

# Al-A'raf

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

## Introduction

Surah *Al-A'raf* is the largest *Makkan* surah in the Holy *Qur'an* with 24 *rukus* and 206 *ayaat*. It forms a pair with *Al-An'aam* with respect to the topics and subjects discussed.

This surah mostly deals with the subjects which are related to the Hereafter, punishment and Prophethood. Between the first and the sixth section (rukus) the subject under discussion is the return to Hereafter. Here the people of *Makkah* have been given a warning about the consequences of their wrong attitude and are admonished to accept the message that Prophet Muhammad (SAW) has been sent with. When this surah was being revealed the Prophet (SAW) was about to migrate from *Makkah* to *Madinah*, thus the concluding portion of this surah has been directed towards the People of the Book with whom he was going to come into contact at *Madinah*. The discourse upto twenty first section gives a detailed discussion of the past Prophets, their communities and the punishments meted out to them. During the course of this the *Jews* have also been warned of the consequences of their hypocritical attitude towards the Prophets, for they professed to believe in Prophet Moses (AS) but they not only disobeyed him but in fact clung to falsehood.

At the end of the surah, Allah (SWT) has given some instructions to the Prophet (SAW) and his followers to show patience in dealing with their enemies and are advised to be very careful and not take any step that might harm their cause.

(1) "*Alif Lam Mim Sad*" Refer to *ayah* 1 of *Al-Baqarah*.

(2) "*(This is the) Book sent down unto you.*" i.e. This *Qur'an* is the Book of Allah (SWT) sent down to you O Muhammad (SAW). "*So let not your breast be troubled about it, that you warn thereby, and a reminder unto the believers.*" Allah (SWT) commands His Messenger (SAW) not to show constraint in his heart nor

hesitate in conveying the *Qur'an* and warn with it. This *ayah* does not mean that the Prophet (SAW) had any doubts about this *Qur'an*; rather the constraint experienced by him was because of the affectionate concern for his people. That is why he felt pain when his people would not believe even after listening to the Holy *Qur'an*. Instead they would deny him, ridicule, and make a mockery of Allah's revelations. Thus in this *ayah* Allah (SWT) comforts His Prophet (SAW) by instructing him that his only duty is to remind them of His Message and warn them with this *Qur'an* and that it is not his responsibility to see who becomes a Muslim and who rejects faith.

(3) *"Follow what has been sent down unto you from your Lord."* i.e. the *Qur'an* and the *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). *"And follow not as friends besides Him. Little do you remember!"* i.e. do not follow those who order you to disregard the Messenger (SAW) or to associate partners with Allah (SWT). Do not follow other masters besides Him. But you seldom heed warning.

(4) *"And how many towns have We destroyed. Our torment came upon them by night or while they were sleeping for their afternoon rest."* This is the main theme of this surah i.e. warning the unbelievers about the consequences of their denial through examples of punishments inflicted upon former generations for their wrong attitude towards His Messengers and His Message.

(5) *"And when Our scourge fell upon them, their only plea was: 'We have indeed been wicked men'."* i.e. when Allah (SWT) inflicted torment upon the wrongdoers, their only cry was that they admitted their sins and acknowledged that they were on the wrong path.

(6) *"Then surely, We shall question those to whom it was sent and verily, We shall question the Messengers."* This *ayah* indicates that on the *Day of Resurrection* Allah (SWT) will ask His servants as how did they treat His Messengers and how did they respond to the Messages that He sent them with. Similarly, the Messengers will also be questioned if they had delivered His Message to their people or not. That is why at the Farewell *Hajj* the Prophet (SAW) asked his

companions (RAA), did I convey Allah's message? The companions (RAA) unanimously replied, *"we bear witness that you have conveyed the message and fulfilled your mission."* He raised his finger towards the sky and said, *"O'Allah! Be witness."* He repeated it thrice.<sup>1</sup> Hence it means that the Prophet as Allah's (SWT) representative will bear witness to the fact that he conveyed the message to the Muslims which he was sent with and the Muslims will bear witness that they conveyed the message to the rest of Mankind.

(7) *"Then surely, We shall recount to them (what they have done) with knowledge, and indeed We were not absent."* This refers to the Book of deeds which will be placed before them on the *Day of Resurrection* and they will find therein all that they did.

