

SURAH AS A STORY



Surah At-Tawbah

The Repentance

The complete journey — the surah with no Bismillah —
told the way a loving elder shares it with a child



Surah No. 9 • 129 Ayahs • Medinan

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The Surah at a Glance

*Wa in ahadum-minal-mushrikeenas-tajaaraka
fa-ajirhu hattaa yasma'a Kalaamal-laah*

6. And if any of the polytheists seeks your protection,
then grant him protection so he may hear the words of
Allah.

Laa tahzan innal-laaha ma'anaa

40. Do not grieve; indeed Allah is with us.

*Qul lany-yuseebanaaaa illaa maa katabal-laahu
lanaa*

51. Say: never will we be struck except by what Allah has
decreed for us.

*Afaman assasa bunyaanahoo 'alaa taqwaa
minal-laahi wa ridwaanin khayr*

109. Is one who founded his building on righteousness
from Allah and His approval better...?

*Yaaa ayyuhal-lazeena aamanut-taql-laaha wa
koonoo ma'as-saadiqeen*

119. O you who believe, fear Allah and be with those who
are truthful.

*Laqad jaaa'akum Rasoolum-min anfusikum
'azeezun 'alayhi maa 'anittum*



128. There has certainly come to you a Messenger from among yourselves; grievous to him is what you suffer.

Listen to the Arabic recitation of this Surah, ayah by ayah, with the Qari — free on nooraniilm.com (Read & Recite section).

The Surah Without a Bismillah

Beta, before anything else, you will notice something unique about this surah: it is the only one in the Quran that does not begin with 'Bismillahir-Rahmanir-Raheem'.

The companions themselves discussed this. 'Uthman (radiyallahu anhu) is reported to have explained that Surah al-Anfal and Surah at-Tawbah were close in subject matter and revealed around the same period, and it was not made clear to them that at-Tawbah was separate, so they were placed together without the line between them.

And other scholars added a reason connected to the content: this surah opens with a declaration of the ending of treaties with those who had broken them —



and 'In the name of Allah, the Most Merciful, the Especially Merciful' does not sit at the head of a declaration of severance. Beta, whichever explanation you take, the absence is itself part of the surah's tone.

'BARA'ATUN MINALLAHI WA RASOOLIH
ILAL-LAZINA 'AHADTUM MINAL-MUSHRIKEEN — A
DECLARATION OF DISASSOCIATION FROM ALLAH AND
HIS MESSENGER TO THOSE WITH WHOM YOU HAD
MADE A TREATY AMONG THE POLYTHEISTS.'

Beta, and understand the background, because this surah is often quoted without it. For years, treaties had been made and broken by tribes who attacked while agreements stood. And Allah gave notice: four months of safe passage, and then the treaties with the treaty-breakers were ended.

And note what is preserved carefully in the very same passage: 'ILLAL-LAZINA 'AHADTUM
MINAL-MUSHRIKEENA THUMMA LAM
YANQUSOOKUM SHAY'AN WA LAM YUZAHIROO



'ALAYKUM AHADAN FA-ATIMMOO ILAYHIM
'AHDAHUM ILA MUDDATIHIM — EXCEPT FOR THOSE
WITH WHOM YOU MADE A TREATY AND THEN THEY
HAVE NOT BEEN DEFICIENT TOWARD YOU IN
ANYTHING OR SUPPORTED ANYONE AGAINST YOU —
SO COMPLETE FOR THEM THEIR TREATY UNTIL
THEIR TERM — INNALLAHA
YUHIBBUL-MUTTAQEEN — indeed, Allah loves the
righteous.'

Beta, mark that. Those who kept their word were to
have their treaties honoured to the last day. The ending
applied to the treaty-BREAKERS.

And then, beta, an ayah that people who quote this
surah selectively almost never quote:

'WA IN AHADUN MINAL-MUSHRIKEENAS-TAJARAKA
FA-AJIRHU HATTA YASMA'A KALAMALLAH — AND IF
ANY ONE OF THE POLYTHEISTS SEEKS YOUR
PROTECTION, THEN GRANT HIM PROTECTION SO
THAT HE MAY HEAR THE WORDS OF ALLAH —



THUMMA ABLIGH-HU MA'MANAH — AND THEN
DELIVER HIM TO HIS PLACE OF SAFETY — ZALIKA
BI-ANNAHUM QAWMUN LA YA'LAMOON — that is
because they are a people who do not know.'

