

Sura 91: Al-Shams (The Sun)

In the name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy

Verses 1 to 15:

1. *By the sun and its brightness,*
2. *And the moon as it follows it,*
3. *And the day as it displays it,*
4. *And the night as it covers it,*
5. *And the sky and He who built it,*
6. *And the earth and He who spread it,*
7. *And a soul and He who perfected it,*
8. *And inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.*
9. *He is indeed successful who purifies it,*
10. *And he is indeed a failure who corrupts it.*
11. *(The tribe of) Thamud denied (the truth) because of their rebellious pride,*
12. *When the wicked man among them was deputed.*
13. *And the Messenger of God said to them, "It is the she-camel of God, so let her drink."*
14. *But they denied him, and they hamstrung her, so God doomed them for their sin and leveled it.*
15. *And He does not fear its consequence.*

The Sura has been revealed in Mecca. It consists of two sections. The first section is comprised of the first ten verses. The section attracts the attention to some of the physical phenomena of the universe. These are signs of the power of God. The section ends with a statement about who will be successful and who will be a failure. The second section is comprised of the verses eleven to the end. This section narrates briefly the story of the tribe of Thamud.

"By the sun and its brightness, and the moon as it follows it, and the day as it displays it, and the night as it covers it, and the sky and He who built it, and the earth and He who spread it." God makes an oath by cosmic scenes; His creatures; and the soul and its perfection and inspiration. The oath bestows high status on these creatures and directs the heart to reflect upon them. The oath starts with the sun and its brightness, then the moon as it follows after the sun, the day as it makes things clear, the night as it covers the earth, the sky and He who built it, and the earth and He who spread it. The fact that God is making an oath using these creatures of His elevates these creatures to a high status. The oath evokes in the human being the sense to appreciate the signs of God and to reflect upon them.

The verses then discuss an important fact regarding the human soul, *"and a soul and He who perfected it, and inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it. He is indeed successful who purifies it. And he is indeed a failure who corrupts it."* These verses in addition to the verses, *"And We showed him the two ways?" (90: 10)* and *"Indeed, We guided him to the way, be he grateful or be he ungrateful." (76: 3)* establish the psychological theory of Islam. Humankind has a dual nature and a dual propensity. Because of the fact that his body was created from mud and then God breathed into him of His spirit, he has equal propensity to

goodness and evil; and to guidance and going astray. Humankind has the ability to differentiate between what is right and what is wrong. He also has the ability to motivate himself to do what is right as well as doing what is wrong. This ability to differentiate and to guide oneself is expressed by the verse, “*and a soul and He who perfected it, and inspired it to differentiate between what is wrong for it and (what is) right for it.*” This ability is instilled in the initial natural disposition of humankind. God sent His Message to unleash this ability and to strengthen it.

In addition to the ability instilled in the initial natural disposition to differentiate between right and wrong, humankind has a built in conscious decision making mechanism. The decisions made by this mechanism are the decisions that humankind will be held accountable for. The person who uses this mechanism to purify himself and to do good deeds will be successful while those who use the mechanism to commit sins will be losers. The consequence of giving humankind this conscious decision making mechanism is that humankind is held accountable for his deeds. It is a mercy of God that he sent the Message to guide humankind to the right path and to help him make the right decisions.

An example of making the wrong decision is then given, “*(The tribe of) Thamud denied (the truth) because of their rebellious pride, When the wicked man among them was deputed, and the Messenger of God said, “It is the she-camel of God, so let her drink.” But they denied him, and they hamstrung her, so God doomed them for their sin and leveled it. And He does not fear its consequence.*” The story of the tribe of Thamud was narrated in several places in the Qur’an. It is mentioned here to highlight the fact that the decision that the tribe of Thamud made to deny its Prophet was only caused by its tyranny. Tyranny motivated the wicked among them to hamstring the she-camel. Their Prophet warned them but they did not heed the warning. They hamstrung the she-camel and God punished them.