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Surah Al-Insan

The Man · Madani · 31 ayat — reflections on surah 76
of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah Al-Insan

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الإنسان — Al-Insan, "The Man". Surah 76 of 114, revealed in Madinah, 31 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/76/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Reminding man that he was once nothing, the surah calls him to gratitude and choice between thankfulness and denial, then paints the lavish reward of the righteous in Paradise—who fed the needy, orphan, and captive seeking only God's face—and urges patient, steadfast worship.

Al-Insan (also called Ad-Dahr) reminds man that there was a time when he was nothing worth mentioning, created from a mingled drop, given hearing and sight, and shown the way so that he is either grateful or ungrateful. It sets before the ungrateful their chains and blaze, then turns to the righteous (al-abrar), portraying their reward in loving detail: they drink from cups tempered with camphor and ginger, in gardens of silk and shade, served by ageless youths. The heart of the surah is why they earned this, they fulfill their vows, fear a far-reaching Day, and feed the poor, the orphan, and the captive purely for the face of Allah, wanting neither reward nor thanks. It affirms that Allah sent the Quran down in stages, calls the Prophet to patience and to remembering his Lord morning and evening, and ends that this is a reminder for whoever wills, though none wills except as Allah wills.

TWO

Its themes

- Man's humble origin
- Gratitude or ingratitude
- The reward of the righteous (abrar)
- Selfless charity for Allah's face
- Gradual revelation
- Constant remembrance

THREE

Key verses

Verily We created Man from a drop of mingled sperm, in order to try him: So We gave him (the gifts), of Hearing and Sight.

Qur'an 76:2

We created man from a mingled drop to test him, and made him hearing and seeing. Al-Sa'di notes the faculties are given precisely so that the test, gratitude or denial, is meaningful.

We showed him the Way: whether he be grateful or ungrateful (rests on his will).

Qur'an 76:3

Indeed We guided him to the way, be he grateful or ungrateful. Ibn Kathir explains Allah made the path clear; the choice, and its consequence, is the human's own.

And they feed, for the love of Allah, the indigent, the orphan, and the captive,-

Qur'an 76:8

They give food, despite loving it, to the poor, the orphan, and the captive. The abrar give from what they themselves cherish, which is what lifts the act above mere surplus.

(Saying), "We feed you for the sake of Allah alone: no reward do we desire from you, nor thanks.

Qur'an 76:9

We feed you only for the face of Allah; we want from you neither reward nor thanks. The verse captures the purest intention, charity emptied of all self-interest.

And celebrate the name of thy Lord morning and evening,

Qur'an 76:25

Remember the name of your Lord morning and evening. A prescription of steady, daily remembrance to keep the heart anchored through patience and hardship.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-Insan ("The Human Being"), also called ad-Dahr ("Time"), is classed in this dataset as Madani, though scholars have disagreed, some holding it Makkan or partly so. It takes its name from its opening reflection on the human being's origin and moral trial, and it is one of the Qur'an's most sensuous, luminous depictions of Paradise — a surah that first grounds the reader in humility and then lifts them into delight.

Its character moves in three broad phases: a meditation on human createdness and the fork between gratitude and ingratitude; a portrait of the righteous (al-abrar) and their selfless charity, followed by a long, jewel-bright description of their reward; and a closing address to the Prophet ﷺ counselling patience, remembrance and night worship. The tone is gentle and generous, but framed throughout by the seriousness of the choice each soul must make.

How the surah unfolds

It opens with a humbling question (76:1–3): was there not a stretch of time when the human being was nothing worth mentioning? God created him from a mingled drop, to test him, and made him hearing and seeing — that is, equipped him with the faculties to perceive and be accountable. Then the pivotal verse: "We guided him to the way — whether he be grateful or

ungrateful" (76:3). God has shown the path; the response is the human being's to give. For the ungrateful, chains, shackles and a blaze are prepared (76:4).

The surah then turns to the righteous, and its heart is their charity (76:5–12). They drink from a cup tempered with kafur, from a spring the servants of God cause to gush forth. Their earthly deeds are named: they fulfil their vows, they fear a Day whose evil is widespread, and — most memorably — "they give food, despite their love for it, to the needy, the orphan, and the captive," saying, "We feed you only for the sake of God's Face; we desire from you neither reward nor thanks; we fear from our Lord a stern and calamitous Day" (76:8–10). Because of that pure intention, God shields them from the evil of that Day and grants them radiance and joy, and rewards them, for their patience, with a garden and silk.