Beta, read that again. In the middle of a state of war, an individual from the opposing side who asks for safety is to be PROTECTED, given the chance to hear the Quran, and then ESCORTED SAFELY BACK — even if he does not accept it.

Beta, and the reason given is beautiful: 'they are a people who do not know'. Ignorance is treated as a reason for mercy, not for hostility.

They Want to Blow Out the Light

The surah then describes the mindset of those who had persistently broken their word: 'LA YARQUBONA FEE MU'MININ ILLAN WA LA ZIMMAH — they do not observe toward a believer any tie of kinship or covenant.'



'YASHTAROO BI-AYATILLAHI THAMANAN QALEELA
— they exchanged the verses of Allah for a SMALL
PRICE.'

And it establishes a principle: 'FA-IN TABOO WA
AQAMUS-SALATA WA ATAWUZ-ZAKATA
FA-IKHWANUKUM FID-DEEN — BUT IF THEY
REPENT, ESTABLISH PRAYER AND GIVE ZAKAH, THEN
THEY ARE YOUR BROTHERS IN RELIGION.'

Beta, note how quickly the door swings from enemy to
BROTHER. Not 'former enemy to be watched' —
brother.

And then, beta, an ayah that has comforted this ummah
for fourteen centuries:

'YUREEDOONA AN YUTFI'OO NOORALLAHI
BI-AFWAHIHIM — THEY WANT TO EXTINGUISH THE
LIGHT OF ALLAH WITH THEIR MOUTHS — WA
YA'BALLAHU ILLA AN YUTIMMA NOORAHU WA LAW
KARIHAL-KAFIROON — BUT ALLAH REFUSES EXCEPT
TO PERFECT HIS LIGHT, ALTHOUGH THE



DISBELIEVERS DISLIKE IT.'

Beta, feel the image: people puffing at the sun. Blowing with their mouths at a light that fills the sky.

And 'ya'ballahu illa' — Allah REFUSES anything except the completion of His light. Not 'Allah will protect it' — He REFUSES any other outcome.

The surah then warns about a danger inside a believer's own house: 'YA AYYUHAL-LAZINA AMANOO LA TATTAKHIZOO ABA'AKUM WA IKHWANAKUM AWLIYA'A INIS-TAHABBUL-KUFRA 'ALAL-IMAN — do not take your fathers and brothers as allies if they prefer disbelief over belief.'

And then the ayah that measures every heart, beta: 'QUL IN KANA ABA'UKUM WA ABNA'UKUM WA IKHWANUKUM WA AZWAJUKUM WA 'ASHEERATUKUM WA AMWALUNIQ-TARAFTUMOOHA WA TIJARATUN TAKHSHAWNA KASADAHA WA MASAKINU TARDAWNAHA AHABBA ILAYKUM MINALLAHI WA



RASOOLIH WA JIHADIN FEE SABEELIH
FA-TARABBASOO — SAY: IF YOUR FATHERS, YOUR
SONS, YOUR BROTHERS, YOUR SPOUSES, YOUR
RELATIVES, THE WEALTH YOU HAVE ACQUIRED, THE
COMMERCE YOU FEAR MAY SLACKEN, AND THE
HOMES YOU ARE PLEASED WITH — ARE MORE
BELOVED TO YOU THAN ALLAH AND HIS MESSENGER
— THEN WAIT.'

Beta, look at how specific that list is. It names exactly
the things a person actually loves: family, savings, a
business he is anxious about, and a home he is proud of.
And it does not forbid loving them. It asks about the
ORDER.

The Two in the Cave

And now, beta, the surah recalls a moment from the
hijrah — and it contains one of the most beautiful
sentences ever spoken by a human being.

