MUSAMMAN 'INDAH — it
is He who created you from clay and then decreed a
term, and a specified term is with Him — THUMMA
ANTUM TAMTAROON — then you are in dispute.'

And then the surah asks them to look at history: 'A LAM
YARAW KAM AHLAKNA MIN QABLIHIM MIN QARNIN
MAKKANNAHUM FIL-ARDI MA LAM NUMAKKIN
LAKUM — have they not seen how many generations



We destroyed before them, whom We had established upon the earth AS WE HAVE NOT ESTABLISHED YOU?'

Beta, that is a humbling line for every confident civilisation: peoples were given more than you have, and they are gone.

And then, beta, one of the most extraordinary statements in the entire Quran about Allah Himself:

'QUL LI-MAN MA FIS-SAMAWATI WAL-ARD — SAY: TO WHOM BELONGS WHATEVER IS IN THE HEAVENS AND EARTH? — QUL LILLAH — SAY: TO ALLAH — KATABA 'ALA NAFSIHIR-RAHMAH — HE HAS DECREED UPON HIMSELF MERCY.'

Beta, stop here. 'Kataba 'ala Nafsihir-rahmah' — He has WRITTEN UPON HIMSELF mercy.

Nobody can impose an obligation on Allah. Nothing outside Him can require anything of Him. And yet He took mercy and made it binding on Himself, by His own choice.



Beta, the Prophet ﷺ told us that when Allah created the creation, He wrote in a book with Him, above the Throne: My mercy prevails over My anger.

So when you come back to Him after a long absence, you are not appealing to a reluctant judge. You are appealing to One who committed Himself to mercy before you existed.

Communities Like You

The surah then addresses the demands for miracles, beta, and gives a striking answer: even if a written book came down on paper that they could touch with their hands, they would say it was magic. The problem was never evidence.

'WA MA MINNA ILLA LAHU MAQAMUN MA'LOOM' — and then a description of the deniers on the Day they see the truth: 'YA LAYTANA NURADDU WA LA NUKAZZIBA BI-AYATI RABBINA — OH, IF ONLY WE COULD BE RETURNED, AND WE WOULD NOT DENY THE SIGNS OF OUR LORD.' And Allah's comment: 'WA LAW



RUDDOO LA-'ADOO LIMA NUHOO 'ANH — BUT IF THEY WERE RETURNED, THEY WOULD RETURN TO EXACTLY WHAT THEY WERE FORBIDDEN.'

Beta, that is an honest verdict on human nature. The regret is real in the moment; the change usually is not.

And then, beta, an ayah that will change how you look at every living thing:

'WA MA MIN DABBATIN FIL-ARDI WA LA TA'IRIN YATEERU BI-JANAHAYHI ILLA UMAMUN AMTHALUKUM — AND THERE IS NO CREATURE ON THE EARTH, NOR A BIRD THAT FLIES WITH ITS TWO WINGS, EXCEPT THAT THEY ARE COMMUNITIES LIKE YOU — MA FARRATNA FIL-KITABI MIN SHAY' — WE HAVE NOT NEGLECTED IN THE REGISTER A THING — THUMMA ILA RABBIHIM YUHSHAROON — THEN UNTO THEIR LORD THEY WILL BE GATHERED.'

Beta, 'umamun amthalukum' — NATIONS LIKE YOU. Every species is a community, with its own order, its own way of living, its own provision — and its own



gathering before its Lord.

Beta, this ayah alone should make a believer gentle with animals. They are not scenery. They are nations, and they will be gathered.

And note: 'ma farratna fil-kitabi min shay' — nothing has been left out.

'WA LAW SHA'ALLAHU LA-JAMA'AHUM 'ALAL-HUDA FA-LA TAKOONANNA MINAL-JAHILEEN — and if Allah had willed, He would have gathered them all upon guidance, so never be of the ignorant.'

'INNAMA YASTAJEEBUL-LAZINA YASMA'OON — ONLY THOSE WHO HEAR WILL RESPOND — WAL-MAWTA YAB'ATHU HUMULLAH — but the dead — Allah will resurrect them.'

Beta, note the terrible categorisation: those who do not respond are described as the DEAD. Hearing without responding is a kind of death.

The Keys of the Unseen



And now, beta, one of the most famous ayahs of the Quran:

'WA 'INDAHU MAFATIHUL-GHAYBI LA YA'LAMUHA
ILLA HU — AND WITH HIM ARE THE KEYS OF THE
UNSEEN; NONE KNOWS THEM EXCEPT HIM.'