(8) *"And the weighing on that day will be with justice. So as for those whose scale will be heavy, they will be the successful."* This *ayah* indicates that the weighing of good and bad deeds on the *Day of Judgment* is true and whoever has his good deeds heavier than he will surely be admitted into Paradise i.e. the ultimate abode for those who are successful.

(9) *"And as for those whose scale are light, they are those who will lose their souls because they denied and rejected Our revelations."* On the other hand, those who will find their scale lighter with good deeds i.e. heavier with evil deeds, then they shall find themselves in loss for they had disbelieved in Allah's revelations.

(10) *"And surely, We gave you authority on the earth and provided you therein with a livelihood. Yet, you are seldom thankful."* Allah (SWT) has blessed mankind with ownership and control on this earth. He has made this earth as a place of comfort and as a means of provision for His servants, so that they should show gratitude to their Lord. But, human beings are prone to ingratitude and heedlessness and they show little gratitude to Him.

(11) *"And surely, We created you and then gave you shape, then We told the angels, "Prostrate to Adam", and they prostrated, except Iblees (Satan), he refused to be of those who prostrate."* This *ayah* describes the creation of Adam (AS). Allah (SWT) used the plural in this case, because Adam (AS) is the father of all mankind as He created the whole human race from this single being. Then Allah (SWT) commanded the angels to prostrate before Adam (AS) and they all obeyed their Lord except *Iblees* who rejected the command of Allah (SWT) and did not prostrate to Adam (AS). For further commentary on this subject, refer to *ayah* 34 of *Al-Baqarah*.

(12) *"(Allah) said: "What prevented you that you did not prostrate, when I commanded you?" Iblees said: "I am better than him, You created me from fire, and him You created from clay."* The *Jinn* are created from fire whereas Allah (SWT) created the body of humans from clay. The *Jinn* are more like humans, for both are required to worship Allah (SWT) and follow Islam and both are given the free-will to exercise. Therefore, like humans they may either be obedient or disobedient to their Creator. Thus when Allah (SWT) commanded *Iblees* to prostrate before Adam (AS), he became proud and jealous from the superiority given to the humans as he saw only the lower side of the man (clay) and failed to see the higher side (soul). Therefore he refused to obey and rejected Allah's command.

(13) *"(Allah) said: "get down from this, it is not for you to be arrogant here. Get out, for you are of those humiliated and disgraced."* The rebellious nature and arrogance of *Iblees* earned him nothing but wrath of Allah (SWT) and was thrown out of the Paradise.

(14) *"(Iblees) said: "Allow me respite till the Day they are raised up."* *Iblees* prayed to Allah (SWT) to grant him reprieve till the *Last Day* so that he can prove that these humans whom Allah (SWT) has chosen above him and all creations, are disobedient to Allah (SWT).

(15) *"(Allah) said: "You are of those allowed respite." "* Allah (SWT) answered his request and gave him respite till the *Day of Judgment*. Thus he became a staunch enemy to Adam (AS) and his progeny and is always planning to mislead them from the right path. This is the basis of the struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood—with *Iblees* and his followers on one side and the Allah's servants on the other.

(16) *"(Iblees) said: "Because You have led me astray, surely I will sit in wait against them on Your Straight Path."* i.e. as You have misguided me and expelled me from the Garden and Your Mercy, likewise I will misguide Your servants whom you create from amongst the progeny of the one for whom you expelled me i.e. Adam (AS). The important point to note here is that *Iblees* is assigning his own willful disobedience to Allah (SWT), whereas in fact his own conduct was responsible for his degradation.

(17) *"Then I will spring upon them from before them and behind them, from their right and from their left, and You will not find most of them as thankful ones." "*i.e. I will mislead Your servants from all sides and directions by raising doubts in them about their beliefs and causing confusion in their religion, thus luring them to the path of evil. And most of them will not show gratitude to You but will follow their desires and the evil ways that I will teach them.

(18) *"(Allah) said: "Get out from this (Paradise) disgraced and expelled." "* Again in this *ayah* *Iblees* has been commanded to be expelled and banished from the heavens in a disgraceful manner. Then Allah said: *"Whoever of them (mankind) will follow you, then surely I will fill Hell with you all."* i.e. whoever amongst the progeny of Adam (AS) will follow *Satan* and his evil ways, then he will surely be thrown into the *Hellfire* in the Hereafter.

