INTRODUCTION AND SUMMARY: SŪRAṬ 'Abasa, 80.

This is an early Makkan Sūra, and is connected with an incident which reflects the highest honour on the Prophet's sincerity in the Revelations that were vouchsafed to him even if they seemed to reprove him for some natural and human zeal that led him to a false step in his mission according to his own high standards.

He was once deeply and earnestly engaged in trying to explain the holy Qurān to Pagan Quraish leaders, when he was interrupted by a blind man, ‘Abdullāh ibn Umm-i-Muktūm, one who was also poor, so that no one took any notice of him. He wanted to learn the Qurān. The holy Prophet naturally disliked the interruption. Perhaps the poor man’s feelings were hurt. But he whose gentle heart ever sympathised with the poor and the afflicted, got new Light from above, and without the least hesitation published this revelation, which forms part of the sacred scripture of Islam, as described in verses 13-16. And the Prophet always afterwards held the man in high honour.

The incident was only a passing incident, but after explaining the eternal principles of revelation, the Sūra recapitulates the Mercies of Allah to man, and the consequences of a good or a wicked life here, as seen in the world to come, in the Hereafter.
In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful.

1. (The Prophet) frowned
   And turned away,\(^{5950}\)
2. Because there came to him
   The blind man (interrupting).
3. But what could tell thee
   But that perchance he might
   Grow in purity?
4. Or that he might receive
   Admonition, and the Reminder
   Might profit him?\(^{5951}\)
5. As to one who regards
   Himself as self-sufficient,\(^{5952}\)
6. To him dost thou attend;
7. Though it is no blame
   To thee if he grow not\(^{5953}\)
   In purity.

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5950. See the Introduction to this Sûra for the incident to which this refers. The lesson is that neither spiritual worth nor the prospect of effective spiritual guidance is to be measured by a man's position in life. The poor, or the blind, the halt, or the maimed, may be more susceptible to the teaching of Allah's Word than men who are apparently gifted, but who suffer from arrogance and self-sufficiency.

5951. It may be that the poor blind man might, on account of his will to learn, be more likely to grow in his own spiritual development or to profit by any lessons taught to him even in report than a self-sufficient leader. In fact it was so. For the blind man became a true and sincere Muslim and lived to become a governor of Madinah.

5952. Such a one would be a Pagan Quraish leader, whom the holy Prophet was anxious to get into his fold, in order that the work of preaching Allah's Message might be facilitated. But such a Message works first amongst the simple and lowly, the poor and despised folk, and the mighty ones of the earth only come in when the stream rushes in with irresistible force.

5953. Allah's Message is for all, but if the great ones arrogantly keep back from it, it is no fault of the preacher, so long as he has proclaimed the Message. He should attend to all, and specially to the humble and lowly.
8. But as to him who came 
    To thee striving earnestly,
9. And with fear 
    (In his heart), 5954
10. Of him wast thou unmindful.
11. By no means 
    (Should it be so)! 
    For it is indeed 
    A Message of remembrance. 5955
12. Therefore let whose will, 
    Keep it in remembrance.
13. (It 5956 is) in Books 
    Held (greatly) in honour, 
14. Exalted (in dignity), 
    Kept pure and holy, 
15. (Written) by the hands 
    Of scribes— 
16. Honourable and 
    Pious and Just.

5954. The fear in the blind man's heart may have been two-fold. (1) He was humble and God-fearing, not arrogant and self-sufficient; (2) being poor and blind, he feared to intrude; yet his earnest desire to learn the Qur-an made him bold, and he came, perhaps unseasonably, but was yet worthy of encouragement, because of the purity of his heart.

5955. Allah's Message is a universal Message, from which no one is to be excluded,—rich or poor, old or young, great or lowly, learned or ignorant. If anyone had the spiritual craving that needed satisfaction, he was to be given precedence if there was to be any question of precedence at all.

5956. At the time this Sûra was revealed, there were perhaps only about 42 or 45 Sûras in the hands of the Muslims. But it was a sufficient body of Revelation of high spiritual value, to which the description given here could be applied. It was held in the highest honour; its place in the hearts of Muslims was more exalted than that of anything else; as Allah's Word, it was pure and sacred; and those who transcribed it were men who were honourable, just and pious. The legend that the early Sûras were not carefully written down and preserved in books is a pure invention. The recensions made later in the time of the first and the third Khalifas were merely to preserve the purity and safeguard the arrangement of the text at a time when the expansion of Islam among non-Arabic-speaking people made such precautions necessary.
17. Woe to man! What hath made him Reject Allah?  
18. From what stuff Hath He created him?  
19. From a sperm-drop: He hath created him, and then Mouldeth him in due Proportions;  
20. Then doth He make His path smooth for him;  
21. Then He causeth him to die, And putteth him in his Grave;  
22. Then, when it is His Will, He will Raise him up (again).  
23. By no means hath he Fulfilled what Allah Hath commanded him.

