

The Kingdom of God: A Commentary of Surat al-Mulk

Lesson 1



tasneeminstitute
ENRICHING THE SOUL

How to Read the Quran

- The Quran, and all other Divine scriptures, are unlike ordinary texts. They cannot be read in the same way other books are read.
- 1. Approach it with a pure heart. Understanding the Quran requires purity of heart. It gradually reveals itself to the reader as the heart becomes more and more pure.
- 2. Know the author. The reader must be conscious that they are in the presence of God and every word is emanating from Him.
- 3. Although the Prophet received the Quran, God is also speaking directly to us in our own time-period.

How to Read the Quran

- 4. Do not read the Quran to prove a pre-existing belief.
- 5. Read the Quran at times when you are able to concentrate.
- 6. Recite it with humbleness. Implore God to help you understand its meaning.

The Merits of Surat al-Mulk

- It is reported that Imam al-Baqir (a) once said:

سورة الملك هي المانعة، تمنع من عذاب القبر، وهي مكتوبة في التوراة سورة الملك، ومن
قرأها في ليلة فقد أكثر وأطاب ولم يكتب من الغافلين

“Surat al-Mulk is a shield. It protects from the chastisement of the
grave....”

The Merits of Surat al-Mulk

- The Prophet (s) is reported to have said:

وددت أن تبارك الملك في قلب كل مؤمن

“I would love for it to be in the heart of every believer.”

من قرأ سورة تبارك فكأنما أحيى ليلة القدر

“Whoever recites it, it is as though they observed a night vigil in worship on the Night of Destiny.”

Themes of Surat al-Mulk

- This chapter is centered around two themes.
 - 1. It speaks of God's lordship over all of creation in refutation of the pagan belief in gods who allegedly control small pockets of the cosmos.
 - 2. It also speaks of the Day of Judgment and the punishment and reward meted out to people on that day.

Verse 1

تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي بِيَدِهِ الْمُلْكُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

“Blessed is He in Whose Hand lies the Kingdom, and He is Powerful over all things.”

- What is the meaning of “تبارك” tabaraka”? It comes from the word baraka بركة
- One of the meanings of بركة is الزيادة which means “plentitude” or “abundance”.
- There is “baraka” in God and this means that there is abundant goodness that comes from Him. What comes from Him cannot be measured.

Verse 1

- Another interpretation- if we understand تبارك to mean الزيادة – is that God is beyond what our minds can comprehend. God Himself cannot be measured.
- God's relation to human beings is a beautiful paradox. He is close to our hearts but far from our minds.

Verse 1

- The second meaning of بركة is constancy and establishment. This comes from its usage in classical Arabic when the camel sits and establishes its chest on the ground. A Bedouin, for instance, would say برك البعير
- When applied to God it asserts His permanence. Everything perishes except Him

Verse 1

- The word مبارك “mubarak” is used to describe is used for creations that are blessed because they are sources of goodness.

- Ex. The House of God:

إِنَّ أَوَّلَ بَيْتٍ وُضِعَ لِلنَّاسِ لَلَّذِي بِبَكَّةَ مُبَارَكًا وَهُدًى لِّلْعَالَمِينَ

“Indeed, the first House [of worship] established for mankind was that at Bakka - blessed and a guidance for the worlds.” Quran 3:96

- Ex. The Night of Destiny:

إِنَّا أَنْزَلْنَاهُ فِي لَيْلَةٍ مُّبَارَكَةٍ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُنذِرِينَ

”Indeed, We sent it down during a blessed night. Indeed, We were to warn [mankind].” Quran 44:3

- The word تبارك “tabarak” is only used for God

Verse 1

- Why is God the source of abundant, plentiful goodness? The next part of the verse answers this question. “...**He in Whose Hand lies the Kingdom.**”
- What is meant by the “Hand of God”?
- Salafi/Hanbali interpret this literally. They assert that God has a hand but we do not understand its reality. *الكيفية مجهولة والسؤال بدعة*
- Ahlul Bayt interpret this metaphorically. This verse is considered an allegorical verse which can only be understood in the light of decisive Quranic verses.

Verse 1

- The verses in the Quran are either “allegorical” or “decisive” based on the following verse:

هُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ عَلَيْكَ الْكِتَابَ مِنْهُ آيَاتٌ مُحْكَمَاتٌ هُنَّ أُمُّ الْكِتَابِ وَأُخَرُ مُتَشَابِهَاتٌ

“It is He who sent the Book down to you, in it are decisive verses, they are the mother of the book, and others are allegorical...” Quran 3:7

Verse 1

- An example of a decisive verse:

لَيْسَ كَمِثْلِهِ شَيْءٌ

“There is nothing like Him..” Quran 42:11

- If we place this verse beside the verse that attributes a hand to God, there is a contradiction and the only way to resolve it would be to interpret “hand” metaphorically.