(19) *" "And O Adam (AS)! Dwell you and your wife in Paradise, and eat thereof as you both wish, but approach not this tree otherwise you both will be of the wrongdoers." "* This *ayah* is already commented upon in *ayah* 35 of *Al-Baqarah*.

(20) *"Then Satan whispered suggestions to them both in order to uncover that which was hidden from them of their private parts (before); he said: "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree save you should become angels or become immortals.""* This *ayah* indicates that *Iblees* plotted against Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) and suggested to them treachery by whispering into their ears. *Iblees* wanted to make them disobey their Lord and thus reveal to them the private parts of their bodies that were hidden from them before. Therefore, he lied to them and told them that the reason that Allah (SWT) has forbidden them to eat from this tree is because He does not want them to be like angels or live in this Paradise forever.

(21) *"And he (Satan) swore by Allah (SWT) to them both (saying): "Verily, I am one of the sincere well-wishers for you both.""* i.e. he tried to persuade them to eat from the tree and even swore by Allah (SWT) that he is telling them the truth and that it is in their interest that they must trust him and follow him.

(22) *"So he misled them with deception."* This indicates the error and disobedience of Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) cannot be termed as a sin as it only arose from the misunderstanding produced by the cursed *Iblees*. *"Then when they tasted of the tree, that which was hidden from them of their shame became manifest to them and they began to stick together the leaves of Paradise over themselves."* i.e. when they ate from the tree the private parts of their bodies that were hidden from them before were made visible to them and thus they began to cover themselves with the leaves of the Paradise trees i.e. making them as a dress. *"And their Lord called out to them (saying): "Did I not forbid you that tree and tell you: Verily, Satan is an open enemy unto you?""* i.e. Allah (SWT) reminded them of His commandment and His warning to Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) about the enmity and hatred of *Iblees* towards them and their offspring.

(23) *"They said: "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You forgive us not, and bestow not upon us Your Mercy, we shall certainly be of the losers.""* When Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) committed that act of disobedience, they wanted to repent and return to Paradise but they could not find the words to use them in their prayers. So

Allah (SWT) bestowed His mercy and blessing on them and taught them these words, with which they could pray and ask for repentance. Thus Allah (SWT) pardoned them and accepted their repentance, as we already read in *Al-Baqarah*.

This also refutes the false belief of '*The Original Sin*' amongst the *Christians*. They claim that when Adam (AS) ate from the forbidden tree, Allah (SWT) became angry and directed punishment onto him; that punishment continued on Adam's offspring's until the coming of Jesus (AS). His crucifixion was to relieve the generations after him from their forefather's sin. On the other hand, Islam does not accept the belief of '*The Original Sin*' whereby Adam's disobedience to Allah (SWT) has been inherited by all his descendants. In other words, it does not accept that all human beings on earth are sinful by birth because of their forefather's sin. *Qur'an* states that when Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) sinned, they repented and received Allah's forgiveness. Muslims believe all newborns are born pure and sinless i.e. on their *Fitrah*, and a child does not bear the burden of a sin committed by an ancestor.

(24) "(Allah) said: "Get down, one of you an enemy to the other. On earth will be a dwelling place for you and sustenance, for a time."" This means that *Iblees* and Adam (AS) became enemies forever. *Iblees* prayed to Allah (SWT) to grant him life till the *Last Day* so that he can prove that these humans whom Allah (SWT) has chosen above him and all creations, are disobedient to Allah (SWT), and thus he became an enemy to Adam (AS) and his progeny. This is the basis of the struggle between good and evil, truth and falsehood that has been going on for centuries and will continue till the appointed time of the Last Doom.

(25) "He said: "Therein you shall live, and therein you shall die, and from it you shall be brought out."" When Adam (AS) and Eve (AS) were sent down to earth, they were told that the earth will be a dwelling place for them for a temporary period of time. They will live, die and buried in their graves, from which they will then be resurrected on the *Day of Judgment*.