'WA YA'LAMU MA FIL-BARRI WAL-BAHR — AND HE
KNOWS WHAT IS ON THE LAND AND IN THE SEA —
WA MA TASQUTU MIN WARAQATIN ILLA
YA'LAMUHA — NOT A LEAF FALLS BUT THAT HE
KNOWS IT — WA LA HABBATIN FEE
ZULUMATIL-ARDI WA LA RATBIN WA LA YABISIN
ILLA FEE KITABIN MUBEEN — AND NO GRAIN IS
THERE WITHIN THE DARKNESSES OF THE EARTH,
AND NO MOIST OR DRY THING, BUT THAT IT IS IN A
CLEAR RECORD.'

Beta, sit with the scale of this. Every leaf that has ever
detached from a branch, anywhere on earth, in any
century, in any forest no human has walked through —
He knew it as it fell.



Every seed lying in the dark under the soil. Every wet thing and every dry thing.

Beta, and this is not offered to frighten you. It is offered as comfort. Because if He knows a leaf falling in an empty forest, then He knows exactly what is happening to you. Your situation has not slipped past Him. Your effort has not gone unrecorded. Your pain is not unwitnessed.

And then, beta, an ayah about sleep that few people notice:

'WA HUWAL-LAZI YATAWAFFAKUM BIL-LAYLI WA YA'LAMU MA JARAHTUM BIN-NAHARI THUMMA YAB'ATHUKUM FEEHI LI-YUQDA AJALUN MUSAMMA — AND IT IS HE WHO TAKES YOUR SOULS BY NIGHT AND KNOWS WHAT YOU HAVE COMMITTED BY DAY, THEN HE RAISES YOU UP AGAIN THEREIN, THAT A SPECIFIED TERM MAY BE FULFILLED.'

Beta, every night you die a small death and are returned. Sleep is a rehearsal, and waking is a small resurrection.



That is why the du'a on waking is: praise to Allah who gave us life after He caused us to die, and to Him is the resurrection.

'WA HUWAL-QAHIRU FAWQA 'IBADIHI WA YURSILU 'ALAYKUM HAFAZAH — and He is the Subjugator over His servants, and He sends over you guardian angels.'

Ibrahim and the Night Sky

And now, beta, one of the most beautiful passages in the Quran — the young Ibrahim (alaihis salam) reasoning his way to his Lord, in front of a people who worshipped the heavens.

'FA-LAMMA JANNA 'ALAYHIL-LAYLU RA'A KAWKABAN QALA HAZA RABBEE — SO WHEN THE NIGHT COVERED HIM, HE SAW A STAR. HE SAID: THIS IS MY LORD — FA-LAMMA AFALA QALA LA UHIBBUL-AFILEEN — BUT WHEN IT SET, HE SAID: I DO NOT LOVE THOSE THAT SET.'



'FA-LAMMA RA'AL-QAMARA BAZIGHAN QALA HAZA RABBEE — and when he saw the moon rising, he said: this is my Lord — FA-LAMMA AFALA QALA LA'IN LAM YAHDINEE RABBEE LA-AKONANNA MINAL-QAWMID-DALLEEN — but when it set, he said: IF MY LORD DOES NOT GUIDE ME, I WILL SURELY BE AMONG THE PEOPLE WHO WENT ASTRAY.'

'FA-LAMMA RA'ASH-SHAMSA BAZIGHATAN QALA HAZA RABBEE HAZA AKBAR — and when he saw the sun rising, he said: this is my Lord; THIS IS GREATER — FA-LAMMA AFALAT QALA YA QAWMI INNI BAREE'UN MIMMA TUSHRIKON — but when it set, he said: O MY PEOPLE, I AM FREE OF WHAT YOU ASSOCIATE WITH ALLAH.'

'INNI WAJJAHTU WAJHIYA LILLAZI FATARAS-SAMAWATI WAL-ARDA HANEEFAN WA MA ANA MINAL-MUSHRIKEEN — INDEED, I HAVE TURNED MY FACE TOWARD HE WHO CREATED THE HEAVENS AND THE EARTH, INCLINING TOWARD TRUTH, AND I AM NOT OF THOSE WHO ASSOCIATE



OTHERS WITH ALLAH.'