The Prophet ﷺ and Abu Bakr (radiyallahu anhu) were
hiding in the cave of Thawr, and the men of Quraysh,



tracking them, arrived at the mouth of the cave. Abu Bakr said, as the reports relate: if one of them looks down at his feet, he will see us. And the Prophet ﷺ said: what do you think of TWO whose THIRD is Allah?

'ILLA TANSUROOHU FA-QAD NASARAHULLAHU IZ AKHRAJAHUL-LAZINA KAFAROO THANIYATH-NAYNI IZ HUMA FIL-GHAR — IF YOU DO NOT AID HIM, ALLAH HAS ALREADY AIDED HIM WHEN THOSE WHO DISBELIEVED HAD DRIVEN HIM OUT, THE SECOND OF TWO, WHEN THEY WERE IN THE CAVE — IZ YAQOOLU LI-SAHIBIHI LA TAHZAN INNALLAHA MA'ANA — WHEN HE SAID TO HIS COMPANION: DO NOT GRIEVE; INDEED, ALLAH IS WITH US.'

Beta, 'LA TAHZAN INNALLAHA MA'ANA' — do not grieve; Allah is with us.

Consider the situation in which those words were said. Two men in a cave. An army of trackers outside. No weapons, no escape route, no plan. Every visible fact said it was over.



And he did not say 'we will be fine' or 'they will not find us'. He said: ALLAH IS WITH US.

Beta, memorise this sentence in Arabic and keep it for your worst nights. It does not promise you an outcome. It tells you Who is present.

'FA-ANZALALLAHU SAKEENATAHU 'ALAYHI WA AYYADAHU BI-JUNOODIN LAM TARAWHA — SO ALLAH SENT DOWN HIS TRANQUILLITY UPON HIM AND SUPPORTED HIM WITH SOLDIERS YOU DID NOT SEE.'

Beta, 'sakeenah' — a settling calm that descends on a heart. And 'junoodin lam tarawha' — armies you cannot see. Beta, you have no idea how many times you have been defended by something you never noticed.

'WA JA'ALA KALIMATAL-LAZINA KAFARUS-SUFLA WA KALIMATULLAHI HIYAL-'ULYA — and He made the word of those who disbelieved the LOWEST, while the word of Allah is the HIGHEST — WALLAHU 'AZEEZUN HAKEEM — and Allah is Almighty, Wise.'



March Out, Light or Heavy

Much of this surah concerns the expedition to Tabuk, beta — and you should know the conditions. It was called in the peak of summer heat, at harvest time, for a march of hundreds of miles toward the greatest empire of that age. Everything about it was difficult.

And that is exactly why it separated people.

'INFIROO KHIFAFAN WA THIQALAN WA JAHIDOO BI-AMWALIKUM WA ANFUSIKUM FEE SABEELILLAH — GO FORTH, WHETHER LIGHT OR HEAVY, AND STRIVE WITH YOUR WEALTH AND YOUR LIVES IN THE CAUSE OF ALLAH — ZALIKUM KHAYRUN LAKUM IN KUNTUM TA'LAMOON — that is better for you, if you only knew.'

Beta, 'khifafan wa thiqalan' — LIGHT OR HEAVY. The scholars explained: young or old, rich or poor, eager or reluctant, with few responsibilities or many. Whatever your condition, go.



Beta, take it as a principle: there is never a perfectly convenient moment to do the right thing. Waiting to feel 'light' before you act is how a lifetime passes.

'LAW KANA 'ARADAN QAREEBAN WA SAFARAN
QASIDAN LATTABA'OOKA — HAD IT BEEN AN EASY
GAIN AND A SHORT TRIP, THEY WOULD HAVE
FOLLOWED YOU — WA LAKIN BA'UDAT
'ALAYHIMUSH-SHUQQAHAH — BUT THE DISTANCE WAS
LONG FOR THEM.'

Beta, that ayah describes a permanent human type: enthusiastic for anything with quick returns and low cost, absent when the work is long and the reward is distant.

