

# Tafseer Surah at-Takathur (التكاثر)

Notes on Nouman Ali Khan's Concise Commentary of the Quran

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## Introduction

- This surah begins with accusing humans of being distracted by the worldly life and its temptations and ends with them being interrogated on the Day of Judgement
  - It reminds mankind that death can come suddenly and without warning while they are busy chasing after the worldly life. At one moment they may be in a palace and the next in their grave [Safwa al-Tafaaseer]
- There is a special focus in this surah on those people who only believe when they see something and do not want to learn through listening
- The surah also points out the horrors that will occur on the Day of Judgement from which no one will be safe except the believer who put forth righteous deeds [Safwa al-Tafaaseer]

## Tafseer of the Verses

### 1. Competition in [worldly] increase diverts you

- a. The Arabic word *alhaa* (divert)
  - i. Comes from the word *lahw* meaning when you are distracted or preoccupied as opposed to something else
    1. Some argue it means when you are distracted with something less important at the expense of something more important
      - a. Ex: you were distracted by your phone and missed your flight
    2. *Lahw* is also the common Arabic word used for entertainment
- b. The Arabic *at-takaathur* (competition)
  - i. This word gives four implications:
    1. Competing to want more than others
      - a. Specifically in context of useless things
        - i. Ex: someone has a big house so you want a bigger house than that person
    2. Showing off to others that you have more
    3. Obsession with wanting more for yourself even when not competing against another
      - a. Such a person never feels he has enough
    4. When a person's circle of friends or family pressure him/her to compete in a certain way in things which are not a priority
      - a. Ex: when parents tell their kids, "Look at your so-and-so cousin who is married now, why aren't you?"

- c. Allah does not mention what we should be busying ourselves with instead because that is a question we need to answer ourselves and it is unique to each one of us
  - i. In general, worship is definitely one of them
    - 1. Anything beyond this, we need to examine our own gifts, talents, and skills and put them to use in a productive way
- d. The point of this verse is to critique wasting our time away by competing in meaningless things
  - i. It is interesting to note that our religion relies on the use of time a lot even in worship
    - 1. Ex: the sun is used as a clock for prayers and the moon is used as a calendar to determine months
- e. Whatever is little and enough is better than something that is way too much and ends up distracting you
  - i. Meaning things should be done with the right proportion

## **2. Until you visit the graveyards**

- a. Meaning that we are always going to want more and more until we die
- b. Allah is telling us in a sarcastic way that we are so distracted by this life that it will take us to our graves
  - i. Meaning we will keep being distracted by meaningless things until we die
- c. Some said this was in reference to some tribes who were boasting about their past ancestors by visiting the graveyard and counting graves to determine which tribe had more warriors in the past
  - i. So Allah is saying to them that you are so distracted by this world that you even go to the graveyard, which should be reminding you of your own demise, in order to boast to each other
- d. The Arabic word *zaara* (visit)
  - i. The original meaning of it is to meet somebody and hug them
  - ii. In the context of this verse, it means that we too will eventually be like those in the graves by meeting with them in death
  - iii. Some said the word implies a short visit, therefore, Allah is saying that we will eventually die and be put in our graves for a short while but then resurrected for the ultimate accountability
    - 1. Some have been in their graves for thousands of years yet Allah is still referring to their time in the grave as a short visit so what about our small life on this earth?

## **3. No! You are going to know**

- a. Meaning very soon you are going to find out how wrong you were and how little time you had in this life
  - i. This is in reference to death

## **4. Then no! You are going to know**

- a. This is a form of emphasis
- b. Some said this second one is in reference to the Day of Judgement

- i. Meaning even death itself was nothing compared to what is going to happen on the Day of Judgement

## **5. No! If you only knew with knowledge of certainty**

- a. Meaning if you truly knew with certainty what is being told to you by your Creator about life, death, and the Day of Judgement
  - i. This is a type of knowing where you have no doubts about it
- b. Knowledge of certainty (*'ilm al-yaqeen*)
  - i. This is the type of knowledge that is inferred through knowledge and evidence. Animals do not have this ability
    - 1. Ex: when you see smoke from a distance and conclude that there is a fire even though you have not seen it with your eyes
  - ii. Allah is saying that mankind has the ability to infer through evidence the reality of this life and preparing for the afterlife, however, they do not do so but are constantly distracted by only what we can see
  - iii. Quran is also a form of *'ilm al-yaqeen*, because we can derive and infer things from it

## **6. You will surely see the Hellfire**

- a. Allah is saying since mankind does not use the knowledge of certainty but only relies on what they can see, then realize that they will definitely see the Hellfire
  - i. It is a form of censure
  - ii. Knowledge based on what we can see is called 'eye of certainty' (*'ayn al-yaqeen*)
- b. The Arabic word *jaheem* (Hellfire)
  - i. Comes from a word meaning the eyes of a lion or a person that is about to attack, because they are usually blazing red before the attack. It is as if to say that Hellfire will be looking right back at us like a predator
- c. Everyone, including believers, will see Hellfire

## **7. Then you will surely see it with the eye of certainty**

- a. Eye of certainty (*'ayn al-yaqeen*)
  - i. This is knowledge that is derived by actually witnessing something with the eyes
  - ii. Ex: you see the fire with your own eyes and conclude that there is a fire
- b. Meaning we will see the Hellfire with our own eyes but at that time it will be too late
  - i. Whenever Allah showed explicit signs in this life with what people could see with their own eyes but continued to disbelieve, they were punished. This is why when prophets were given miracles that people could see but still refused, they were destroyed
    - 1. Doors of mercy are open as long as the people are in listening mode. Once they see the signs with their eyes, there is no excuse left
      - a. This is why the criminals on the Day of Judgement will say when they see the Hellfire, "How we wish we had obeyed Allah and obeyed the Messenger" (Quran 33:66). The believers are described in this life to have the mindset of "We hear and we obey", because they used their *ilm al-yaqeen* to infer giving preference to the afterlife over this life

## **8. Then you will surely be asked that Day about pleasure**

- a. Meaning when you finally see the Hellfire itself with your own eyes, it is then you will be asked about the comforts of this life because those comforts were put in place to remind you to be grateful and not distract you
  - i. These comforts could be anything that we have enjoyed or sought comfort with in this life: electricity, a meal, drop of water, warmth, health, clothes, etc.