

## DAILY QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

## From Juz' 21: A Life of Diversion & Play

وَمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَهُوٌّ وَلَعِبٌ ۚ وَإِنَّ الدَّارَ الْآخِرَةَ لَهِيَ الْحَيَوَانُ لَوْ كَانُوا يَعْلَمُونَ

The life of this world (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*) is nothing but diversion and play, but the abode of the Hereafter (*al-ākhirah*) is indeed the Life, had they known! (‘Ankabūt 29:64)

### Reflections:

When a person has it easy and enjoys a luxurious lifestyle, you often hear the expression, “He is definitely living the life!” If you feed this same expression to the Qur’ān, it will qualify it in this way: “He is definitely living the *worldly life*.” As for ‘*the Life*,’ without any qualifications, the Qur’ān gifts this to the Ākhirah. This contrast between the worldly life and that of the Ākhirah is nicely summarized in the lines of Imam ‘Alī (‘a): “Certainly, this world and the next are two enemies against each other and two paths in different directions. Whoever loves this world and makes it a friend hates the next and is its enemy.”<sup>1</sup>

So what, then, is the ‘worldly life’ (*al-ḥayāt al-dunyā*)? It is definitely not the world of trees, mountains, rivers, and clouds since these are natural phenomena that were created with truth and act as divine signs: “We did not create the heavens and the earth and whatever is between them except with truth.”<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the ‘worldly life’ is a life that is not based on truth or reality; instead, it is built on arbitrary conventions used to prop some individuals over others.

In the Qur’ān, the ‘worldly life’ has been linked to two concepts: ‘diversion’ and ‘play.’ It is a ‘diversion’ because it distracts us from the Ākhirah. It is called ‘play’ because it sets up conventional categories—ownership, fame, pride—that are not based on metaphysical realities. Regardless of whether diversion precedes play (such as in the above verse) or play precedes diversion (as in some other verses),<sup>3</sup> the important thing is that the two taken together are what comprise the worldly life.

When we think of the concept of play, we normally attribute it to what children do. The Qur’ān, however, does not limit it to a child’s activity. Anyone who lives the worldly life, whether young or old, is engrossed in play. But what does play look like for an adult? We find the answer in Surah Ḥadīd: “Know that the worldly life is mere play and diversion, beauty and mutual vainglory among you and rivalry for wealth and children.”<sup>4</sup> When one is in the prime of his youth, the game is about looks and beauty. When one gets a little older, it is about competition and vainglory. Finally, when one is established in late adulthood, it is about the accumulation of property and kinship. According to the Qur’ān, these are all just ‘play’.

Since it is so easy to get entangled in the games of this world, one of the missions of the prophets and the Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) was to teach people *dunyā-ology* (the study of the *dunyā*) and to warn them about falling into the *dunyāwī* game. No where is this best seen than in the words and life of Imam ‘Alī (‘a), who even in his role as the khalifah of the Muslims, never succumbed to the diversionary play of the people around him or the post he occupied. His intense love and remembrance of Allah (swt) prevented him from even touching the ‘worldly life’. He lived true to his words: “In the same way that the sun and night cannot come together, loving God and loving the *dunyā* cannot come together.”<sup>5</sup> May Allah remove the love of the *dunyā* from our hearts and allow us to use the *dunyā* as a planting field for the Ākhirah.

**To ponder:** How does the month of Ramaḍān teach us ways to resist the pull of the *dunyā*?

**References:** Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*

<sup>1</sup> *Nahj al-balāghah*, wisdom 103.

<sup>3</sup> 6:32; 47:36; 57:20

<sup>5</sup> *Ghurur al-ḥikam*, v.1, p. 536.

<sup>2</sup> 46:3

<sup>4</sup> 57:20