

# Tafseer Surah al-'A'la (الأعلى)

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

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## Introduction

- I. It is the only *surah* which begins with commanding us to do Allah's *tasbeeh* (Glorifying Allah by saying *SubhanAllah*)
  - A. *Tasbeeh* is a way to free Allah of any imperfections
- II. Overall, the *surah* talks about the fact that Allah has a plan for everything
- III. Allah's Attributes (seeing, hearing, knowledge, mercy, etc.) consist of the following:
  - A. They have no beginning or end, thus, they are eternal
  - B. They have no limits
  - C. They are entirely His and no one gave them to Him nor can anyone take them away
  - D. They cannot be compared to His creation

## Tafseer of the Verses

### 1. Exalt the name of your Lord, the Most High

- a. Meaning declare Allah free of any sort of imperfections
- b. We fulfill this command by saying *Subhana Rabbi Yal'azeem* while bowing and *Subhana Rabbi Yal'al'a* while prostrating in our *salah*

### 2. Who created and proportioned

- a. Proportioned means that Allah put finishing touches on His creation and perfected it
  - i. Ex: Allah created the seed and from it a fully grown tree comes forth, Allah created a sperm drop and from it a fully grown human forms, etc.
  - ii. Shows us that Allah does not just create but He also puts artistry and perfection into it
    1. This is one of the things that makes us glorify Him and say *SubhanAllah*

### 3. And Who destined and [then] guided

- a. Meaning at each stage of creation, He guided it with certain instructions
  - i. Ex: a baby suckles on its own when newborn, then begins to babble when he/she gets a little older, then is able to do more complex tasks as he/she gets more mature, etc.
- b. Another meaning could be that Allah created you capable at each stage of creation and then guided you in it as what to do
  - i. There are two parts to guidance
    1. You have to be capable
    2. You have to know what to do

- ii. This means we are capable at our current state and we only lack guidance which is being given through the Quran and Sunnah
- c. Types of guidance
  - i. Natural
    - 1. Things created beings do naturally without learning
  - ii. Intellectual
    - 1. Ability to infer something from an observation
    - 2. Ex: think, rationalize, calculate, etc.
  - iii. *Fitrah* (intuition)
    - 1. Our predisposition to a set of morals

#### **4. And who brings out the pasture**

- a. Pasture is the greenery that cattle and sheep eat from
  - i. Everyone benefits from it from the animals and humans

#### **5. And [then] makes it black stubble**

- a. Meaning the pasture after a while becomes useless and dead
  - i. So there is a sense of urgency being hinted at here
    - 1. It is as if we are being told that this revelation from Allah is being given to you and there is a limited time for which you can take advantage of it. On the Day of Judgement, it will be too late

#### **6. We will make you recite, [O Muhammad], and you will not forget**

- a. This is an assurance and consolation for the Prophet (pbuh) because he was afraid that he might forget the verses revealed earlier and more is coming down in the future
- b. Allah is revealing His plan for His prophet (pbuh) that He will not cause him to forget it

#### **7. Except what Allah should will. Indeed, He knows what is declared and what is hidden**

- a. "Except what Allah should will" means in this context that had it not been for the Will of Allah, the Prophet (pbuh) would have forgotten it
  - i. If Allah's guidance is taken away, then the Qur'an would be gone
  - ii. It could also mean that if Allah wants, He can take it away and has the power to do so
  - iii. Some said it is in reference to the Prophet (pbuh) forgetting part of it in his prayer so that we may know the rulings on how to deal with it
  - iv. Some said it is in reference to the abrogated verses (*Baghawi*)
  - v. Some said it means that he may be caused to forget due to some Divine Wisdom (*Mukhtasar al-tafseer*)
- b. The second part means that nothing is hidden from Him and that He knows all whether it is done openly or secretly
  - i. It could also mean that He knows both what is known and the hidden realities of things

#### **8. And We will ease you toward ease**

- a. Meaning Allah will make the following easy for the Prophet (pbuh) :
  - i. Reading, recitation, and memorization of Qur'an
  - ii. The Prophet's mission
    - 1. Meaning He will make it easier for him to bear the trials that come with it

- b. Meaning of “toward ease”
  - i. Some said it means Allah will make the easiest possible law
  - ii. Ustaadh Nouman argues that it means that this path of Islam that He is giving His Prophet (pbuh) is the easiest even more so than the previous scriptures
    - 1. Islam was sent to make ease in people’s lives

**9. So remind, if the reminder should benefit**

- a. Meaning do not worry about the audience whether they listen or not but just do your job of reminding the people
- b. The conditional “if” is used to tell the Prophet (pbuh) that he should continue to remind if he believes the Qur’an has benefit and it certainly does

**10. He who fears [Allah] will be reminded**

- a. Meaning that there will be people who will feel a shiver after being reminded through the Qur’an and take heed

**11. But the wretched one will avoid it**

- a. Meaning there will be people who will make every effort not to hear what the Prophet (pbuh) has to say
- b. They are called wretched because they go out of their way to avoid something that is natural to their *fitrah* (i.e. the revelation of Allah)
  - i. They are behaving in an unnatural way

**12. [He] who will [enter and] burn in the greatest Fire**

- a. This is the destination of those mentioned in the previous verse
  - i. This hardened heart will be softened in the greatest of all fires: Hell

**13. Neither dying therein nor living**

- a. Meaning such a person is neither kept alive nor dead in Hell
  - i. It’s a form of torturous punishment for their crime
- b. Some said it means that they will neither find relief nor the feeling of burning will ever go away from them

**14. He has certainly succeeded who purifies himself**

- a. Meaning the one who grows and enhances himself will reach the ultimate success
- b. Purification here means that he accepts the *kalimah*
  - i. Some said it means purifying oneself from bad character (*al-Tafseer al-Muyassar*) and others said it means purifying oneself from idolatry and sins (*Mukhtasar fee al-tafseer*)
- c. There is a relationship between reminder and purification. When we constantly put ourselves in gatherings of reminder, we purify ourselves and grow bit by bit

**15. And mentions the name of his Lord and prays**

- a. Meaning he remembered the way he’s suppose to mention Allah’s name through *tasbeeh*
- b. Some said “mentions the name of his Lord” means that filling one’s mind with beautiful notions of Allah through His beautiful Names
- c. Prayer is mentioned at the end because it is the ultimate *dhikr*
  - i. The awe and remembrance of Allah comes before engaging in *salah*, which is the ultimate *dhikr*

**16. But you prefer the worldly life**

- a. This is a general address to all mankind that we do not give preference to the afterlife and do not want to grow in preparation to meeting Allah

**17. While the Hereafter is better and more enduring**

- a. The word 'hereafter' in this context means only paradise
- b. 'More enduring' means that it lasts longer and will never wither away

**18. Indeed, this is in the former scriptures**

- a. Meaning that which has been informed to you in this *surah*, the same has been revealed in the scriptures before you even though it may not be in exact same words [*al-Tafseer al-Muyassar*]
- b. Some said the phrase "this is" is in reference to verses 14-17 of this *surah*, therefore, it means that the things mentioned in these four verses have been mentioned in the previous scriptures [*Baghawi*]

**19. The scriptures of Abraham and Moses**

- a. Some said this is in reference to the Bible
- b. Some said that the contents of what was mentioned in their scriptures is discussed in Surah An-Najm starting with verse 36