5957. Cf. lxxvi. 2, and n. 5832. The origin of man as an animal is lowly indeed. But what further faculties and capacities has not Allah granted to man? Besides his animal body, in which also he shares in all the blessings which Allah has bestowed on the rest of His Creation, man has been granted divine gifts which entitle him to be called the Vicegerent on earth: ii. 30. He has a will; he has spiritual perception; he is capable of divine love; he can control nature within certain limits, and subject nature’s forces to his own use. And he has been given the power of judgment, so that he can avoid excess and defect, and follow the middle path. And that path, as well as all that is necessary for his life in its manifold aspects, has been made easy for him.

5958. Cf. xx. 55. Death is an inevitable event after the brief life on this earth, but it is also in a sense a blessing,—a release from the imperfections of this world, a close of the probationary period, after which will dawn the full Reality. “The Grave” may be understood to be the period between physical death and immortal Life, whatever may be the mode of disposal of the dead body. This intermediate period is the Barzakh or Partition: see n. 2940 to xxiii. 101.

5959. Though all these blessings and stages have been provided by Allah’s Grace for the good of man, yet unregenerate man fails in carrying out the purpose of his creation and life.
24. Then let man look
   At his Food,  
   (And how We provide it):

25. For that We pour forth
   Water in abundance,

26. And We split the earth
   In fragments, 

27. And produce therein grain,

28. And Grapes and
   The fresh vegetation,

29. And Olives and Dates,

30. And enclosed Gardens, 
   Dense with lofty trees,

31. And Fruits and Fodder,—

32. A provision
   For you and your cattle.

5960. After a reference to man's inner history, there is now a reference to just one
   item in his daily outer life, his food: and it is shown how the forces of heaven and earth
   unite by Allah's Command to serve man and his dependants. “A provision for you and
   your cattle” (verse 32 below). If that is the case with just one item, food, how much
   more comprehensive is Allah's beneficence when the whole of man's needs are
   considered!

5961. The water comes from the clouds in plentiful abundance; the earth is ploughed,
   and the soil is broken up in fragments, and yields an abundant harvest of cereals (Corn),
   trellised fruit (Grapes), and vegetable food (nutritious Plants), as well as fruit that can
   keep for long periods and serve many uses, like olives and dates.

5962. Therein: i.e., from within the earth or the soil.

5963. We not only get field crops such as were mentioned in n. 5961 above, but we
   have the more highly cultivated garden crops, both in the way of lofty trees, and in the
   way of carefully tended fruits like the fig; and then we have grass and all kinds of fodder.

5964. The same verse occurs at lxxix. 33, where no. 5940 explains the wider meaning
   in that context.
33. At length, when there
   Comes the Deafening Noise,—5965
34. That Day shall a man
   Flee from his own brother,
35. And from his mother
   And his father,
36. And from his wife
   And his children.5966
37. Each one of them,
   That Day, will have
   Enough concern (of his own)
   To make him indifferent
   To the others.5967
38. Some Faces that Day
   Will be beaming,
39. Laughing, rejoicing.

5965. Preliminary to the establishment of the Final Judgment.
5966. Even those who were nearest and dearest in this life will not be able or willing to help each other on that awful Day. On the contrary, if they have to receive a sentence for their sins, they will be anxious to avoid even sharing each other's sorrows or witnessing each other's humiliation; for each will have enough of his own troubles to occupy him. On the other hand, the Righteous will be united with their righteous families: lii. 21; and their faces will be "beaming, laughing, rejoicing" (lxxx. 38-39).
5967. Cf. lxx. 10-14. Nor friend will ask after a friend that Day. On the contrary the sinner will desire to save himself at the expense even of his own family and benefactors.
40. And other faces that Day
Will be dust-stained; 5968
41. Darkness will cover them:
42. Such will be
The Rejecters of Allah,
The Doers of Iniquity.

5968. The dust on the faces of the sinners will be in contrast to the beaming light on the faces of the righteous; and the blackness in contrast to the “laughing, rejoicing” faces of the righteous. But the dust also suggests that being Rejecters of Allah, their faces and eyes and faculties were choked in dust, and the blackness suggests that being Doers of Iniquity they had no part or lot in Purity or Light. Another contrast may possibly be deduced: the humble and lowly may be “in the dust” in this life, and the arrogant sinners in sunshine, but the roles will be reversed at Judgment.