



ANSWER

فَالْمُقَسِّمَاتِ أَمْرًا

by those (angels) who distribute things [51:4]

COMMENTARY

In these verses Allah swears an oath by four phenomena, as follows [...]. There is a Hadīth whose attribution to the Holy Prophet ﷺ has been held by Ibn Kathir as *da'if* [weak], but it is also reported as a saying of sayyidnā 'Umar *radī'allāhu 'anhu* and 'Alī *radī'allāhu 'anhu*. It explains these four things as follows [...] the expression *muqassimat-i-amran* refers to the angels who distribute to all creatures their sustenance and water, and different kinds of difficulties and comfort as determined by Allah's orders and decrees.

TAFSĪR IBN KATHĪR

"(And the distributors of command)" `Ali said, it refers to "The angels."

And Allah Ta'ālā knows best.

[N.b. whilst the answer for today's riddle is above, we elucidate below some other oaths Allah takes by characteristics of the angels, for additional commentary and understanding.]

وَالنَّزِعَاتِ غَرْقًا
وَالنَّشِيطَاتِ تَشْطًا
وَالسَّيِّحَاتِ سَبْحًا
فَالسَّيِّقَاتِ سَبْقًا
فَالْمُدَبِّرَاتِ أَمْرًا

I swear by those (angels) who pull out (the souls of the infidels) vigorously, and by those (angels) who untie the knot (of the souls of the believers) smoothly, and by those who float (in the atmosphere) swiftly, then proceed forward quickly, then manage (to do) everything (they are ordered to do) [79:1-5]

COMMENTARY

(I swear by those [angels] who pull out [the souls of the infidels] vigorously ... 79:1). The word *nāzi'āt* is derived from *naẓ'* and it means 'to draw vigorously'. The word *gharqan* is its corroborative because the word *gharq* is used here in the sense of *ighbrāq* and means 'to exert oneself much or to the utmost extent in the thing'. The Arabic idiom has it, 'He drew the bow with great vigour'. The Sūrah



begins with an oath by certain characteristics of the angels to affirm that the Resurrection is a certainty. The subject of the oath, however, has been contextually deleted. The oath of the angels is probably apt on this occasion because they are all the time involved in the administration and running of the world. They are executing their duties loyally. On the Day of Judgement, all material causes will be severed. Unusual events will occur and the angels will be involved in them.

Five characteristics of the angels are mentioned which are concerned with or related to the extraction of the soul at the time of death. The purport of the verses is to affirm that Resurrection is a certainty. It starts with human death. Every man's death is his partial Day of Doom, and this has an important impact on his belief in Resurrection. The five qualities are as follows:

The first quality of the angels:

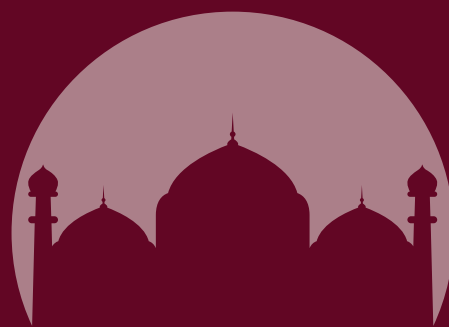
(I swear by those (angels) who pull out (the souls of the infidels) vigorously.) This refers to the angels of punishment who draw the souls of the infidels vigorously and harshly. The words 'vigorously' refer to spiritual pain. The humans around the dying person may not be sensitive to the pain. Often it is noticed that the soul of an infidel apparently slips out easily, but this ease is perceived by humans around the dying man. The pain is felt by the soul of the dying person. Who can perceive it? We are aware of it only because Allah has informed us about it in this verse.

