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Surah Ash-Sharh

The Relief · Makki · 8 ayat — reflections on surah 94 of the Qur'an

QURAN

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الشرح — Ash-Sharh, “The Relief”. Surah 94 of 114, revealed in Makkah, 8 ayat. The full text and a recitation are on the web edition at deen2u.com/quran/94/.

ONE

The surah in brief

Allah reminds the Prophet how He expanded his breast and lifted his burden and renown, then gives the enduring promise that with every hardship comes ease, calling him to turn in worship and yearning to his Lord once his task is done.

Ash-Sharh continues the consolation of Ad-Duha, reminding the Prophet of favors already granted: did We not expand your breast for you, lift from you the burden that weighed on your back, and raise high your renown? At its center is the promise repeated twice for emphasis, that with hardship comes ease, so that no difficulty arrives without its relief bound to it. The surah then redirects the comforted heart to action: when you are free from one task, labor on in another, and to your Lord alone direct your longing. It is a short breath of mercy that ends by turning gratitude into renewed effort and devotion.

TWO

Its themes

- Expansion of the breast
- Relief of the burden
- Raised remembrance
- Hardship paired with ease
- Continued striving
- Turning to the Lord

THREE

Key verses

Have We not expanded thee thy breast?–

Qur'an 94:1

"Did We not expand your breast for you?" the opening reminds that inner spaciousness and calm are themselves a gift already given.

So, verily, with every difficulty, there is relief:

Qur'an 94:5

"Indeed, with hardship comes ease," and its repetition assures that relief is not a distant hope but the constant companion of every trial.

Verily, with every difficulty there is relief.

Qur'an 94:6

The second telling drives it home: no single hardship outweighs the ease attached to it, for the ease is promised twice against the one hardship.

Therefore, when thou art free (from thine immediate task), still labour hard,

Qur'an 94:7

"So when you have finished, then labor on," rest is not idleness; comfort is meant to refuel the next act of service.

And to thy Lord turn (all) thy attention.

Qur'an 94:8

"And to your Lord direct your longing," the final aim of all striving is not the task itself but nearness to the One it is done for.

FOUR

Reading it closely

Context & character

Ash-Sharḥ — “The Expansion,” also called Alam Nashraḥ or al-Inshirāḥ — is a very short Makkan surah of eight verses. It is closely tied to the surah before it, aḍ-Ḍuḥā, so closely that some early scholars discussed whether they form a pair recited together, and many read them as two movements of one consolation to the Prophet ﷺ. Where aḍ-Ḍuḥā reassures him that his Lord has not left him, this surah reminds him of the expansion, relief, and honour his Lord has already granted.

The character of the surah is gentle, buoyant, and forward-looking. It reviews past blessings, states a universal law of hope, and then issues a call to action. At its centre is one of the most quoted verses of the Qur'an — repeated for emphasis — that with hardship comes ease. The surah lifts a weighed-down heart and then, rather than leaving it merely comforted, turns it toward renewed striving.

How the surah unfolds

It opens (94:1–4) with three rhetorical questions that are really affirmations of grace: “Did We not expand for you your breast? And remove from you your burden — the one that weighed down your back? And raise high for you your remembrance?” The expansion of the breast is the opening of the heart to guidance, patience, and peace; the removal of the burden is the lifting of the weight of the Prophet's early distress and the forgiveness of any shortcoming; and the raising of his

remembrance is the exalting of his name — mentioned alongside God's in the call to prayer and the testimony of faith across the world for all time.

Then comes the pivot and the surah's famous refrain (94:5–6): “For indeed, with hardship comes ease. Indeed, with hardship comes ease.” The repetition is not mere emphasis; the commentators note the grammar — the definite “the hardship” recurs while “ease” is indefinite and multiplies — yielding the reading that one hardship is bracketed by two eases, so difficulty never truly outnumbers relief. The statement is universal in form: it is a law of God's dealing with the world, not only a promise to one man.

The surah closes with a command born of that hope (94:7–8): “So when you are free, exert yourself, and to your Lord direct your longing.” Having lightened the heart, it does not permit idleness. When one task or hardship is done, turn at once to the next labour — of worship, of striving — and let the whole of one's desire and hope be aimed at God alone.

The major themes, in depth

The first theme is the inventory of grace as a foundation for confidence. The three questions of the opening are a recital of what God has already done: He opened the heart, lifted the burden, and raised the name. For the Prophet ﷺ this was intimate reassurance during a hard season. But the pattern is instructive for every believer: God's past provision — inner peace granted, weights lifted, honour given — is real capital against present difficulty. The surah teaches that we do not face hardship empty-handed; we face it as people already

deeply provided for. The “expansion of the breast,” in particular, is the inner spaciousness by which a heart can hold trials without breaking — itself the greatest gift, because a heart that is expanded can carry what would crush a narrow one.

The second theme is the law that ease is bound to hardship. “With hardship comes ease” (ma‘a — “with,” not merely “after”) suggests the ease is not a distant reward for enduring but a companion travelling alongside the difficulty, present within it if one has eyes to see. Repeated twice, and read by the scholars as one recurring hardship attended by two eases, it becomes a structural promise about reality: no difficulty is total, none is unaccompanied, and none has the last word. This is one of the Qur'an's great gifts to the struggling — not a denial that hardship is real, but an assurance that it is temporary, bounded, and outnumbered by relief. Ibn Kathīr records the Companions' saying that grew from this verse: “one hardship will not overcome two eases.”

The third theme is that relief is meant to fuel more striving, not rest. The closing command — “when you are free, exert yourself” (94:7) — corrects a natural but shallow response to comfort. The believer's ease is not an invitation to idleness but a re-fuelling for the next labour. Finish one duty and rise to another; complete the affairs of the world and turn to the worship of God; and in all of it, “to your Lord direct your longing” (94:8) — let the ultimate object of every hope and desire be God Himself. The surah thus refuses to let consolation curdle into complacency. Relief is a resource, given so that one may spend it again in God's service.

Points of reflection

The surah's central line has carried countless believers through their darkest passages, and its comfort is precise: the ease is with the hardship, not only after it. The reflection is to look for the mercy hidden inside the difficulty as it unfolds — the growth, the nearness to God, the strengths discovered — rather than only waiting for the trial to end.

It also teaches gratitude as memory. Before promising future relief, the surah has the Prophet ﷺ recall past relief — the opened heart, the lifted burden. A believer facing hardship can do the same: rehearse how God has expanded and unburdened you before, and let that record steady you now. The God who lifted the last weight is the same God present under this one.

Finally, the surah guards against the laziness that comfort can breed. Ease is given to be spent. When one task is finished, the believer's instinct should be to rise to the next good work and to point every longing back to God. The surah's arc — from consolation to command — is the arc of a healthy soul: comforted, but never idle; relieved, but always reaching for its Lord.

FIVE

Carrying it

1. In hardship, hold to the doubled promise that ease is bound to it, so despair never gets the last word.
2. Treat relief and rest as fuel, not a finish line; finish one duty and move into the next.
3. Anchor all your effort in longing for your Lord, so that work becomes worship rather than mere busyness.

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/.