There follows the extended vision of Paradise (76:13–22): reclining on couches, feeling neither scorching sun nor bitter cold; shade drawn close and fruit hung low within easy reach; served in vessels of silver and goblets of crystal, measured to perfect proportion; given a cup tempered with ginger from a spring called Salsabil; waited upon by ageless youths who look, when you see them, like scattered pearls; and when you look upon that place you see bliss and a vast dominion. Upon them are garments of fine green silk and rich brocade, adorned with bracelets of silver, and their Lord gives them a pure drink to drink. And they are told: "This is a reward for you, and your striving has been appreciated" (76:22).

The final movement addresses the Prophet ﷺ directly (76:23–31): "It is We who sent down the Qur'an upon you in stages." So be patient for your Lord's decree, and do not obey any sinner or ingrate among them; remember the name of your Lord morning and evening, and prostrate to Him in the night and glorify Him through the long night. The deniers love the fleeting world and leave behind them a heavy Day. God created them and firmed their frames, and could, if He willed, replace them entirely with others like them. This is a reminder — so whoever wills, let him take a path to his Lord. "But you will not will unless God wills" — He is Knowing, Wise; He admits whom He wills into His mercy, and for the wrongdoers He has prepared a painful punishment.

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is human origin as the ground of humility and accountability. The surah begins by reminding a proud creature that he was once literally nothing worth mentioning, formed from a lowly mixed drop (76:1–2). But God did not leave him inert: He made him hearing and seeing and "guided him to the way" (76:3). This is the surah's moral fulcrum — guidance has been given, faculties have been granted, and so the human being stands genuinely responsible for whether he becomes grateful (shakir) or ungrateful (kafur). Creation from nothing is not a humiliation but a dignifying trust, precisely because it is paired with guidance and the power to choose.

The second and most cherished theme is charity purified of self. The abrar feed the needy, the orphan and the captive "despite their love for it" — giving away what they themselves want — and, crucially, they want nothing back: no repayment,

not even thanks, only "the Face of God" (76:8–9). This is the Qur'an's portrait of ikhlas in action: generosity so free of ego that it refuses even the small reward of gratitude. Some narrations connect these verses to an act of charity by the Prophet's household; the mainstream commentators cite the account but note the weakness of its chains, and read the verses primarily as a universal ideal for every believer. Their entire lavish reward, the surah stresses, flows from this pure motive and their patience.

The third theme is the reward itself as the perfected answer to earthly deprivation. The Paradise of al-Insan is drawn with deliberate contrasts to worldly want: neither burning sun nor biting cold (comfort against the desert's extremes), shade and fruit brought near (ease against toil), drinks of kafur, ginger and Salsabil (purity against thirst), silk and silver (honour against poverty), and ageless servants like scattered pearls. And over it all: "your striving has been appreciated" (76:22). The reward is not arbitrary luxury but the exact reversal of the hardships the righteous bore for God — every discomfort answered, every sacrifice acknowledged.

Points of reflection

Al-Insan invites the reader to hold two truths together: that we came from nothing and owe everything, and that we have nonetheless been entrusted with real moral freedom. Remembering the mingled drop cures arrogance; remembering "whether grateful or ungrateful" cures fatalism. Between the two lies a life of chosen gratitude.

Its highest call is to give like the abrar — to part with what we love, for God's Face alone, expecting not even thanks. In a world that transacts constantly in recognition and return, this is a radical purity of intention, and the surah promises it is the very thing that unlocks the garden. And its closing counsel — patience, remembrance morning and evening, prostration and glorification through the night — is the quiet daily discipline by which an ordinary believer joins the ranks of those whose striving God appreciates.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Remember you began as nothing; every faculty is a gift to answer for.
2. Guidance is given; gratitude or denial is your own choice.
3. Give from what you love, seeking only Allah's face, not thanks.
4. Anchor each day with remembrance of your Lord, morning and evening.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, al-Sa'di, al-Qurtubi. A summary is not a tafsir: for the verse-by-verse treatment go to the works themselves, or to the close studies at deen2u.com/tadabbur/.