

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah At-Tariq

The Nightcomer · Makki · 17 ayat — reflections on
surah 86 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah At-Tariq

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الطارق — At-Tariq, “The Nightcomer”. Surah 86 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 17 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/86/.

ONE

The surah in brief

By the piercing night-star, every soul has a guardian over it; the One who first created man from a gushing fluid can surely bring him back when secrets are tested, so the plots of the deniers are met by Allah's own sure plan.

At-Tariq swears by the night-comer, the piercing star, to press a single claim: over every soul there is a watcher who records. It then turns the human gaze inward, asking us to consider what we are made from, a gushing fluid issuing from between the backbone and the ribs, and to conclude that the One who first produced us is surely able to return us. On the Day secrets are tested, no strength or helper will remain. Swearing by the sky and earth, it declares the Qur'an a decisive word, no idle jest, and answers the schemers with a calm assurance: they plot, and Allah plots, so give the deniers only a little respite.

TWO

Its themes

- A guardian over every soul
- The lesson of our creation
- Power to resurrect
- The day secrets are tested
- The Qur'an as decisive word
- Divine planning outlasts plots

THREE

Key verses

There is no soul but has a protector over it.

Qur'an 86:4

Over every soul stands a keeper; no moment of your life is unattended, which should sober the private self as much as the public one.

Now let man but think from what he is created!

Qur'an 86:5

"Let man consider what he was created from," a summons to trace ourselves back to a drop and grow humble before the God who shaped it.

Surely (Allah) is able to bring him back (to life)!

Qur'an 86:8

The One who first brought us from that fluid is plainly able to return us; the argument for resurrection is written in our own origin.

The Day that (all) things secret will be tested,

Qur'an 86:9

On the Day secrets are laid bare, the hidden intentions we hide even from ourselves are the very things put on trial.

Behold this is the Word that distinguishes (Good from Evil):

Qur'an 86:13

The Qur'an is a decisive word, not amusement; it draws a firm line through reality and asks to be taken with full seriousness.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Aṭ-Ṭāriq — “The Night-Comer” — is a short Makkan surah of seventeen verses. Its name is the striking word of its opening oath: aṭ-ṭāriq, literally the one who comes by night, the one who knocks in the dark, which the Qur'an itself glosses as “the piercing star.” Like its neighbours it belongs to the early Makkan preaching on resurrection and revelation, and its brevity carries a great deal of argument in a small frame.

The character of the surah is tight and evidential — it reads almost like a compressed case. It moves from the night sky to the drop of fluid that makes a human being to the certainty of return, and finally to the nature of the Qur'an as a decisive word. The tone is confident and a little combative near the end, answering the schemers of Makka with a serene assurance that God's plan will outlast theirs.

How the surah unfolds

The surah opens (86:1–4) by swearing an oath by the heaven and by the night-comer — “and what will make you know what the night-comer is? The piercing star” — to establish a single guarded truth: “over every soul there is a keeper.” The bright star that pierces the darkness becomes an image for the fact that nothing is left in the dark; every human being has an appointed watcher recording their deeds. The vast night is not empty and unwitnessed; it is pierced through with light, as every life is pierced through with the awareness of God.

The middle section (86:5–10) turns to an argument for resurrection drawn from origins: “let man consider from what he was created — from a gushing fluid, issuing from between the backbone and the ribs.” The One who first brought a person out of a mere drop is “surely able to bring him back.” The proof of the second creation is the first. This is set against “the Day when the secrets are tried,” when the hidden contents of hearts are put to the test and a person will have neither strength of his own nor any helper to save him. Reckoning strips a soul of every support it leaned on.

The final movement (86:11–17) swears again — by the heaven that returns (its rain, or its recurring cycles) and the earth that splits open (with vegetation) — to affirm: “Indeed this is a decisive word, and it is no jest.” The Qur'an is not idle speech or entertainment; it is the word that separates truth from falsehood. Then the schemers appear: “they are plotting a plot, and I am planning a plan.” The surah closes with a command of steady patience: “so give the disbelievers respite — grant them respite a little while.” God is in no hurry; let them run out their short rope.

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the constant watch over the soul. “Over every soul there is a keeper” (86:4) is the surah's thesis, and it is proved by the image of the piercing star: just as a bright body cuts through the deepest night so that darkness cannot fully hide anything, so no human moment is un-witnessed. Classical commentators identify the keeper with the recording angels, appointed to preserve every deed for the Day when secrets are

tested. The theme is meant to relocate the believer's sense of privacy: there is no truly hidden act, and the awareness of being seen is not oppressive surveillance but the dignity of a life that matters enough to be recorded.

The second theme is resurrection argued from embryology. The surah does not merely assert the return; it reasons to it. Look at what you were — a spurt of fluid, insignificant, unpromising — and look at what became of you. A God who performed that first, improbable creation is not stumped by the second. This is the Qur'an's recurring logic against the deniers who found resurrection absurd: the harder act has already been done, in each of them, once. The “Day when secrets are tried” (86:9) then adds the moral stakes — the return is not merely biological continuation but exposure, when what was concealed in the chest becomes the very thing one is judged by.

The third theme is the seriousness of revelation against the small games of its opponents. “It is a decisive word, and it is no jest” (86:13–14): the Qur'an distinguishes truth from falsehood and is not to be trifled with. Set immediately beside this is the plotting of the disbelievers (86:15–16) — and the surah's calm answer, “I am planning a plan.” The contrast is between human scheming, which is frantic and shallow, and divine planning, which is unhurried and total. The instruction to “grant them respite a little while” is not weakness but sovereignty: the One who holds the outcome can afford to wait.

Points of reflection

The surah trains a person to live as one who is watched in the best sense — “over every soul there is a keeper.” This awareness, taken to heart, quietly reorders private behaviour. What we do in the dark, the surah insists, is lit by a piercing star; the believer's response is not paranoia but honesty, an outer and inner life that could bear the light.

It also offers a cure for a doubt many carry without naming it — the suspicion that after death there is nothing. The surah answers by pointing not to the sky but to the self: you are already a resurrection story, brought from a drop into a hearing, thinking person. Reflect on your own beginning and the second creation stops seeming strange.

And to anyone worn down by the cleverness of those who oppose the truth, the surah's last verses are a steadying hand. Let them scheme. Give them a little time. The believer is not asked to match plot for plot but to trust that the divine plan is already running, patient and certain, beneath their busy noise.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Live as one always watched; a recording guardian over every soul makes secret sin and secret sincerity equally seen.
2. Contemplate your fragile beginning to cure both pride and doubt about being raised again.
3. Do not fear the scheming of the truth's enemies; the surah answers their plots with Allah's, and counsels patient, brief waiting.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, al-Sa'di, Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman, al-Tabari, Jami' al-Bayan. 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/.