

The Real Competition

In Surat Al-Mutaffifin Almighty Allah draws a comparison between two groups of people and gives us the chance to choose for ourselves: in which group would we like to fit?

The first group comprises the friends of Sijjin whose situation in this worldly life is described in the noble Qur'an as well as what awaits them on the Day of Judgment, as follows:

[Not at all! Surely the Book of the constantly impious is indeed in Sijjîn. And what makes you realize what Sijjîn is? (It is) a Book imprinted. Woe upon that Day to the beliers, who cry lies to the Day of Doom, and in no way does anyone cry lies to it except every constantly vicious transgressor. When Our ayat (Verses, signs) are recited to him, he says, "Myths of the earliest (people)!" Not at all! No indeed, (but) whatever they were earning has overlaid on their hearts. Not at all! Surely upon that Day they will indeed be curtained from their Lord; Thereafter surely they will indeed be roasting in Hell-Fire. Thereafter it will be said (to them), "This is what you cried lies to."] (Al-Mutaffifin 83:7-17)

Thus, the noble Qur'an rebukes them and affirms that a record of their actions is kept in a specified location, albeit this location is unknown to us. Furthermore, in recompense for their transgression, they are threatened with woe and ruin on that Day when their record will be reviewed.

The transgressors, as the Arabic term fujjar here connotes, are those who excessively indulge in sin. In their book, all the deeds they have done throughout their lifetime are recorded. We do not have any knowledge about the nature of this book nor are we required to do so. The whole matter belongs to the realm of which we know nothing except what is revealed by Almighty Allah in the Qur'an or through His Messenger (peace and blessings be upon him).

[...whatever they were earning has overlaid on their hearts.] Indeed, the hearts of those who indulge in sin become dull, as if they were veiled by a thick curtain keeping them in total darkness, unable to see the light. In this way, they begin to gradually lose their sensitivity and thus, become lifeless. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) is reported to have said, “When a man commits a sin, it throws a black spot over his heart. If he repents, his heart is polished; but if he persists in his practice, the stains increase.” (At-Tirmidhi)

Explaining this verse, Imam Al-Hasan Al-Basri said, “It is a case of one sin on top of another until the heart is blinded and dies.”

The Inevitable Reckoning

So far, we have learnt about the situation of the unbelieving transgressors, as well as their motives for transgression and rejection of the truth. Then we have been informed about what will befall them on that mighty Day, a destiny which befits their evil deeds and denial of the truth. It is related in the Qur’an as follows:

[Surely upon that Day they will indeed be curtained from their Lord; Thereafter surely they will indeed be roasting in Hell-Fire. Thereafter it will be said (to them), “This is what you cried lies to.”] (Al-Mutaffifin 83:15-17)

Given the thick veil over their hearts, these people are unable to feel the presence of Almighty Allah or observe His limits. Therefore, it is only appropriate that they would not be allowed to see His glorious face. Thus, they will be rightfully deprived of this great happiness, which is only bestowed on those whose hearts and souls are so pure and transparent that they deserve to be encompassed within the security and infinite mercy of their Lord. Describing them, the noble Qur’an says:

[Faces upon that Day will be blooming, looking towards their Lord.] (Al-Qiyamah 75:22–23)

In contrast, the separation of the unbelievers from their Lord is the greatest and most agonizing punishment and deprivation. Indeed, it is a miserable end for a servant to be deprived of any contact with his Most Merciful Lord because of the unbelief and transgression he committed; thereby incurring his Lord's wrath upon himself. At this point, man loses all his humanity and sinks to a level which ensures Hell is his just recompense [Thereafter surely they will indeed be roasting in Hell-Fire.] On top of this, there is something that is much worse and more agonizing, namely, the way they will be rebuked [Thereafter it will be said (to them), "This is what you cried lies to."]