And they made excuses, and some asked permission to stay behind, and the surah exposes the whole spectrum — those who lied, those who were genuinely unable, and those who wept because they could not find mounts to ride: 'TAWALLAW WA A'YUNUHUM TAFEEDU
MINAD-DAM'I HAZANAN ALLA YAJIDOO MA



YUNFIQOON — they turned back while their eyes
OVERFLOWED WITH TEARS out of grief that they could
not find anything to spend.'

Beta, remember them. There are people whose hearts
are in a good work even when their circumstances keep
them out of it — and Allah recorded their tears in His
Book.

And then, beta, an instruction for every anxious heart:

'QUL LAN YUSEEBANA ILLA MA KATABALLAHU LANA
HUWA MAWLANA — SAY: NEVER WILL WE BE
STRUCK EXCEPT BY WHAT ALLAH HAS DECREED FOR
US; HE IS OUR PROTECTOR — WA 'ALALLAHI
FALYATAWAKKALIL-MU'MINOON — AND UPON
ALLAH LET THE BELIEVERS RELY.'

Beta, this single ayah removes the fear of what people
might do to you. Nothing reaches you except what was
already written — and the One who wrote it is your
Mawla.



A Building on the Edge of a Cliff

The surah then exposes the hypocrites in detail, beta — those who prayed with the community but worked against it. And it describes one of their projects.

They built a masjid — a place of worship — intending it as a base for division and for undermining the believers. And Allah revealed the truth about it, and the Prophet ﷺ ordered it demolished.

'WAL-LAZINAT-TAKHAZOO MASJIDAN DIRARAN WA KUFRAN WA TAFREEQAN BAYNAL-MU'MINEEN — and those who took a masjid FOR CAUSING HARM, and DISBELIEF, and DIVISION AMONG THE BELIEVERS — WA LA-YAHLIFUNNA IN ARADNA ILLAL-HUSNA — AND THEY WILL SURELY SWEAR: WE INTENDED ONLY THE BEST.'

Beta, note that: they swore their intentions were good. A building can be a masjid on the outside and a weapon on the inside.



And then, beta, comes one of the most important parables in the Quran about intention:

'A FA-MAN ASSASA BUNYANAHU 'ALA TAQWA MINALLAHI WA RIDWANIN KHAYRUN — IS ONE WHO FOUNDED HIS BUILDING ON RIGHTEOUSNESS FROM ALLAH AND HIS APPROVAL BETTER — AM MAN ASSASA BUNYANAHU 'ALA SHAFI JURUFIN HARIN FANHARA BIHI FEE NARI JAHANNAM — OR ONE WHO FOUNDED HIS BUILDING ON THE EDGE OF A CRUMBLING CLIFF, SO IT COLLAPSED WITH HIM INTO THE FIRE OF HELL?'

Beta, picture both. Two buildings. From the outside, they may look identical — same walls, same height, same doors.

The difference is entirely underneath. One is founded on 'taqwa' and the desire for Allah's approval. The other sits on 'shafi jurufin har' — the lip of an eroding sandbank, the kind of edge that looks solid until the moment it gives way.



Beta, and the ayah does not say the second building fell down. It says it fell WITH HIM into the Fire. The builder goes down with it.

Beta, apply this to everything you build: a career, a reputation, a family, a project, even your worship. Ask what it is standing on. Because you cannot tell from the walls.

Allah Has Purchased

And now, beta, one of the most remarkable ayahs in the Quran — a contract of sale, with Allah as the buyer:

'INNALLAHASH-TARA MINAL-MU'MINEENA
ANFUSAHUM WA AMWALAHUM BI-ANNA
LAHUMUL-JANNAH — INDEED, ALLAH HAS
PURCHASED FROM THE BELIEVERS THEIR LIVES AND
THEIR PROPERTIES, IN EXCHANGE FOR THAT THEY
WILL HAVE PARADISE.'

'WA'DAN 'ALAYHI HAQQAN FIT-TAWRATI
WAL-INJEELI WAL-QUR'AN — a TRUE PROMISE



binding upon Him in the Torah and the Gospel and the Quran — WA MAN AWFA BI-'AHDIHI MINALLAH — AND WHO IS TRUER TO HIS COVENANT THAN ALLAH?'