The second quality of the angels:

(and by those [angels] who untie the knot [of the souls of the believers] smoothly, [2]) The word *nashitāt* is derived from *nasht* and it means 'to untie the knot'. This signifies 'to untie the knot of something which contains water or air, so that it may be released easily'. This is metaphor for drawing out the souls of the believers gently, unlike the souls of the infidels which are plucked out harshly. In this case too the adverb 'smoothly' refers to the spiritual smoothness, and not to the physical experience. Sometimes, it happens that there is a delay at the time of death of a righteous believer. This may not be suspected to mean that he is undergoing some sort of suffering, although physically it may seem so. When the soul of an infidel is extracted, the entire scene of the punishment of *barzakh* comes in front of him. It is frightened by it, disperses throughout the body and tries to hide or escape. The angels forcefully extract the soul just as wet wool wrapped around a skewer is forcefully removed. When the soul of a believer is extracted, on the other hand, the reward, the blessings and the welcome news of the *barzakh* come in front of him.

The third quality of the angels:

(and by those who float [in the atmosphere] swiftly.. .79:3). The word *sabb* literally means to 'swim' or 'float'. Here it signifies 'to glide along swiftly as in the sea where there is no mountain barrier'. The one who swims fast and goes far in swimming or a boatman who moves directly towards his final destination. The 'angels who float swiftly' refer to the quality of the angels of death who extract human souls and take them quickly towards the sky.



The fourth quality of the angels:

(then proceed forward quickly.. .79:4). According to Divine instruction, the angels do not delay in transporting the souls of people to their good or their bad abodes. The soul of a believer is transported to the atmosphere and blessings of Paradise, and that of an unbeliever to the atmosphere and torment of Hell.

The fifth quality of the angels:

(then manage [to do] everything [they are ordered to do,] . . .79:5). In other words, the last task of these angels of death will be as follows: Those who are commanded to reward and comfort the deserving souls, will gather means of reward and comfort for them; and those who are commanded to punish and cause pain to [the evil souls] will organise means for that.

Reward and Punishment in the Grave

The Sūrah thus far confirms that at the time of death, the angels will arrive and extract human souls. Then they will take them to the sky and swiftly transport them to their abodes, the good souls to the good abode and the bad souls to the bad one. There they will organise means of reward or punishment and pain or comfort for them. The verses show that the reward and punishment will take place in the grave or *barzakh*. Thereafter the reward and punishment will be meted out on the Day of Judgement. Authentic Traditions give elaborate details of this. There is a lengthy Tradition of Sayyidnā Barā' Ibn 'Azīb *radī'allāhu 'anhu* cited in *Mishkāt-ul-Masābīh* with reference to Musnad of Ahmad.

TAFSĪR IBN KATHĪR

Swearing by Five Characteristics that the Day of Judgement will occur

Ibn Mas'ud, Ibn 'Abbas, Masruq, Sa'id bin Jubayr, Abu Salih, Abu Ad-Duha and As-Suddi all said, **(By those who pull out, drowning.)** "These are the angels who remove the souls from the Children of Adam." Among them are those whose souls are removed by the angels with difficulty, as if he is being drowned during its removal. There are those people whose souls the angels remove with ease, as if they were unraveling him (i.e., his soul from him) due to their briskness. This is the meaning of Allah's statement, **(By those who free briskly.)** This has been mentioned by Ibn 'Abbas. In reference to Allah's statement, **(And by the swimmers, swimming.)** Ibn Mas'ud said, "They are the angels." Similar statements have been reported from 'Ali, Mujahid, Sa'id bin Jubayr, and Abu Salih. Concerning Allah's statement, **(And by the racers, racing.)** It has been narrated from 'Ali, Masruq, Mujahid, Abu Salih, and Al-Hasan Al-Basri that this means the angels. Then Allah says, **(And by those who arrange affairs.)** 'Ali, Mujahid, 'Ata', Abu Salih, Al-Hasan, Qatadah, Ar-Rabi' bin Anas, and As-Suddi all said, "They are the angels." Al-Hasan added, "They control the affairs from the heaven to the earth, meaning by the command of their Lord, the Mighty and Majestic."

And Allah Ta'ālā knows best.