Faces Radiant with Joy

As a typical Qur'anic method of providing two elaborately contrasting images so that a detailed comparison can be drawn, the verses move on to an account of the other group: the righteous. It is related as follows:

[Not at all! Surely the Book of the constantly-benign is indeed in Illiyyîn. And what makes you realize what Illiyyîn is? (It is) a Book imprinted, The near-stationed (to Allah) witness it. Surely the constantly-benign will indeed be in Bliss, On couches looking (about). You recognize in their faces the bloom of Bliss. They will be given to drink of sealed nectar, whose sealing is musk; for this then let the competitors compete- And whose blend is of Tasnîm, a spring at which drink the near-stationed (to Allah).] (Al-Mutaffifin 83:18-28)

In contrast to the record of the transgressors, that of the righteous is in `Illiyyin. The term righteous refers to the believing servants of Allah who do righteous deeds. They are the exact opposite of the transgressors, who indulge in every sort of sin and excess. The name `Illiyyin connotes elevation and sublimity, which suggests, on the other hand, that Sijjin is associated with baseness and ignominy.

The above verses tell us that this book is witnessed by the [angels](#) near to Almighty Allah. Without a doubt, this indicates that the record of the righteous is associated with nobility, purity and sublimity. In fact, the whole image provides evidence of the honor the righteous shall receive.

After that, the verses go on to describe the situation in which the righteous will find themselves. We are told of the bliss they will enjoy on that great Day [Surely the constantly-benign will indeed be in Bliss, on couches looking (about).] This means that they will be given a place of honor: they will be able to look wherever they wish; they will not have to look down, out of humility; and nothing therein will trouble them in the least. In their bliss, the righteous will live in complete mental and physical comfort. Moreover, their faces will radiate with unmistakable joy [You recognize in their faces the bloom of Bliss.]

In Paradise, the righteous will be given to drink of a pure drink, securely sealed with a seal of musk [They will be given to drink of sealed nectar, whose sealing is musk.] Their drink is absolutely pure, free of any unwanted additions or particles of dust. Describing it as securely sealed with musk indicates, perhaps, that it is ready-made in secured containers to be opened when refreshment is needed. All this adds to the impression of the meticulous care being taken. The fact that the seal is of musk also adds an element of elegance and luxury. The whole picture, however, is only understood within the limits of human experience in this world. In the life to come, however, people will have different concepts, tastes and standards which will be free from all the bonds of this limited world. The description is carried further in the following two verses:

[And whose blend is of Tasnîm, a spring at which drink the near-stationed (to Allah).]

So, this pure, securely-sealed drink is opened and mixed with a measure of the water from a spring called Tasnim and is described as the one from which those who are brought near to their Lord drink.

Within this wonderful description we are also given a significant instruction [...for this then let the competitors compete.] Those who strive for an object of this world, no matter how superb, grand or honorable it may appear, are in reality striving for something hollow, cheap and temporary. This world, in its totality, is not worth, in the sight of Almighty Allah, a mosquito's wing. Yet, it is the Hereafter that carries real weight with Him. Therefore, it should be the goal for strenuous competition and zealous striving.

It is remarkable that striving for the hereafter elevates the souls of all those who strive, while competition for worldly objects sinks the competitors' souls to the lowest depths. As man works continuously to achieve the happiness of the Hereafter, his work makes this world happy and pure for himself and those around him. On the other hand, efforts made for the achievement of worldly ends turn this world into a filthy marsh, where animals devour one another savagely.

Striving for the hereafter does not turn the earth into a barren desert, as some transgressors mistakenly imagine. Islam views this world as a farm whose fruit is the hereafter. It defines the role of the true believer in building and inhabiting this world while following the path of piety and righteousness. In addition, Islam calls upon its followers to perceive such fruitful endeavors as acts of worship that fulfill the very purpose of their existence as defined by the Creator:

[And in no way did I create the jinn and humankind except to worship Me.] (Adh-Dhariyat 51:56)

The statement [...for this then let the competitors compete] inspires the believers to look far beyond this finite, insignificant world. As they work on purifying the filthy marsh of this world their souls are elevated to new heights. Man's life on earth is limited, whereas his life to come is of limitless duration. The luxuries of this world are extremely limited in comparison to what awaits the believers in Paradise, which is far beyond our imagination. Elements of happiness in this worldly life are well-known to everyone, but in the next world they will be on a level befitting a life everlasting.

What comparison can then be held between the two spheres of competition or the two goals, even when we apply the human method of balancing losses against profits? It is, indeed, one race and a single competition that is truly far more important than any other [...for this then let the competitors compete.]

Translated by `Adil Salahi

* This article has been taken with modifications from the author's book In The Shade of The Qur'an.