

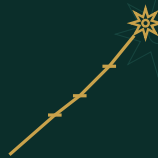
SURAH AS A STORY



Surah Al-Balad

The City

The complete journey — the steep path nobody climbs —
told the way a loving elder shares it with a child



Surah No. 90 • 20 Ayahs • Meccan

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The Surah at a Glance

*Laaa uqsimu bihaazal-balad. Wa anta
hillum-bihaazal-balad*

1-2. I swear by this city — and you are free of restriction
in this city —

Laqad khalaqnal-insaana fee kabad

4. We have certainly created man in hardship.

*Alam naj'al-lahoo 'aynayn. Wa lisaananw-wa
shafatayn*

8-9. Have We not made for him two eyes, and a tongue
and two lips?

Wa hadaynaahun-najdayn

10. And We showed him the two ways.

*Falaq-tahamal-'aqabah. Wa maaa adraaka
mal-'aqabah*

11-12. But he has not broken through the steep path. And
what will make you know what the steep path is?

*Fakku raqabah. Aw it'aamun fee yawmin zee
masghabah*

13-14. Freeing a slave, or feeding on a day of severe
hunger.



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

An Oath by a City — and by You

Beta, this surah opens with an oath by a place, and then does something the Quran does nowhere else quite like this: it swears by the city, and then mentions the Messenger ﷺ inside the oath itself.

'LA UQSIMU BI-HAZAL-BALAD — I SWEAR BY THIS CITY — WA ANTA HILLUN BI-HAZAL-BALAD — and YOU are HILL — free, settled, dwelling — in this city.'

Beta, the city is Makkah — the sacred sanctuary where no blood may be shed, no tree cut, no animal hunted. The most protected soil on earth. And Allah is pointing at a bitter irony: this city is sacred, its safety is guaranteed by Allah Himself — and yet the people of this city consider the killing and torturing of the believers, and the harming of Muhammad ﷺ, to be permissible.



The scholars explain 'wa anta hillun' in more than one way, beta. One: you, O Muhammad, are a resident of this city — the city's honour is because of the one dwelling in it. Another: they treat you as 'hill' — as though harming you is lawful — in the very city where harming a bird is unlawful. Feel the sharpness of that: a bird is protected here, and the Messenger of Allah is not.

'WA WALIDIN WA MA WALAD — and by the FATHER and what he BEGOT.' A parent and his children — the oath now moves from a place to a relationship, from the holiest ground to the deepest human bond.

And what is all of this swearing for? For the ayah that follows — a diagnosis of the human condition so precise that once you hear it, you will recognise it in every life you know.

Created in Hardship

'LAQAD KHALAQNAL-INSANA FEE KABAD — WE HAVE CERTAINLY CREATED MAN IN KABAD.'



Beta, 'kabad' means struggle, toil, difficulty, being in the thick of something hard. And Allah does not say man EXPERIENCES hardship — He says man was CREATED IN it. Hardship is not an interruption of life; it is the medium of life, like water is the medium of a fish.

Think about it honestly, beta. From the very first moment: birth itself is a struggle, for the mother and for the child. Then teething. Then learning to walk, falling over and over. Then school, exams, the search for work, marriage, raising children, paying for things, illness, ageing, and finally death — which is the hardest passage of all. And in between, the smaller struggles: the daily fight against your own laziness, anger, and desires.

So when we complain 'why is life so difficult?' — the Quran answers: because that is exactly how it was designed. Beta, this is not a pessimistic ayah; it is a LIBERATING one. Most of our misery comes not from hardship itself, but from the belief that hardship is abnormal — that everyone else got the easy version and we were singled out. Once you accept 'khuliqa fee



kabad', you stop waiting for a struggle-free life to begin, and you start using the one you have.

And notice where the true ease is promised: not here. Here is kabad; the rest is in the Hereafter — 'jannatin 'aliyah', in the surah you read before this one.

'A YAHSABU AN LAN YAQDIRA 'ALAYHI AHAD — does he think that NO ONE HAS POWER over him?' Beta, this is the arrogance that comes with strength and wealth: I answer to nobody. 'YAQOOLU AHLAKTU MALAN LUBADA — he says: I have DESTROYED — squandered — WEALTH IN ABUNDANCE!' Boasting about how much he spent — on his reputation, on his enmity against the truth. 'A YAHSABU AN LAM YARAHU AHAD — does he think that NO ONE SAW HIM?'

Beta, two illusions in two ayahs: nobody can hold me accountable, and nobody saw. Both are false, and both are the reason people do what they do in the dark.

Three Gifts and Two Roads



Then Allah reminds this boastful man of what he was given — and the list is startling in its simplicity: 'A LAM NAJ'AL LAHU 'AYNAYN — have We not made for him TWO EYES — WA LISANAN WA SHAFATAYN — and a TONGUE and TWO LIPS?'

Beta, why these? Of all the organs Allah could have mentioned — the heart, the brain, the hands — He chose the eyes and the speaking apparatus. Because these are the tools of guidance and of ruin: the eyes with which you SEE the signs (or chase what is forbidden), and the tongue and lips with which you SPEAK the truth (or lie, mock, slander and boast — as this man was doing).

And notice the lips are mentioned separately from the tongue. The scholars reflect: the tongue was given two gates — the teeth and the lips — as if to say, before a word leaves you, it must pass two barriers. Speech was designed to be guarded, beta.



