

Surah 78. An-Nabaa

78.1 ABOUT WHAT do they [most often] ask one another?

78.2 About the awesome tiding [of resurrection],

78.3 on which they [so utterly] disagree.¹

78.4 Nay, but in time they will come to understand [it]!

78.5 And once again:² Nay, but in time they will come to understand!

78.6 HAVE WE NOT made the earth a resting-place [for you],

78.7 and the mountains [its] pegs?³

78.8 And We have created you in pairs;⁴

78.9 and We have made your sleep [a symbol of] death⁵

78.10 and made the night [its] cloak

78.11 and made the day [a symbol of] life.⁶

78.12 And We have built above you seven firmaments,⁷

78.13 and have placed [therein the sun,] a lamp full of blazing splendour.

78.14 And from the wind-driven clouds We send down waters pouring in abundance,

78.15 so that We might bring forth thereby grain, and herbs,

78.16 and carders dense with foliage.⁸

78.17 VERILY, the Day of Distinction [between the true and the false]⁹ has indeed its appointed time:

78.18 the Day when the trumpet [of resurrection] is sounded and you all come forward in multitudes;

78.19 and when the skies are opened and become [as wideflung] gates;¹⁰

78.20 and when the mountains are made to vanish as if they had been a mirage.¹¹

78.21 [On that Day,] verily, hell will lie in wait [for those who deny the truth] -

78.22 a goal for all who are wont to transgress the bounds of what is right!

78.23 In it shall they remain for a long time.¹²

78.24 Neither coolness shall they taste therein nor any [thirst-quenching] drink -

78.25 only burning despair and ice-cold darkness:¹³

78.26 a meet requital [for their sins]!

78.27 Behold, they were not expecting to be called to account?

78.28 having given the lie to Our messages one and all:

78.29 but We have placed on record every single thing [of what they did].

78.30 [And so We shall say:] "Taste, then, [the fruit of your evil doings,] for now We shall bestow on you nothing but more and more suffering!"¹⁴

78.31 [But,] verily, for the God-conscious there is supreme fulfilment in store:¹⁵

78.32 luxuriant gardens and vineyards,

78.33 and splendid companions well-matched,¹⁶

78.34 and a cup [of happiness] overflowing.

78.35 No empty talk will they hear in that [paradise], nor any lie.

78.36 [All this will be] a reward from thy Sustainer, a gift in accordance with [His Own] reckoning¹⁷ -

78.37 [a reward from] the Sustainer of the heavens and the earth and all that is between them, the Most Gracious! [And] none shall have it in their power to raise their voices unto Him

78.38 on the Day when all [human] souls¹⁸ and all the angels will stand up in ranks: none will speak but he to whom the Most Gracious will have given leave; and [everyone] will say [only] what is right.¹⁹

78.39 That will be the Day of Ultimate Truth²⁰ whoever wills, then, let him take the path that leads towards his Sustainer!

78.40 Verily, We have warned you of suffering near at hand - [suffering] on the Day when man shall [clearly] see what his hands have sent ahead, and when he who has denied the truth shall say, "Oh, would that I were mere dust..."²¹

Author Comments

2 - For this rendering of the particle thumma, see surah {6}, note [31].

3 - See [16:15](#) - "He has placed firm mountains on earth, lest it sway with you" - and the corresponding note [11], which explains the reference to mountains as "pegs". - The whole of this passage (verses

{6-16}) is meant to illustrate God's almightiness and creativeness, as if to say, "Is not He who has created the universe equally able to resurrect and re-create man in whatever form He deems necessary?"

4 - I.e., "with the same creative power We have created the miraculous polarity of the two sexes in you and in other animated beings". The phenomenon of polarity, evident throughout the universe (see [36:36](#) and the corresponding note [18]), is further illustrated in verses {9-II}.

5 - Thus Zamakhshari, stressing the primary significance of subat as "cutting-off" (qat'), i.e., "death"; also the famous second-century philologist Abu 'Ubaydah Ma'mar ibn al-Muthanna, who (as quoted by Razi) explains the above Qur'anic phrase as an "analogue (shibh) of death".

6 - According to Zamakhshari, the term ma'ash ("that whereby one lives") is here synonymous with "life". In the polarity of sleep (or "death") and wakefulness (or "life") we see the allusion to bodily death and subsequent resurrection already touched upon in [6:60](#).

7 - Lit., "seven firm ones", indicating the multiplicity of cosmic systems (see surah {2}, note [20]).

