

DAILY QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

From Juz' 27: The Greatest Gift

الرَّحْمَنُ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ...

The All-beneficent has taught the Quran. He created man, He taught him clear speech ... (Raḥmān 55:1-4)

Reflections:

As human beings, we have a tendency to not only take things for granted—thereby failing to recognize the many gifts that surround us—but to properly identify the source of these gifts. Sometimes we forget the role of the sun and moon, the earth and the sky, the trees and the seas in our lives. But usually, when we do recognize their value, we fail to identify their Source. Allah (swt) tries to awaken us in many places of the Qur'ān, but one place where this becomes very apparent is in Surah Raḥmān. In it, Allah (swt) asks us rhetorically over thirty times: “So which of your Lord’s bounties will you both deny?” The reason the word ‘denial’ (*takdhīb*) is used is because instead of sourcing them back to the One Lord, we attribute those gifts to smaller deities, to themselves, or even to blind chance! We *deny* their link to God.

The beginning of this *sūrah* is very interesting and sets the tone for the rest of its contents. The *sūrah* begins with the name *al-Raḥmān*, the all-Merciful. This is one of the greatest names of Allah (swt), which has no opposite, and signifies His all-inclusive mercy that embraces both believer and disbeliever, the heavens and the earth, this world and the next. By beginning the *sūrah* with this name, Allah (swt) is informing us that all of creation is imbued with God’s mercy.

If this *sūrah* is all about the bounties that the most Merciful Lord has bestowed on us—both those we recognize and those we do not—then the next verse in the *surah* is very revealing. Out of all of the bounties mentioned by Allah (swt), the very first one is the Qur'ān itself, where Allah Himself takes ownership over its teaching. The Qur'ān then is one of the greatest gifts granted to humanity by the greatest teacher of it.

One of the things which has sparked the curiosity of many of the *mufasssīrīn* is the placement of the next line — “He created man.” After all, did not Allah (swt) create man *before* He taught him the Qur'ān. If so, why does Allah mention the teaching of the Qur'ān *before* the creation of man. One interesting interpretation to shed light on this ordering involves a distinction between a potential human being and a true human being (*insān*). All of us at the beginning of the path are only human in potential, not very different from the animals we share our planet with. It is only when we adopt the Qur'ānic message of *tawḥīd* and apply it in our actions that we can gain the status of *insāniyyah* that allows us to leave the plain of bestiality and enter the realm of the angels.

The next line may act as a confirmation—“He taught him clear speech.” The difference between *bayān* (clear speech) and *ibhām* (obscurity) is precisely the difference between an *insān* and a *bahīmah* (an animal). When we leave the domain of our animal selves, we are better able to articulate our thoughts in clear manner that is reflective of the truth. Hence, Allah (swt) says, “Do you suppose that most of them listen or exercise their reason? They are just like cattle; indeed, they are further astray from the way.”¹ Listening to the Qur'ān² and reflecting over its verses³ is what allows us to reach the station of *insāniyyah* and hence is the greatest gift from the All-Merciful Lord.

To ponder: In what way can the descriptions of hellfire that appear in the *surah* be seen as a mercy from God?

References: Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*