Verse 1

- There are two kingdoms mentioned in the Quran:
 - 1. Mulk مُلْك – Visible realm which operates through chains of causes and effects
 - 2. Malakut مَلَكُوت – invisible realm which does not go through this chain of cause and effect. Rather, everything is directly attached to God
- Mulk and malakut are actually two sides of the same coin. One is the outer reality and the other is the inner reality.

Verse 1

- One who sees the mulk, may not believe in God because they are blinded by the chains of causes and effects.
- One who sees malakut has no doubt because they see a direct connection between everything and God.

وَكَذَلِكَ نُرِيَ إِبْرَاهِيمَ مَلَكُوتَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَلِيَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُوقِنِينَ

“And thus did We show Abraham the invisible realm of the heavens and the earth that he would be among the certain [in faith].” Quran 6:75

Verse 1

- God is not a symbolic king like some of the kings who have ruled in history.
- **“...and He is Powerful over all things.”**
- If God has the power to do anything, can He create a rock that He Himself cannot lift?

Verse 2

الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوَكُمْ أَيُّكُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْغَفُورُ

“Who created death and life to test you [and to determine] who among you is better in deeds and He is the Mighty and Forgiving.”

- Is death a created thing or is it the absence of life?
- Why is death mentioned before life?
- Why does God need to test us?
- Why are these two names of God mentioned in particular?

Verse 2

- If we construe the verb “to create” literally, death and life must both be *things* created by God. This view is supported by a tradition from Imam al-Baqir (a):

الحياة والموت خلقان من خلق الله، فإذا جاء الموت فدخل في الإنسان، لم يدخل في شيء إلا وقد خرجت منه الحياة

“Life and death are creatures from the creatures of God. If death comes and enters a person, that person will not do anything without life leaving him.”

Source: al-Kafi, v. 3. p. 96

Verse 2

- It is also possible to construe the verb “to create” figuratively to mean “to apportion.”

نَحْنُ قَدَّرْنَا بَيْنَكُمُ الْمَوْتَ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ

“We have apportioned death among you, and we shall not be pre-empted” Quran 56:60

Verse 2

- This verse speaks of one of the reasons why God has doled out life and death: to test us. Life's role in this test is that it provides the playing field for the test. In life, a person faces all sorts of circumstances and must make choices vis-à-vis those circumstances, either in accordance with divine guidance or counter to it.
- Death, on the other hand, is a constant specter on the horizon reminding the living that this life does not last forever and that they must act with urgency before death comes
- Perhaps it is to add emphasis to the imminent specter of death and to encourage us to act before it arrives that the verse mentions the creation or apportionment of death before life.

Verse 2

- It is also significant that the verse says, “[to determine] who among you acts *better*,” not *more*. In a tradition of Imam al-Sadiq we read:

ليس يعني أكثر عملاً، ولكن أصوبكم عملاً، وإنا الإصابة خشية الله والنية الصادقة

“[God] does not mean ‘who acts *more*,’ rather ‘who acts more *correctly*. Correctness is tantamount to the fear of God, a good intention, and a good act”

Verse 2

- This is the only place in the Quran where these two names are mentioned together.
- These two attributes of God are fitting in the context. God is the Mighty الْعَزِيز. Thus the outcome of the test to which He subjects us does not affect Him in the least. In particular, we cannot harm Him by defying him and failing.
- As for those who strive to win the race to “act better,” they must never lose heart because of the vastness of their sins and shortcomings, for God is the All-Forgiving الْغَفُور

Verse 3 and 4

الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ طِبَاقًا مَّا تَرَى فِي خَلْقِ الرَّحْمَنِ مِنْ تَفَاوُتٍ فَارْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ هَلْ تَرَى
مِنْ فُطُورِهِمْ اَرْجِعِ الْبَصَرَ كَرَّتَيْنِ يَنْقَلِبْ اِلَيْكَ الْبَصَرُ خَاسِئًا وَهُوَ حَسِيرٌ

“who created seven heavens in layers, and you will not find any anomalies in the All-Merciful’s creation [of them]. So look once again. Do you see any breaches? Then look again and again and your eyes will return defeated and weary.”

Verse 3 and 4

- We cannot yet say conclusively, what is meant by seven heavens. All we can say is that the Quran repeatedly mentions that there are seven and that the closest of these seven to us is where the stars exist (note that the verse only says that God adorned the lowest of the heavens with stars, not that all stars are in the lowest heaven as some commentators have suggested).
- Allamah Tabatabaie believed this verse seems to indicate that the seven heavens are in vertical layers one atop another

Verse 3 and 4

لِلَّهِ الَّذِي خَلَقَ سَبْعَ سَمَاوَاتٍ وَمِنَ الْأَرْضِ مِثْلَهُنَّ يَتَنَزَّلُ الْأَمْرُ بَيْنَهُنَّ لِتَعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ وَأَنَّ اللَّهَ قَدْ أَحَاطَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عِلْمًا

“It is God who has created seven heavens and of the earth, the like of them. [His] command descends among them so you may know that God is over all things competent and that God has encompassed all things in knowledge.” Quran 65:12

Verse 3 and 4

- However, there is an alternative way to interpret the word طباقا to mean synchrony.
- The beginning of the verse would translate: “who created seven heavens in *synchrony*”
- This meaning seems more appropriate to the rest of the verse and is a viable opinion.