'FASTABSHIROO BI-BAY'IKUMUL-LAZI BAYA'TUM BIH — SO REJOICE IN YOUR TRANSACTION WHICH YOU HAVE CONTRACTED — WA ZALIKA HUWAL-FAWZUL-'AZEEM — AND IT IS THAT WHICH IS THE GREAT ATTAINMENT.'

Beta, look at the terms of this deal. He owns your life and your wealth already — He created both. And yet He offers to BUY them from you, and pay in Paradise.

And He records the contract in three scriptures, and asks: who keeps his word better than Allah?

Beta, and then the instruction: 'fastabshiroo' — REJOICE at the deal you have made. Beta, we usually feel that obedience costs us something. This ayah reframes it entirely: you have made the trade of a lifetime, and the buyer has already signed.



The Three Who Were Left Behind

And now, beta, one of the most moving accounts in the whole Quran — and it is about three ordinary believers who made a mistake.

Three companions stayed behind from Tabuk with no excuse. When the army returned, the hypocrites came with elaborate lies and were accepted at face value. But these three told the truth: we have no excuse.

And they were boycotted. The Prophet ﷺ instructed the community not to speak to them. For fifty days, nobody returned their greeting. One of them, Ka'b ibn Malik (radiyallahu anhu), described how he would greet the Prophet ﷺ and watch to see whether his lips moved in reply, and how the earth itself seemed to change around him.

And then this ayah came down:

'WA 'ALATH-THALATHATIL-LAZINA KHULLIFOO —
AND (He accepted the repentance of) THE THREE WHO



WERE LEFT BEHIND — HATTA IZA DAQAT
'ALAYHIMUL-ARDU BIMA RAHUBAT — UNTIL,
WHEN THE EARTH CLOSED IN ON THEM IN SPITE OF
ITS VASTNESS — WA DAQAT 'ALAYHIM ANFUSUHUM
— AND THEIR OWN SOULS CLOSED IN UPON THEM —
WA ZANNOO AN LA MALJA'A MINALLAHI ILLA ILAYH
— AND THEY WERE CERTAIN THAT THERE IS NO
REFUGE FROM ALLAH EXCEPT IN HIM — THUMMA
TABA 'ALAYHIM LI-YATOOBOO — THEN HE TURNED
TO THEM SO THEY COULD REPENT — INNALLAHA
HUWAT-TAWWABUR-RAHEEM — indeed, Allah is the
Accepting of repentance, the Merciful.'

Beta, take this ayah apart, because it describes a state
many people know.

'DAQAT 'ALAYHIMUL-ARDU BIMA RAHUBAT' — the
earth became NARROW for them DESPITE ITS
VASTNESS. Beta, that is what real distress feels like: the
world is enormous, and there is nowhere in it you can
breathe.



'WA DAQAT 'ALAYHIM ANFUSUHUM' — and their OWN SELVES became narrow upon them. Beta, that is worse — when you cannot escape the situation and you cannot escape yourself either.

And then the turning point: 'WA ZANNOO AN LA MALJA'A MINALLAHI ILLA ILAYH' — they became CERTAIN that there is no refuge from Allah EXCEPT TO HIM.

Beta, sit with that sentence. It is one of the great truths of this deen. When you are running from His displeasure, there is no direction to run except TOWARD Him. There is no third place.

'THUMMA TABA 'ALAYHIM LI-YATOOBOO' — THEN HE TURNED TO THEM SO THAT THEY COULD REPENT.

Beta, look very carefully at the order in that phrase. Allah turned to them FIRST, so that they COULD repent. Their repentance was not what earned His attention — His mercy came first and ENABLED the repentance.



Beta, that means every time you have felt the urge to come back to Him, that urge itself was a gift He gave you. He turned to you before you turned to Him.

And then the ayah that follows, beta — the instruction drawn from their story:

'YA AYYUHAL-LAZINA AMANUT-TAQULLAHA WA KOONOO MA'AS-SADIQEEEN — O YOU WHO HAVE BELIEVED, FEAR ALLAH AND BE WITH THOSE WHO ARE TRUTHFUL.'

