

Surah Al-A'la

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

When I had first studied the Quran few years ago, I had been filled with instant enthusiasm and optimism that all my confusions have been cleared and now I can easily follow the truth which has been made so easy and clear by Allah. But I soon realized that understanding the goodness of a religion is not going to put me on its path automatically. There are obstacles all around which I must overcome to reach my destination. And it took me some time before I reached the conclusion that the biggest obstacle is not outside but my own self. This realization gave me even more incentive to find some cure... something to clean my heart. Today when I discovered these amazing lessons of Surah Al-A'la, I felt like I have found that "healing medicine" which can cure all the diseases of the heart. Its first dose is to glorify Allah with His beautiful names:

سَبِّحْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ الْأَعْلَى {1}

Glorify the name of your Rabb, the Most High

The first step towards healing is peace and so we should bring peace into our hearts with Allah's remembrance. Secondly we should take out some time from our busy schedules in which to contemplate on His creation because it increases our love for the Creator who not only made everything in perfect balance but also guided it:

الَّذِي خَلَقَ فَسَوَّى {2} وَالَّذِي قَدَّرَ فَهَدَى {3}

Who has created all things and perfected them. Who has set their destinies and guided them

These words remind us of a very important fact that just as Allah guided my eyes to see, my ears to hear... similarly He will guide my heart to follow the complete truth... But he gives this guidance to those who ask for it, who really and truly yearn for it and prove their desire by their acts of righteousness. There is so much in this world to see and use but none of these things is permanent... every climax has an anti-climax; as is evident in the next ayahs:

وَالَّذِي أَخْرَجَ الْمَرْعَى {4} فَجَعَلَهُ غُثَاءً أَحْوَى {5}

Who brings forth green pasture, then reduces it to black rubbish.

Only one thing is permanent and that is the word of Allah. This is never going to change in any way at all. Allah has promised to preserve the Quran in its original form forever and ever. The first proof of this preservation was that our Prophet (s.a.w) used to retain each and every word as it was revealed to Him; and afterwards when He used to recite it to His companions, they also memorised it word to word:

سَنُقَرِّئُكَ فَلَا تَنْسَى {6}

Soon We shall make you recite *Our revelations* so you shall forget none of them.

This was Allah's promise to His Messenger (s.a.w) that even though the path of righteousness is full of thorns, yet Allah will make it easy for Him:

وَنُيَسِّرُكَ لِلْيُسْرَى {8}

We shall make it easy for you to follow the easy way.

Although these assurances were being directed to the Messenger of Allah (s.a.w) yet the Quran is for all mankind... so we should also have this firm hope in our hearts that if we stay committed to the true way of life then Allah will make it easy for us. There are two ways to achieve this ease... one is to do something consistently and sincerely. The more you tread on a path, the less difficult it seems... practise makes perfect!! Secondly you should share your ideas with others... Help others to make the right choices in their lives:

فَذَكِّرْ إِن نَّفَعَتِ الذِّكْرَى {9}

Therefore remind (others), surely reminder does benefit.

Sometimes it happens that your advice is very good and sincere but your way of conveying it is not effective. Most people then blame others and feel frustrated. Finally they give up saying "what is the use of telling others when they don't even listen to me". Here Allah is assuring us that giving good advice to others is **always** beneficial... even if others don't listen to you, remember that the most attentive listener is your own heart and it will surely benefit from the good words... But the basic ingredient which makes our deeds effective is fear of Allah, fear of consequences...

سَيَذَكِّرْكَ مَنْ يُخَشَى {10}

He who fears *Allah* will heed the reminder.

No matter how beneficial something might be, there will always be those who remain deprived of it... simply because their hearts and minds have become blind to their own destruction:

وَيَتَحَنَّنُهَا الْأَشَقَى {11} الَّذِي يَصْلَى النَّارَ الْكُبْرَى {12}

And he who is unfortunate will avoid *the reminder*; the one *who* shall burn in the gigantic fire.

Imagine the fire of hell... it is seventy times more severe than the fire which we see in this world. Can we even bear to be close to it? So what will be the state of a person who will be burning in that unimaginably hot furnace... even death will not come for his rescue:

ثُمَّ لَا يَمُوتُ فِيهَا وَلَا يَحْيَى {13}

Where he shall neither die nor live.

The only thing which can make us remove our bad habits and sins, is to think of ourselves in this situation. Because if we think we are not likely to fall in this category then there can be no hope for any self analysis or self improvement... which are the keys of success:

قَدْ أَفْلَحَ مَنْ تَزَكَّى {14}

The one *who will take admonition and* purify himself shall be successful.

Since there can be no **Falah** or success without **Tazkiyah** or self purification; we should understand in clear terms what it actually means. Basically it means that you analyze your characteristics and get rid of the bad habits and replace them with good ones. And then two more ingredients:

وَذَكَرَ اسْمَ رَبِّهِ فَصَلَّى {15}

Who remembers the name of his Rabb and prays.

Apparently it looks so “do-able” but then surely there must be some hidden problem due to which so few people seem to come even close to this kind of piety... So what is stopping us from self purification? Is Allah’s remembrance really difficult? Can we not read our salah regularly and on time? What is the hindrance?

بَلْ تُؤْثِرُونَ الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا {16}

But *O men!* You prefer the life of this world.

This is the reason behind every evil... the root cause of all our diseases of hearts... the love for instant benefits is so great that it covers the intellect and so we forget that our real benefit will be in the real life.... which will be so much better and everlasting...

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَى {17}

While the Hereafter is better and everlasting.

The concept of the hereafter is present in all religions because all the teachings were basically from Allah even though later on people distorted these facts by adding their own philosophies in it... but these teachings are present in all books:

إِنَّ هَذَا لَفِي الصُّحُفِ الْأُولَى {18} صُحُفِ إِبْرَاهِيمَ وَمُوسَى {19}

Surely the same was said in the earlier scriptures; the scriptures of Ibrāhīm (*Abraham*) and Musa (*Moses*).

So basically this surah triggers our hearts towards the greater success of the hereafter and it is so obvious that if you plan for a big success then the achievements of this world will also come to you as an additional bonus from Allah... but if you trade your big investment for small, petty gains of this world then that is all you will get... and nothing more. The choice is ours and help is all from Allah... May He enable us to reap the maximum benefit from our lives and save us from failure and destruction... ameen