Beta, understand what he was doing. The scholars explain that he was not genuinely uncertain — he was teaching his people by walking them through their own logic, step by step, until it collapsed in their hands.

And look at his method. He did not begin by insulting their gods. He said: all right — let us take the brightest thing in your sky. And then he waited for it to SET.

'LA UHIBBUL-AFILEEN' — I DO NOT LOVE THOSE THAT SET.

Beta, that is a principle for your whole life, far beyond stars. Anything that sets is not worth attaching your heart to. Beauty sets. Strength sets. Wealth sets. Status sets. People set — every single one of them, including those you love most.

Attach your heart to the One who does not set.

And his people argued with him, and Allah said: 'WA
TILKA HUJJATUNA ATAYNAHA IBRAHEEMA 'ALA



QAWMIHI — AND THAT WAS OUR ARGUMENT
WHICH WE GAVE IBRAHIM AGAINST HIS PEOPLE —
NARFA'U DARAJATIN MAN NASHA' — WE RAISE IN
DEGREES WHOM WE WILL.'

Beta, note: even the ARGUMENT was given to him. His reasoning was itself a gift.

The surah then lists eighteen prophets by name —
Ishaq, Ya'qub, Nuh, Dawud, Sulayman, Ayyub, Yusuf,
Musa, Harun, Zakariyya, Yahya, 'Isa, Ilyas, Isma'il,
Al-Yasa', Yunus, Lut — and says of them:
'ULA'IKAL-LAZINA HADALLAHU
FA-BI-HUDAHUMUQ-TADIH — THOSE ARE THE ONES
WHOM ALLAH HAS GUIDED, SO FOLLOW THEIR
GUIDANCE.'

Do Not Insult Their Gods

The surah then gives a rule of engagement, beta, that shows the wisdom of this deen:



'WA LA TASUBBUL-LAZINA YAD'OONA MIN
DOONILLAHI FA-YASUBBULLAHA 'ADWAN BI-GHAYRI
'ILM — AND DO NOT INSULT THOSE THEY INVOKE
OTHER THAN ALLAH, LEST THEY INSULT ALLAH IN
ENMITY WITHOUT KNOWLEDGE.'

Beta, read that carefully. Their idols were false —
completely, obviously false. And still the believers were
forbidden from abusing them.

Why? Because the predictable result is that they abuse
Allah in return. And you will have caused it.

Beta, this is a principle of enormous practical value.
Before you say the cutting thing — even the TRUE
cutting thing — ask what it will produce. Winning an
exchange and causing more harm is not a victory.

'KAZALIKA ZAYYANNA LI-KULLI UMMATIN
'AMALAHUM — thus We have made pleasing to every
community their deeds — THUMMA ILA RABBIHIM
MARJI'UHUM FA-YUNABBI'UHUM BIMA KANOO
YA'MALOON — then to their Lord is their return, and



He will inform them about what they used to do.'

The surah then exposes the practices they had invented — dedicating portions of crops and cattle to their idols, forbidding certain animals, and worst of all: 'WA KAZALIKA ZAYYANA LI-KATHEERIN MINAL-MUSHRIKEENA QATLA AWLADIHIM SHURAKA'UHUM — and thus have their partners made pleasing to many of the polytheists THE KILLING OF THEIR CHILDREN.'

Beta, this is where the surah gets its name — 'al-An'am', the cattle — because so much of their invented religion was about which animals were permitted and which were forbidden, while they buried their daughters alive.

Beta, that is what happens when people make their own religion: they become extremely strict about small invented things and lose sight of enormous real ones.

'QAD KHASIRAL-LAZINA QATALOO AWLADAHUM SAFAHAN BI-GHAYRI 'ILM — those have lost who killed their children in foolishness without knowledge.'



The Ten Commandments of the Quran

And now, beta, we come to the summit of this surah — three ayahs that scholars have described as the commandments that were in every scripture, and which the Prophet ﷺ is reported to have pointed to as bearing his seal.

'QUL TA'ALAW ATLU MA HARRAMA RABBUKUM 'ALAYKUM — SAY: COME, I WILL RECITE WHAT YOUR LORD HAS PROHIBITED TO YOU.'

ONE — 'ALLA TUSHRIKOO BIHI SHAY'A — that you not associate anything with Him.

TWO — 'WA BIL-WALIDAYNI IHSANA — and to parents, GOOD TREATMENT.' Beta, again — the second item in the list, immediately after tawheed.

