

Surat al-Insan - Feeding the poor, orphan & captive

Learning Objectives

- To provide an explanation of verses 5-12 of Surat al-Insan.
- To memorise verses 8-9 of Surat al-Insan

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا

Indeed the pious will drink from a cup seasoned with Kafur [76:5]

The word “*abraar*” is the plural of “*barr*” which originally means “broadness and expansiveness.” For this reason dry land and vast deserts, as opposed to large bodies of water, are called “*barr*”. Thus, this term is applied to the righteous because their good deeds have extensive effects on society.

The word “*birr*” means “to be pious” “just” or “to act justly.” The difference between “*khayr*” and “*birr*” is that “*khayr*” has a greater meaning of “goodness” accompanied by intention.

The word “*kaafur*” means “good smelling.” Another meaning is “fragrant plant” or a plant which has a sweet fragrance. The other meaning is that it is an extraordinary white and cool substance. Also, this verse indicates that this purifying drink is so fragrant that it is enjoyed both through the senses of taste and smell.

عَيْنًا يَشْرَبُ بِهَا عِبَادُ اللَّهِ يُفَجِّرُونَهَا تَفْجِيرًا

A fountain from which the servants of Allah shall drink; they make it to flow a (goodly) flowing forth. [76:6]

This verse refers to the fountainhead from which this cup of divine drink is filled. This purified fountain is under their control in such a way that it flows wherever they wish.

In a tradition reported from Imam al-Baqir (AS), he provides a description of the fountain described in the verse. This fountain is placed in the house of the Prophet (SAW) and from there it flows to the houses of the previous Prophets and believers. As in this world, the fountain of knowledge and mercy flow from the Prophet’s house towards the servants of Allah and the righteous, and in the next world, the fountain of the divine pure drink will originate from his house to the houses of the other believers.

يُوفُونَ بِالنَّذْرِ وَيَخَافُونَ يَوْمًا كَانَ شَرُّهُ مُسْتَطِيرًا

They fulfill their vows and fear a day whose ill will be widespread.

وَيُطْعَمُونَ الطَّعَامَ عَلَىٰ حُبِّهِ مِسْكِينًا وَيَتِيمًا وَأَسِيرًا

And they give food out of love for Him to the poor and the orphan and the captive:

إِنَّمَا نُطْعِمُكُمْ لِوَجْهِ اللَّهِ لَا نُرِيدُ مِنْكُمْ جَزَاءً وَلَا شُكُورًا

We only feed you for Allah's sake; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks:

إِنَّا نَخَافُ مِنْ رَبِّنَا يَوْمًا عَبُوسًا قَمْطَرِيرًا

Surely we fear from our Lord a stern, distressful day.

فَوَقَاهُمُ اللَّهُ شَرَّ ذَلِكَ الْيَوْمِ وَلَقَّاهُمْ نَضْرَةً وَسُرُورًا

Therefore Allah will guard them from the evil of that day and cause them to meet with ease and happiness;

وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا

And reward them, because they were patient, with garden and silk [76:7-12]

The Occasion of Revelation

Almost all the well-known Muslim Scholars agree that these verses were revealed when the following events took place:

One morning Sayyida Fatema (AS) found out that her sons, Hassan and Hussain were not well. The holy Prophet (SAW) came to see them and advised Ali (AS) and Fatema (AS) to make a promise (*nadhr*) to Allah (SAW) that they would observe fasts for three consecutive days for their recovery. After a short while both of them recovered.

So Ali (AS), Fatima (AS) Hassan (AS) Hussain (AS) and Fizza fasted for three days. On the first night after their fast, when they were preparing to break their fast, a poor man came to their door and said, "Peace be upon you, O Ahlul Bayt of the Messenger of Allah, I am a poor man. I am hungry. Give me something to eat. May Allah bestow upon you from divine sustenance." All of them gave priority to him and gave their shares. That night they broke their fast with only water.

The following day they fasted again, but like the previous day, an orphan came to the door. Once more they gave away their bread and ate nothing but water.

The next day they fasted for the third time. This day a captive came to their house and they repeated their charity.

On the fourth day, Ali (AS) took Hassan (AS) and Hussain (AS) to see the holy Prophet (SAW). When the Prophet (SAW) saw their condition, they were trembling with hunger, he said, "It grieves me to see you in this condition." Then he stood up and walked with them. When he arrived at their home, he found Fatima (AS) praying. At this moment Jibrael descended and said: "O Mohammad, Allah congratulates you for having such a family." And then Jibrael recited to him Surat al-Insan.

Donating food at the time of severe self-need requires great generosity. It was not simply feeding someone, since their action demanded sacrifices at a time when they themselves, were in greatest need. Their deed conforms with the teaching of the verse 92 of Surat Aal Imran which says: "By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give in the of Allah that which you love...."

وَجَزَاهُمْ بِمَا صَبَرُوا جَنَّةً وَحَرِيرًا

And reward them, because they were patient, with garden and silk [76:12]

Allah will reward them in special gardens of Heaven and will dress them in the best clothes due to their patience, and their loyalty to their vow, fasting and donating their food to the poor, orphan and captive at the time when they were in need of it and were preparing to break their fast.

There are many other verses throughout the Holy Qur'an, where it is mentioned that all rewards, in the Hereafter, are paid in full for man's patience, patience in obedience, patience in avoiding sins and patience in standing firm against difficulties and hardships.

سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ ۖ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ

'Peace be to you, for your patience.' How excellent is the reward of the [ultimate] abode! [13:24]

إِنِّي جَزَيْتُهُمُ الْيَوْمَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا أَنَّهُمْ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

Indeed I have rewarded them today for their patience. They are indeed the triumphant.' [23:111]