



The Absolute Reality

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لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ



We have indeed created man in the best of molds, Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low --

Quran English Translation & Commentary

By

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Introduction and Summary

This is also a very early Surah It appeals to the most sacred symbols to show that Allah created man in the best of moulds, but that man is capable of the utmost degradation unless he has Faith and leads a good life. In subject matter this Surah closely resembles Surah 105.

C.275 (The running Commentary, in Rhythmic Prose)

*Nature and history and the Light of Revelation,
Through the ages, show that man,
Created by Allah in the best of moulds,
Can yet fall to the lowest depths, unless
He lives a life of faith and righteousness.
Then will he reach his goal: if not,
He must stand his Judgement---none can doubt---
Before the wisest and justest of Judges.*

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

وَالْتِّیْنِ ...

1. By the Fig,

C6194. The substantive proposition is in verses 4-8, and it is clinched by an appeal to four sacred symbols, viz.,

- the Fig,
- the Olive,
- Mount Sinai, and
- the sacred City of Makkah.

About the precise interpretation of the first two symbols, and especially of the symbol of the Fig, there is much difference of opinion.

If we take the Fig literally to refer to the fruit or the tree, it can stand as a symbol of man's destiny in many ways. Under cultivation it can be one of the finest, most delicious, and most wholesome fruits in existence: in its wild state, it is nothing but tiny seeds, and is insipid, and often full of worms and maggots.

So man at his best has a noble destiny: at his worst, he is "the lowest of the low".

Christ is said to have cursed a fig tree for having only leaves, and not producing fruit (Matt. 21:18-21), enforcing the same lesson.

There is also a parable of the fig tree in Matt. 24:32-35.

See also the parable of the good and evil figs in Jeremiah, 24:1-10.

But see n. 6198 below.

... وَالزَّيْتُونِ (١)

and the Olive,

C6195. For the sacred symbolism of the Olive, see n. 2880 to 23:20, and notes 3000- 3002 to 24:35, where the parable of Allah's Light includes a reference to the Olive.

But it is possible that the Olive here refers to the Mount of Olives, just outside the walls of the City of Jerusalem (see n. 5038 to 52:2), for this is the scene in the Gospel story (Matt. 24:3-4) of Christ's description of the Judgment to come.

وَطُورِ سَيْنِينَ (٢)

2. And the Mount of Sinai,

C6196. This was the Mountain on which the Law was given to Moses.

See 19:52, and n. 2504.

The Law was given, and the glory of Allah was made visible. But did Israel faithfully obey the Law thereafter?

وَهَذَا الْبَلَدِ الْأَمِينِ (٣)

3. And this City of security --

C6197. "This City of security" is undoubtedly Makkah. Even in Pagan times its sacred character was respected, and no fighting was allowed in its territory. But the same

City, with all its sacred associations, persecuted the greatest of the Prophets and gave itself up for a time to idolatry and sin, thus presenting the contrast of the best and the worst.

C6198. Having discussed the four symbols in detail, let us consider them together. It is clear that they refer to Allah's Light or Revelation, which offers man the highest destiny if he will follow the Way. Makkah stands for Islam, Sinai for Israel, and the Mount of Olives for Christ's original and pure Message.

It has been suggested that the Fig stands for the *Ficus Indica*, the Bo-tree, under which Gautama Buddha obtained Nirvana. I hesitate to adopt the suggestion, but if accepted it would cover pristine Buddhism and the ancient Vedic religion from which it was an offshoot. In this way all the great religions of the world would be indicated. But even if we refer the Fig and the Olive to the symbolism in their fruit, and not to any particular religion, the contrast of Best and Worst in man's destiny remains, and that is the main thing.

This raises a doctrinal question of considerable importance: how does Islam view the ancient Vedic religions and Buddhism, or for that matter, any other religion? As Muslims we are not in a position to affirm whether Buddha was a prophet or not. Although the Quran states that Allah sent Prophets to every people, [10:47](#), [16:36](#), it does not mention the names of all of them. In fact it mentions by name relatively few of the Prophets of the Semitic tradition, or only much as with whom its first audience, the Arabs were generally familiar. As to its present form, we find the doctrines of Buddhism clearly at variance with monotheism and cardinal Principles of the True Religion as explained in the Quran. This may have been the result of distortion or loss by the followers of its original teachings.

As a general rule, we cannot describe anyone as a Prophet or Messenger of Allah unless explicitly mentioned in the Quran, or Hadith. The Message as brought by Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) preserves in itself all that was essential in the earlier revelations or scriptures: it abrogates all the previous messages sent through earlier Prophets ([3:85](#)). (R)

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَن تَقْوِيمٍ (٤)

4. We have indeed created man in the best of molds,

C6199. Taqwim: mould, symmetry, form, nature, constitution. There is no fault in Allah's creation. To man Allah gave the purest and best nature, and man's duty is to preserve the pattern on which Allah has made him: 30:30.

But by making him vicegerent, Allah exalted him in posse even higher than the angels, for the angels had to make obeisance to him (2:30-34, and n. 48). But man's position as vicegerent also gives him will and discretion, and if he uses them wrongly he falls even lower than the beasts.

See next note.

ثُمَّ رَدَدْنَاهُ أَسْفَلَ سَافِلِينَ (٥)

5. Then do We abase him (to be) the lowest of the low --

C6200. This verse should be read with the next.

If man rebels against Allah, and follows after evil, he will be abased to the lowest possible position. For Judgment is sure.

Those who use their faculties aright and follow Allah's Law will reach the high and noble destiny intended for them. That reward will not be temporary, but unailing.

إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ فَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ غَيْرُ مَمْنُونٍ (٦)

6. Except such as believe and do righteous deeds:
for they shall have a reward unailing.

فَمَا يُكَذِّبُكَ بَعْدُ بِالذِّينِ (٧)

7. Then what can, after this, contradict thee; as to the Judgment (to come)?

C6201. Thee: may refer to the holy Prophet or to man collectively.

After this: i.e., when it is clearly shown to you that Allah created man true and pure, that He guides him, and that those who rebel and break His law will be punished and brought down in the Hereafter, who can doubt this, or contradict the Prophet when he gives warning?

أَلَيْسَ اللَّهُ بِأَحْكَمَ الْحَاكِمِينَ (٨)

8. Is not Allah the wisest of Judges?

C6202. Allah is wise and just. Therefore the righteous have nothing to fear, but the evil ones cannot escape punishment.



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