

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Surah Al-A'la

The Most High · Makki · 19 ayat — reflections on surah
87 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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Surah Al-A'la

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الأعلى — Al-A'la, "The Most High". Surah 87 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 19 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/87/.

ONE

The surah in brief

A call to glorify the Lord Most High who creates and guides, with the promise that revelation will not be forgotten; the surah urges the ease of Allah's way, warning that the wretched shun it while the one who purifies himself and remembers his Lord succeeds.

Al-A'la begins with the command to glorify the name of the Lord Most High, then praises Him through a chain of acts: He created and perfected, decreed and guided, and brings out the green pasture only to turn it into dark debris, a picture of the world's brief bloom and fade. He promises the Prophet He will make him recite and not forget, and directs him to remind wherever reminding helps. The surah names the divide plainly: the God-fearing takes heed while the wretched shuns it. Its heart is that the one who purifies himself, remembers his Lord's name, and prays has truly succeeded, even though people prefer the passing world when the Hereafter is better and lasting, a truth found already in the scriptures of Ibrahim and Musa.

TWO

Its themes

- Glorifying the Most High
- Creation and guidance
- The world's fleeting bloom
- Purification of the self
- Remembrance and prayer
- The lasting Hereafter

THREE

Key verses

Glorify the name of thy Guardian-Lord Most High,

Qur'an 87:1

The surah opens by lifting the tongue to His highness, teaching that awe of the Most High is where the reordering of a life begins.

And then doth make it (but) swarthy stubble.

Qur'an 87:5

The lush pasture He makes into blackened debris is the whole world in miniature, green today and gone tomorrow.

But those will prosper who purify themselves,

Qur'an 87:14

Success is granted to whoever purifies himself; the goal is not merely to avoid sin but to cleanse and grow the soul.

Nay (behold), ye prefer the life of this world;

Qur'an 87:16

"But you prefer the worldly life," a diagnosis of the human tilt toward the near and visible over the better and lasting.

But the Hereafter is better and more enduring.

Qur'an 87:17

The Hereafter is better and more enduring, the plain counter to our short-sighted preference, and the reason to invest beyond this life.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Al-A'la — “The Most High” — is a Makkan surah of nineteen verses, and one especially beloved by the Prophet ﷺ, who recited it often in the Witr prayer and in the two 'Ids and the Friday prayer. Its name comes from the opening command: “Glorify the name of your Lord, the Most High.” It carries the freshness of early Makkan revelation — a surah about the very act of receiving revelation, the God who gives it, and the two kinds of people who meet it.

The character of the surah is uplifting and reassuring. Where many neighbouring surahs press hard on the terrors of the Day, this one glorifies, promises, and gently sorts. It contains a direct comfort to the Prophet about the Qur'an itself, and it ends by anchoring its message in the oldest scriptures, as if to say: this is nothing new, this is the ancient truth returning.

How the surah unfolds

It opens (87:1–5) with the command to glorify the Most High, immediately grounded in what He does: He created and then perfectly proportioned; He determined and then guided; He brought forth the pasture green, then turned it into darkened, withered debris. In a few strokes the surah sketches a Lord who is not distant but continually creating, measuring, guiding, and cycling life into death — the whole of nature as a display of His governance.

The surah then turns to the Prophet ﷺ with a tender promise (87:6–7): “We shall make you recite, so you will not forget — except what God wills.” This addressed a real anxiety about grasping and retaining the revelation; the assurance is that the safekeeping of the Qur'an is God's undertaking, not a burden left on the Messenger's memory. “He knows what is open and what is hidden,” and “We shall ease you toward the easy way” (87:8) — the whole path of the message is made gentle by the One who sends it.

Then comes the instruction to preach and the sorting of hearers (87:9–13): “So remind, if the reminder benefits.” Some read this as a general call to keep reminding; the one who fears God will take heed, while the most wretched will turn away from it — the one who will roast in the greatest Fire, where he neither dies nor lives. Finally the surah names what actually saves (87:14–19): “Successful is the one who purifies himself, and remembers the name of his Lord, and prays.” It then diagnoses the human problem — “but you prefer the life of this world, while the hereafter is better and more lasting” — and seals the message by locating it in “the earliest scriptures, the scriptures of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā.”

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the perfection of God's creating and guiding — the ground of His right to be glorified. The four verbs of the opening (created, proportioned, determined, guided) describe a flawless competence: nothing is made and left rough; everything is given its measure and then shown its way. The green pasture turning to dark stubble (87:4–5) is both a mercy

and a memento mori — the same God who feeds also fades what He feeds, so that the cycle itself preaches that this world is passing. To glorify “the Most High” is therefore not empty praise but the fitting response of a creature who sees this care and this transience everywhere.

The second theme is the divine safeguarding of revelation. The promise “We shall make you recite, so you will not forget” (87:6) reassured the Prophet ﷺ personally, but it also states a doctrine: the Qur'an is preserved by God, not merely by human effort. This lifts an enormous weight — the Messenger is a receiver, not the guarantor, of the message. The same gentleness runs into “We shall ease you toward the easy way” (87:8): the whole undertaking of prophethood and, by extension, of the religion, is designed to be manageable, not crushing. God does not load His servant beyond capacity.

The third theme is purification versus the preference for this world. The surah's climax names the successful person by three acts: he purifies himself (tazakkā), remembers his Lord, and prays (87:14–15). Purification here is both the cleansing of the soul from disbelief and sin and, many scholars add, the giving of one's wealth in charity — an outward zakāh that mirrors an inward one. Against this stands the single diagnosis of why people fail: “you prefer the life of this world” (87:16). The whole of misguidance is compressed into a choice of priorities — the near over the lasting, the smaller over the greater. And to disarm any objection that this is a novel teaching, the surah closes by rooting it in the scriptures of Ibrāhīm and Mūsā: the message that the hereafter is better and more enduring is the oldest message there is.

Points of reflection

The surah gives the soul a simple, ordered program: glorify Him, purify yourself, remember His name, pray. It is almost a rule of life in miniature — and it is no accident that the Prophet ﷺ wove it through his most regular prayers. A believer can take it as a daily checklist of orientation: is my day pointed toward the Most High, and am I doing the small cleansing acts that keep the heart clear?

It also names our central temptation with unusual mercy — not as villainy but as a misjudged preference. “You prefer the life of this world.” The cure is not self-hatred but re-weighing: the hereafter “is better and more lasting.” Much of the spiritual struggle is simply this recalibration, done again and again, until the lasting genuinely outweighs the immediate in how we actually spend our hours.

Finally, the reassurance to the Prophet — that God preserves and eases — extends to every believer who fears the religion is too much for them. The path is designed for the one walking it. “We shall ease you toward the easy way” is a promise that sincere effort meets divine help, and that the reminder, when it lands on a heart that fears God, does its gentle work.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. Begin and steady your day with glorifying the Most High; reverence recalibrates everything downstream.
2. See the world's beauty as pasture soon to wither, and let that loosen its grip without making you scorn its lawful good.
3. Make purifying the soul, remembering Allah, and praying the concrete shape of the success the surah promises.

Where this reading draws from. Ibn Kathir, Tafsir al-Qur'an al-'Azim, al-Sa'di, Taysir al-Karim al-Rahman, Amin Ahsan Islahi, Tadabbur-i-Qur'an. 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/.