(26) *"O Children of Adam (AS)! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover yourselves and as an adornment, and the raiment of righteousness, that is better."* This *ayah* states that Allah (SWT) has given three kinds of clothing for the children of Adam (AS) to wear viz. *Libas*, *Rish* and *Libas of Taqwa*. *Libas* refers to the dress which is used to cover body parts the uncovering of which is taken as bad and shameful. *Rish* refers to the dresses which Allah (SWT) has blessed humans with for beautification and to make them look handsome. The third kind of dress mentioned is the dress of *Taqwa*. This *Libas of Taqwa* conceals human weaknesses and moral shortcomings and acts as a spiritual dress of good deeds and fear of Allah (SWT). Then Allah (SWT) said: *"This is of the revelations of Allah (SWT) that they may take heed."* i.e. He has revealed these signs as an invitation for the people to understand and recall the primordial truths.

(27) *"O Children of Adam (AS)! Let not Satan deceive you, as he got your parents out of Paradise, stripping them of their raiments, to show them their private parts."* Allah (SWT) warns the children of Adam (AS) that they should guard themselves against the seduction of *Iblees* and his followers, lest, he also deceives them like he did their parents, Adam (AS) and Eve (AS). *"Verily, he and his tribe see you from where you cannot see them."* i.e. the Satan and his followers can see and interact with the humans just like the angels, while the human beings cannot see them. The *Jinns* like the angels can also transform themselves into the shape of a human being, which makes their deception even more dangerous. *"Verily, We made the devils friends for those who do not believe."* i.e. they act as guardians and supporters of the unbelievers.

(28) *"And when they commit a shameful act, they say: "We found our fathers doing it, and Allah (SWT) has commanded us of it." Say: "Nay, Allah (SWT) never commands what is shameful. Do you say of Allah (SWT) what you know not?"* This *ayah* refers to one of the many shameful and absurd customs of the Arabs before the advent of Islam. The people of *Makkah* and all those coming for the Pilgrimage would circumambulate around the *Ka'bah* naked. Allah (SWT) revealed this *ayah* to

abolish that shameful custom and refuted their false claim that their elders and forefathers had been doing this all along and that this is what Allah (SWT) has told them to do. On the contrary, it was said to them that Allah (SWT) never commands a shameful act and that they are attributing a lie against Him without having any proof or evidence for it.

(29) *“Say: My Lord has enjoins justice and that you should face Him in every place of worship.”* i.e. worship none but Allah (SWT) and face the *Ka’bah* at *Makkah* during all your prayers. But this injunction is not confined to Prayer only, instead it also means being upright or keeping the orientation straight in all acts of worship, dealings and transactions. *“And invoke Him only making your religion sincere to Him.”* i.e. to worship Allah (SWT), purely and exclusively, without associating anyone with Him in any capacity. This also indicates that only formal obedience is not enough for all is in vain without inward sincerity (*Ikhlas*). Further, the *ayah* states: *“As He brought you into being, so shall be your return.”* This means that it is He Who created you in the first place and it is He Who will make you rise again on the *Day of Judgment*.

(30) *“A group He has guided and a group deserved to be in error, for they took the devils as friends instead of Allah (SWT), and think that they are guided.”* In this *ayah* Allah (SWT) has differentiated between those who are misguided and those whom He has guided. The *ayah* states that there are some people He has guided to the straight path while there are others who have fallen into misguidance and error because they made the devils as their protectors and friends instead of Him and still thought that they were on the right path. So Allah has justly left in error.

(31) *“O Children of Adam (AS)! Dress well every time you pray and eat and drink but waste not by extravagance, certainly He does not like the extravagant.”* This *ayah* again refutes the false custom of circumambulating around the *Ka’bah* in a naked state. Instead Allah (SWT) has commanded the believers to present themselves in the best of their adornments when going out for prayers in the mosque, for every place of prostration is a mosque. This also indicates that

covering oneself for Prayer and *Tawaf* (circumambulation) is what is meant by adorning oneself to worship Allah (SWT). However the word adornment is used rather than the word covering to signify that what is meant is that a person should adorn himself and not limit it to simply covering. Another of their false customs attributed to Allah (SWT) was that they would abstain from eating and drinking during the days of Pilgrimage. But Allah (SWT) commanded the believers to eat and drink from all pure things that He has provided for them as long as they abstain from two things viz. eating and drinking what He has prohibited and indulging in extravagance.