Beta, that is the lesson of the fifty days. The liars were excused immediately and were losers forever. The truthful were punished for fifty days and their honesty was recorded in the Quran until the end of time.

Ka'b (radiyallahu anhu) said afterwards that Allah had never blessed him with anything greater than his truthfulness that day, and that he never intended to tell a lie again as long as he lived.

A Messenger From Among Yourself



And now, beta, the surah — which has been the sternest in the Quran, the one without a Bismillah, full of warnings and exposures — ends with two of the most tender ayahs about the Prophet ﷺ:

'LAQAD JA'AKUM RASOOLUN MIN ANFUSIKUM — THERE HAS CERTAINLY COME TO YOU A MESSENGER FROM AMONG YOURSELVES — 'AZEEZUN 'ALAYHI MA 'ANITTUM — GRIEVOUS TO HIM IS WHAT YOU SUFFER — HAREESUN 'ALAYKUM — DEEPLY CONCERNED FOR YOU — BIL-MU'MINEENA RA'OOFUN RAHEEM — AND TO THE BELIEVERS, KIND AND MERCIFUL.'

Beta, take each phrase.

'MIN ANFUSIKUM' — from YOUR OWN SELVES. One of you. He knew hunger, loss, grief, and the death of his own children. He was not sent from above to instruct you from a distance.

'AZEEZUN 'ALAYHI MA 'ANITTUM' — it is HARD ON HIM, painful to him, that you should suffer. Beta, your



difficulty caused him distress. Fourteen centuries ago, your hardship was already grieving someone.

'HAREESUN 'ALAYKUM' — intensely, eagerly concerned for you. The word describes someone who wants something desperately. He desperately wanted you saved.

'BIL-MU'MINEENA RA'OOFUN RAHEEM' — and beta, note this: 'ra'oof' and 'raheem' are two of Allah's own names, and He gave both of them to His Messenger ﷺ in this ayah. No other prophet is described with two of Allah's names in this way.

And the final ayah of the surah, beta — the instruction for the moment when everyone turns away:

'FA-IN TAWALLAW FA-QUL HASBIYALLAHU LA ILAHA
ILLA HUWA — SO IF THEY TURN AWAY, SAY:
SUFFICIENT FOR ME IS ALLAH; THERE IS NO DEITY
EXCEPT HIM — 'ALAYHI TAWAKKALTU — UPON HIM
I HAVE RELIED — WA HUWA
RABBUL-'ARSHIL-'AZEEM — AND HE IS THE LORD OF



THE GREAT THRONE.'

Beta, 'HASBIYALLAH' — Allah is ENOUGH for me. It is reported that whoever says this seven times, Allah suffices him in whatever worries him.

Beta, so notice how this surah ends. It began with a severance, and it ends with 'Allah is enough for me'. It spent a hundred and twenty ayahs separating the truthful from the false — and then it closes by telling you that if every single person turns away, you still have everything you need.

And beta, that is the answer to the loneliness that sometimes comes with holding on to the truth. Say it: hasbiyallahu la ilaha illa Huwa, 'alayhi tawakkaltu, wa Huwa Rabbul-'Arshil-'Azeem.

What This Surah Teaches Us

1. Treaties with those who kept their word were honoured in full — the severance applied to the treaty-breakers.



2. Even in a state of war, one who seeks protection is sheltered, allowed to hear the Quran, and escorted safely home.
 3. They puff at the sun with their mouths — and Allah REFUSES anything but the completion of His light.
 4. 'La tahzan innallaha ma'ana' — it does not promise an outcome; it tells you Who is present.
 5. 'Light or heavy' — there is never a convenient moment to do the right thing.
 6. Two buildings can look identical; the difference is entirely underneath. Ask what yours stands on.
 7. He turned to them SO THAT they could repent — His mercy comes first and enables your return. And be with the truthful, whatever it costs.
- Hasbiyallahu la ilaha illa Huwa, 'alayhi tawakkaltu wa Huwa Rabbul-'Arshil-'Azeem. 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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