Verse 3 and 4

- We must differentiate between an anomaly **تَفَاوُت** and diversity. Of course, as we gaze at the cosmos around us, we will see great diversity of form and function. The cosmos is heterogeneous, not homogeneous. This does not mean that we have discovered anomalies to answer the Quran's challenge. Rather this diversity is an integral part of the cosmos without which it would not be as it is. The anomalies that the Quran tells us we shall not find are exceptions to the principles upon which the cosmos is created, such that we would be forced to conclude that the cosmos is not one singular integrated system.

Verse 5

وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَجَعَلْنَاهَا رُجُومًا لِلشَّيَاطِينِ وَأَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابَ السَّعِيرِ

“And We have adorned the lowest of these heavens with lights and We have made [from] them things to cast at devils. And We have prepared for them [in the hereafter] the punishment of hellfire.”

- Verses 67:3-4 argued that God’s heavens are free from all defects. 67:5 takes us a step further than negating the negative and speaks of the positive beauty of the heavens.

Verse 5

- It is tempting to assume the “lights” referred to are stars. However, the rest of the verse indicates that “lights” refers more broadly to the various luminous and illuminated bodies in the sky. In particular, we are told in other verses that meteors شهاب are used to ward off jinn who seek to spy on the heavens.

Verse 5

إِلَّا مَنْ اسْتَرَقَ السَّمْعَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ مُبِينٌ

“However, whoever [among them] eavesdrops, a bright meteor pursues him.” Quran 15:18

إِلَّا مَنْ خَطَفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ

“Except one who snatches [some words] by theft, but they are pursued by a burning flame, piercing [in brightness].” Quran 37:10

- Accordingly, we must construe “lights” more broadly than just stars.

Verse 5

- This phenomenon of jinn eavesdropping and then being driven away by meteors is mentioned several times in the Quran.
- In Surat al-Saffat, we read:

أَنَا زِينَةُ السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ وَحِفْظًا مِّنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَّارِدٍ لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى
وَيُقَدِّفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ دُحُورًا وَلَهُمْ عَذَابٌ وَأَصِيبٌ إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَاقِبٌ

“We have adorned the lowest of the heavens with the ornaments of stars, and we have protected it from every rebellious devil. They do not eavesdrop on the highest council, and they are shot at from every angle as outcasts. And for them [in the hereafter] is an eternal punishment. However, he [among them] who [tries to] eavesdrop, a piercing meteor pursues him

Verse 5

لَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا لِلنَّاظِرِينَ وَحَفَظْنَاهَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ إِلَّا مَنْ اسْتَرَقَ
السَّمْعَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ مُبِينٌ

“We have made towering structures (possibly a reference to the orbits) in the sky and adorned it for those who gaze [at it]. And we have protected it from every outcast devil. However, whoever [among them] eavesdrops, a bright meteor pursues him.” Quran 15:16-18

Verse 5

وَأَنَّا لَمَسْنَا السَّمَاءَ فَوَجَدْنَاهَا مَلَأَتْ حَرَسًا شَدِيدًا وَشُهَبًا وَأَنَّا كُنَّا نَقْعُدُ مِنْهَا مَقَاعِدَ لِلسَّمْعِ فَمَنْ يَسْتَمِعِ الْآنَ يَجِدْ لَهُ شِهَابًا رَّصَدًا

“And [they said,] ‘We touched the sky and found it to be filled with stalwart guards and meteors.’ And [they said,] ‘We used to sit in it in a place fit for eavesdropping. But whoever [tries to] listen now finds a meteor lying in wait for him’ Quran 72:8-9

Verse 5

- The main problems with these verses are the following:
 - 1) Meteors are physical phenomena that existed before and after the Prophet's birth, which is the time when the meteors began to be used to drive off jinn. So what about the meteors changed that they are now used for this purpose?
 - 2) What connection exists between jinn travelling into the sky and eavesdropping on angels?

Verse 5

- In answer to the first question we can say that meteors, like all natural phenomena, are controlled by God's servants, the angels. It is possible that the angels who have always guided these meteors continue to do so, but with an additional purpose of warding off devils. Thus, to us it seems that there is no difference in the natural phenomenon, but in reality, the same phenomenon serves two purposes.

Verse 5

- In answer to the second question, we can conjecture that jinn are like human beings in that there is an inverse relationship between their physical strength and their spiritual strength. Human beings may attain spiritual strength through self-deprivation like fasting. Perhaps, jinn strengthen themselves spiritually by travelling into the sky physically, thereby preparing themselves for contact with the realm of angels. Their purpose in doing so was to interfere with guidance or to gather information of the unseen that they could then use for evil purposes

Verse 5

- Not only do these evil jinn face punishment in this world; in the hereafter, they will be punished with the fire.