(32) *"Say: "Who has forbidden the adoration with clothes given by Allah (SWT), which He has produced for his slaves, and the things clean and pure for sustenance?"*" This *ayah* is an admonishment for those who think that good dress and good food made lawful by Allah (SWT) is unlawful for them. Islam does not teach to live in tattered rags or torn clothes despite of having the means to adorn themselves. Therefore an unkempt, dirty and slovenly *Faqir* cannot claim sanctity in Islam. Instead, Allah (SWT) says that He has provided and allowed for the believers the best of clothing, so that they should adorn themselves and has provided for them good and pure things for food, so that they eat from them and be grateful to Him. *"Say: "They are, in the life of this world, for those who believe, (and) exclusively for them on the Day of Resurrection."*" Allah (SWT) commanded His Messenger (SAW) to say that even though all these blessings that He has provided in this earthly life are also enjoyed by the disbelievers in the Hereafter the disbelievers will have no share in it, for Paradise is exclusively made for the believers. *"Thus We explain the revelations in detail for people who have knowledge."* i.e. He has made His signs and revelations clear and abolished all the superstitions that were falsely attributed to Him. Allah makes plain His revelations to men of understanding.

(33) *"Say: "(But) the things that my Lord has indeed forbidden are shameful acts whether committed openly or secretly, sins, unrighteous oppression, joining partners with Allah (SWT) for which He has given no sanction, and saying things about Allah (SWT) of which you have no knowledge."*" Allah (SWT) commanded His Prophet (SAW) to tell the idolators

the things which He has made unlawful for them. The first thing made unlawful by Allah (SWT) as described in this *ayah* is to commit shameful deeds like adultery, fornication, whoredom etc. whether committed openly or in secret. Then comes the prohibition for all kinds of sins whether limited to one personally or which relate to the rights and dealings with others. In the end Allah (SWT) sternly warns against committing *Shirk* i.e. joining partners with Him, and attributing lies against Him.

(34) *“And every nation has its appointed term; when their term is reached, neither can they delay it nor can they advance it an hour.”*<sup>2</sup> This means that Allah (SWT) has determined a fix term for every community on the face of this earth. If they do not do good and believe during the time of this probation, then when their term expires they would not be given any respite even for a single moment nor will the *Last hour* be delayed. Nor can they go before it.

(35) *“O Children of Adam (AS)! If there come to you Messengers from amongst you, reciting to you My revelations, then whosoever becomes pious and righteous, on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve.”* This *ayah* promises reward for those who, when Prophets of Allah (SWT) come to them with guidance and Divine injunctions, listen to them carefully and act accordingly with piety and righteousness. They will be saved from sorrows and grief and they shall have eternal peace and comfort. They will have nothing to fear or to regret.

(36) *“But those who reject Our revelations and treat them with arrogance, they are the dwellers of the (Hell) Fire, they will abide therein forever.”* On the other hand, those who reject His Messengers and disobey His commandments will suffer the eternal punishment of Hellfire. That is to say, those that deny and scorn Allah's revelations shall be the people of the Fire, and there they shall remain for ever.

(37) *“Who is more unjust than one who invents a lie against Allah (SWT) or rejects His revelations? For such their appointed portion will reach them from the Book, until when Our Messengers come to them to take their souls, they will say: “Where are those whom you used*

*to invoke and worship besides Allah (SWT)," they will reply, "They have vanished and deserted us." And they will bear witness against themselves, that they were disbelievers."* In other words, what is being said here is that although the disbelievers who invent lies and utter falsehood against Allah (SWT) and reject His revelations are the most unjust and wicked people, yet they get their due share of good things and life (i.e., the chance of repentance and reformation) during the probation period in this world. But once that period expires, angels of death will take their souls out of their bodies and they will be called to account. They will be asked about the false deities that they used to invoke and worship besides Allah (SWT) but soon they will realize that the same false deities have forsaken them and thus they will confess their sin and will admit that they were unbelievers.

#### **Foot Notes**

[1] Sahih Muslim 2 : 886.

[2] Hour in the text expresses indefinite but short period of time—normally a moment.