THREE — 'WA LA TAQTULOO AWLADAKUM MIN IMLAQIN — NAHNU NARZUQUKUM WA IYYAHUM — and do not kill your children out of poverty; WE PROVIDE FOR YOU AND FOR THEM.'



Beta, notice the order of provision here compared to Surah al-Isra. There, where the fear was FUTURE poverty, it said 'We provide for THEM and for you'. Here, where the poverty is PRESENT, it says 'We provide for YOU and for them'. The Quran addresses the exact fear in each case.

FOUR — 'WA LA TAQRABUL-FAWAHISHA MA ZAHARA MINHA WA MA BATAN — and do not approach immoralities, what is APPARENT of them and what is CONCEALED.'

Beta, note: the hidden ones are named too. The sin nobody sees is on the same list.

FIVE — 'WA LA TAQTULUN-NAFSAL-LATI HARRAMALLAHU ILLA BIL-HAQQ — and do not kill the soul which Allah has forbidden, except by right.'

'ZALIKUM WASSAKUM BIHI LA'ALLAKUM TA'QILOON — this He has instructed you that you may USE REASON.'



SIX — 'WA LA TAQRABOO MALAL-YATEEMI ILLA BILLATI HIYA AHSANU HATTA YABLUGHA ASHUDDAH — and do not approach the orphan's property except in the way that is best, until he reaches maturity.'

SEVEN — 'WA AWFUL-KAYLA WAL-MEEZANA BIL-QIST — and give full measure and weight in justice.'

And then, beta, a mercy inserted into the middle of the commandments: 'LA NUKALLIFU NAFSAN ILLA WUS'AHA — WE DO NOT CHARGE ANY SOUL EXCEPT WITH THAT WITHIN ITS CAPACITY.'

Beta, that clause is placed right after the command about weights and measures — because a merchant might fear that a tiny unintended error would ruin him. And Allah says: you are only held to what you can manage.

EIGHT — 'WA IZA QULTUM FA'DILOO WA LAW KANA ZA QURBA — AND WHEN YOU SPEAK, BE JUST, EVEN IF IT CONCERNS A NEAR RELATIVE.'



Beta, this one is neglected constantly. Justice in SPEECH — in what you say about people, in whose side you take, in how you report a dispute. And specifically: even when it is your own family, your own community, your own side.

NINE — 'WA BI-'AHDILLAHI AWFOO — and fulfil the covenant of Allah.'

'ZALIKUM WASSAKUM BIHI LA'ALLAKUM TAZAKKAROON — this He has instructed you that you may REMEMBER.'

TEN — 'WA ANNA HAZA SIRATEE MUSTAQEEMAN FATTABI'OOH — AND THIS IS MY PATH, WHICH IS STRAIGHT, SO FOLLOW IT — WA LA TATTABI'US-SUBULA FA-TAFARRAQA BIKUM 'AN SABEELIH — AND DO NOT FOLLOW OTHER WAYS, FOR THEY WILL SEPARATE YOU FROM HIS WAY.'

Beta, it is reported that the Prophet ﷺ drew a straight line in the sand and said: this is the path of Allah. And then he drew lines branching off from both sides and



said: these are other paths, and upon each of them is a devil calling to it. And then he recited this ayah.

Beta, note the grammar: the straight way is SINGULAR — 'sirati mustaqeeman'. The others are PLURAL — 'as-subul'. One road, many exits.

My Prayer, My Living, My Dying

And now, beta, the surah closes with some of the most complete ayahs in the Quran.

'MAN JA'A BIL-HASANATI FA-LAHU 'ASHRU AMTHALIHA — WHOEVER COMES WITH A GOOD DEED WILL HAVE TEN TIMES THE LIKE THEREOF — WA MAN JA'A BIS-SAYYI'ATI FA-LA YUJZA ILLA MITHLAHA — AND WHOEVER COMES WITH AN EVIL DEED WILL NOT BE RECOMPENSED EXCEPT THE LIKE OF IT — WA HUM LA YUZLAMUON — AND THEY WILL NOT BE WRONGED.'

Beta, look at the arithmetic of your Lord. One good deed is multiplied by ten — and in other texts, up to seven



hundred and beyond. One bad deed is counted as exactly one.

Beta, this is the mathematics of mercy. If it were even — one for one — most of us would be in serious trouble. But at ten to one, a person who does even a modest amount of good has hope.