8 - Implying that the overwhelming evidence of purpose and plan in all observable nature points to the existence of a conscious Creator who has "not created [anything of] this without meaning and purpose" ([3:191](#)), and who - as is stressed in the sequence - will one day pronounce His judgment on every human being's willingness or unwillingness to live up to the standards of morality made clear to him through inborn instinct as well as through divine revelation.

9 - See note [6] on [77:13](#). This passage connects with verses {4-5}.

10 - Allegorically, "its mysteries will be opened to man's understanding" - thus further amplifying the concept of "the Day of Distinction between the true and the false".

11 - See note [90] on {20:105-107}, as well as note [63] on [14:48](#).

12 - I.e., not forever, since the term *huqb* or *hiqbah* (of which *ahqab* is the plural) denotes no more than "a period of time" or "a long time" (Jawhari) - according to some authorities, "eighty years" according to others, "a year" or simply "years" (Asas, Qamus, Lisan al-'Arab, etc.). But however one defines this term, it is obvious that it signifies a limited period of time, and not eternity: and this is in tune with many indications in the Qur'an to the effect that the suffering described as "hell" is not eternal (see note [114] on the last paragraph of [6:128](#)), as well as with several authentic sayings of the Prophet (e.g., the one quoted in note [10] on [40:12](#)).

13 - For my rendering of *hamim* as "burning despair", see surah {6}, note [62]. The meaning of *ghassaq* is explained in note [47] on {38:57-58}.

14 - Lit., "We shall not increase you in anything but suffering": i.e., until the sins committed in this world are atoned for by commensurate suffering in the hereafter - for "whoever shall come [before God] with an evil deed will be requited with no more than the like thereof; and none shall be wronged" [6:160](#).

15 - I.e., the fulfilment of all that a human being may ever desire (Razi), symbolized by the "luxuriant gardens", etc., of the sequence.

16 - For the above rendering of *atrab*, see surah {56}, note [15]. As regards my rendering of *kawa'ib* as "splendid companions", it is to be remembered that the term *ka'b* - from which the participle *ka'ib* is derived - has many meanings, and that one of these meanings is "prominence", "eminence" or "glory" (Lisan al-'Arab); thus, the verb *ka'ba*, when applied to a person, signifies "he made [another person] prominent", "glorious" or "splendid" (ibid.) Based on this tropical meaning of both the verb *ka'ba* and the noun *ka'b*, the participle *ka'ib* has often been used, in popular parlance, to denote "a girl whose breasts are becoming prominent" or "are budding": hence, many commentators see in it an allusion to some sort of youthful "female companions" who would entertain the (presumably male) inmates of paradise. But quite apart from the fact that all Qur'anic allegories of the joys of paradise invariably apply to men and women alike, this interpretation of *kawa'ib* overlooks the purely derivative origin of the above popular usage - which is based on the tropical connotation of "prominence" inherent in the noun *ka'b* - and substitutes for this obvious

tropism the literal meaning of something that is physically prominent: and this, in my opinion, is utterly unjustified. If we bear in mind that the Qur'anic descriptions of the blessings of paradise are always allegorical, we realize that in the above context the term kawa'ib can have no other meaning than "glorious [or "splendid"] beings", without any definition of sex; and that, in combination with the term atrab, it denotes, "splendid companions well-matched" - thus alluding to the relations of the blest with one another, and stressing the absolute mutual compatibility and equal dignity of all of them. See also note [13] on [56:34](#).

17 - I.e., not merely in accordance with their good deeds but far in excess of them, in accordance with God's unlimited bounty.

18 - Lit., "the soul", in the singular but implying a plural. This is, according to Ibn 'Abbas, Qatadah and Al-Hasan (all of them quoted by Tabari), the meaning of ar-ruh in the above context.

19 - This includes the symbolic right of the prophets to "intercede" for the sinners on Judgment Day (see [10:3](#) - "There is none that could intercede with Him unless He grants leave therefor" - and the corresponding note [7], which makes it clear that such "intercession" implies God's a-priori acceptance of the sinner's repentance). In a wider sense, the statement that he whom God will allow to speak "will say [only] what is right" implies the impossibility of anyone's being untruthful on Judgment Day.

20 - Cf. [69:1](#) and the corresponding note [1]. Objectively, it will be the moment when the ultimate reality of human life and its purpose will become fully accessible to man's understanding.

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