'WA HADAYNAHUN-NAJDAYN — and We SHOWED HIM THE TWO NAJD.' 'Najd', beta, is a raised, elevated path — a highway visible on high ground. Two clear roads: good and evil. And Allah says He SHOWED him both — through the fitrah placed in every soul, through the messengers, through the Book.

So the human being has been equipped: eyes to see, a tongue to express, and a clearly marked map with two visible roads. Nobody will be able to say: I could not tell the difference.

The Steep Path Nobody Climbs

And now, beta, the ayah at the heart of this surah — and it is one that should trouble each of us:

'FA-LAQTAHAMAL-'AQABAH — BUT HE HAS NOT BROKEN THROUGH THE STEEP PATH.'

'Aqabah' is a steep mountain trail — a hard, uphill climb. And 'iqtiham' is a violent, forceful plunge — to throw yourself at something difficult without hesitating.



So the ayah says: man was given eyes, a tongue, and a map with two roads — and still he did not THROW HIMSELF at the uphill road. He chose the level, easy path, as almost everyone does.

'WA MA ADRAKA MAL-'AQABAH — and what will make you know what the steep path is?' Beta, whenever Allah asks this, He is about to reveal something we would never have guessed. So what do you imagine the steep climb will be — forty years of fasting? A pilgrimage on foot? Living in a cave?

Listen to the answer: 'FAKKU RAQABAH — FREEING A SLAVE — AW IT'AMUN FEE YAWMIN ZEE MASGHABAH — OR FEEDING, on a day of severe HUNGER — YATEEMAN ZA MAQRABAH — an ORPHAN who is a RELATIVE — AW MISKEENAN ZA MATRABAH — or a POOR PERSON in the DUST.'

Beta, that is the steep mountain: freeing a human being from bondage, and feeding the hungry when food is scarce and precious. Not a mystical feat — a practical



one.

And look at the exquisite details Allah adds. 'On a day of severe hunger' — when food is expensive and you want it yourself; anyone can give away extra. 'An orphan who is a RELATIVE' — because helping your own poor relatives is heavier on the ego than charity to strangers; strangers thank you and think you are great, while relatives know you, and there is old history, and sometimes envy. 'A poor person in the dust' — 'matrabah', clinging to the earth, so destitute he has nothing between him and the ground.

Beta, why is this the STEEP path? Because it goes uphill against the strongest gravity in the human soul: love of wealth and love of self. The soul will happily pray, fast and recite — all of that costs no money. But to open the hand when you yourself are in need, and to give to someone who will not praise you for it — that is the climb.



'THUMMA KANA MINAL-LAZINA AMANOO — AND THEN he was of those who BELIEVED — WA TAWASAW BIS-SABRI WA TAWASAW BIL-MARHAMAH — and ADVISED ONE ANOTHER TO PATIENCE and ADVISED ONE ANOTHER TO COMPASSION.'

Beta, notice this carefully — the feeding and the freeing must be accompanied by IMAN, or they are just philanthropy, uncounted with Allah. And then two mutual duties: advising each other to sabr, and advising each other to MARHAMAH — mercy. A whole community that reminds itself to be merciful. Imagine, beta, if our families and WhatsApp groups did that: pushing each other toward patience and mercy rather than outrage.

'ULA'IKA AS-HABUL-MAYMANAH — THOSE are the companions of the RIGHT.'

The Fire That Closes In



And the surah closes with the other group:

'WAL-LAZINA KAFAROO BI-AYATINA HUM

AS-HABUL-MASH'AMAH — and those who disbelieved
in Our verses — THEY are the companions of the LEFT
— 'ALAYHIM NARUN MU'SADAH — over them will be
a FIRE CLOSED IN.'

Beta, 'mu'sadah' means shut, sealed, locked over them
— the way a door is closed and bolted with someone
inside. No opening, no ventilation, no exit.

And now look at the design of this whole surah, beta. It
began with a CITY — a place of sanctuary and safety. It
ends with a fire that is SEALED SHUT. Between those
two, Allah placed the choice: the level path that most
people take, or the steep climb of freeing, feeding,
believing, and urging one another to patience and
mercy.

And here is the encouragement to leave you with. The
climb Allah described is not out of reach for anyone. You
may never own a slave to free — but there are people



around you in bondage of other kinds: someone drowning in debt, a worker trapped in cruel employment, a person imprisoned by an addiction or a wrong crowd. And feeding on a day of hunger is available to anyone with a plate of food.

Beta, that is the mercy of this surah: it takes the mountain and turns it into steps. And it tells us who the successful really are — not the man who boasts 'I have destroyed wealth in abundance', but the one who quietly climbs, feeding a relative's orphan on a hard day, expecting nothing but Allah.

What This Surah Teaches Us

- 1.** You were created IN hardship — stop waiting for the struggle-free life to begin, and use the one you have.
- 2.** Two illusions ruin people: 'nobody can hold me accountable' and 'nobody saw me.' Both are false.



3. Eyes, tongue and lips were given as tools of guidance — and speech was placed behind two gates so that it would be guarded.

4. The two roads are clearly marked; nobody will be able to plead confusion.

5. The steep path is practical, not mystical: free someone from bondage, and feed the hungry when food is dear.

6. Give first to your own poor relatives — it is heavier on the ego, and heavier on the scale.

7. Charity without iman is philanthropy; pair your giving with faith, and build a community that advises patience and mercy.

Ya Allah, make us of those who throw themselves at the steep climb — and make us companions of the right. 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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