'QUL INNANI HADANEE RABBEE ILA SIRATIN MUSTAQEEMIN DEENAN QIYAMAN MILLATA IBRAHEEMA HANEEFA — say: my Lord has guided me to a straight path — a correct religion, the way of Ibrahim, inclining to truth — WA MA KANA MINAL-MUSHRIKEEN.'

And then the ayah that a Muslim should carry as his personal declaration, beta:

'QUL INNA SALATEE WA NUSUKEE WA MAHYAYA WA MAMATEE LILLAHI RABBIL-'ALAMEEN — SAY: INDEED, MY PRAYER, MY RITES OF SACRIFICE, MY LIVING AND MY DYING ARE FOR ALLAH, LORD OF THE WORLDS — LA SHAREEKA LAH — NO PARTNER HAS



HE — WA BI-ZALIKA UMIRTU WA ANA
AWWALUL-MUSLIMEEN — and this I have been
commanded, and I am the first of the Muslims.'

Beta, look at the four things surrendered: my prayer, my
sacrifice, my LIFE, and my DEATH.

The first two are worship — those are expected. But
'mahyaya' — my LIVING. That means everything: my
work, my income, my marriage, my friendships, my rest,
my speech, my choices at three in the afternoon on an
ordinary Tuesday.

And 'mamati' — my DYING. The one event I do not
control, handed over in advance.

Beta, this ayah is recited in the opening du'a of the
prayer for a reason. It is the whole of Islam in one
sentence: nothing of mine is outside His ownership.

'QUL A GHAYRALLAHI ABGHEE RABBAN WA HUWA
RABBU KULLI SHAY' — say: is it other than Allah I
should desire as a lord, WHILE HE IS THE LORD OF



EVERYTHING? — WA LA TAKSIBU KULLU NAFSIN
ILLA 'ALAYHA — and every soul earns not except
against itself — WA LA TAZIRU WAZIRATUN WIZRA
UKHRA — AND NO BEARER OF BURDENS WILL BEAR
THE BURDEN OF ANOTHER.'

And the final ayah of this surah, beta:

'WA HUWAL-LAZI JA'ALAKUM KHALA'IFAL-ARDI WA
RAFA'A BA'DAKUM FAWQA BA'DIN DARAJATIN
LI-YABLUWAKUM FEE MA ATAKUM — AND IT IS HE
WHO HAS MADE YOU SUCCESSORS UPON THE EARTH
AND HAS RAISED SOME OF YOU ABOVE OTHERS IN
DEGREES, TO TEST YOU IN WHAT HE HAS GIVEN YOU
— INNA RABBAKA SAREE'UL-'IQAB — indeed, your
Lord is swift in penalty — WA INNAHU
LA-GHAFOORUN RAHEEM — BUT INDEED, HE IS
FORGIVING AND MERCIFUL.'

Beta, look at the last line of this surah, and look at how it
began.



It opened with 'kataba 'ala Nafsihir-rahmah' — He has decreed mercy upon Himself. And it closes with 'la-Ghafoorun Raheem' — Forgiving and Merciful.

Between those two, this surah spent one hundred and sixty-five ayahs demolishing every rival to Allah, tracing Ibrahim's search through the night sky, and laying down the commandments that were given to every nation.

And it says: the differences in rank between you — who has more, who has less, who is above and who is below — are the TEST ITSELF. Whatever you were given more of, that is your examination paper.

Beta, that is Surah al-An'am: a foundation, poured in one night.

What This Surah Teaches Us

1. He decreed mercy UPON HIMSELF — nobody could oblige Him; He chose to bind Himself.



2. Every creature and bird is a 'community like you' — they are nations, and they will be gathered.

3. Not a leaf falls without His knowledge — which means nothing about your situation has escaped Him.

4. 'La uhibbul-afileen' — I do not love those that set. Do not attach your heart to anything that sets.

5. Do not insult even a false god, if the result is that Allah is insulted in return — ask what your words will produce.

6. Be just in SPEECH, even when it concerns your own relative; and 'when you speak' includes what you say about people.

7. One good deed counts as ten, one bad deed as one — that is the mathematics of mercy.

Qul inna salatee wa nusukee wa mahyaya wa mamatee lillahi Rabbil-'alameen. Ameen.

— This is a simplified, faithful retelling for understanding, based on the Quran's translation and established tafseer (Ibn Kathir and others). For



deeper study, always read with a qualified teacher. —

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