

UNDERSTANDING THE QURAN

THEMES AND STYLE

BY MUHAMMAD ABDEL HALEEM

CHAPTER 8:

PARADISE IN THE QURAN

Paradise, the abode of the righteous in the hereafter, is called, in the Qur'an, al-janna, meaning 'the garden'. It is one of the major themes of the Qur'an, occurring under this name over one hundred times and under other designations, like the firdaws, home of Peace, home of the righteous and many more. This reflects the fundamental significance of the final judgment and requital in Islamic theology. People are given time in the present world to make real choices for themselves. To allow full requital in the here and now would run counter to this plan

35:45

وَلَوْ يُؤَاخِذُ اللَّهُ النَّاسَ بِمَا كَسَبُوا مَا تَرَكَ عَلَى ظَهَرِهَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ وَلَكِنْ يُؤَخِّرُهُمْ إِلَى أَجَلٍ مُّسَمًّى ۖ فَإِذَا جَاءَ أَجْلُهُمْ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ كَانَ بِعِبَادِهِ بَصِيرًا

Now if God were to take men [at once] to task for whatever [wrong] they commit [on earth], He would not leave a single living creature upon its surface. However, He grants them respite for a term set [by Him]: but when their term comes to an end - then, verily, [they come to know that] God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His servants.). Whatever recompense may come in this world is not comprehensive, lasting or complete, and is mixed with the imperfections of this world

42:30

وَمَا أَصَابَكُمْ مِنْ مُّصِيبَةٍ فَبِمَا كَسَبَتْ أَيْدِيكُمْ وَيَعْفُو عَنْ كَثِيرٍ

Now whatever calamity may befall you [on Judgment Day] will be an outcome of what your own hands have wrought, although He pardons much;

3:165

أَوَلَمَّا أَصَابَتْكُمْ مُصِيبَةٌ قَدْ أَصَبْتُمْ مِثْلَيْهَا قُلْتُمْ أَنَّى هَذَا ۖ قُلْ هُوَ مِنْ عِنْدِ
أَنفُسِكُمْ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

AND DO YOU, now that a calamity has befallen you after you had inflicted twice as much [on your foes], ask yourselves, "How has this come about?" Say: "It has come from your own selves." Verily, God has the power to will anything;

87:17

وَالْآخِرَةُ خَيْرٌ وَأَبْقَىٰ

Although the life to come is better and more enduring.

Full, pure and lasting rewards will come about in the phase of judgement. This is a binding promise from God, who does not break promises. As already explained in the previous chapter LIFE AND BEYOND, the Qur'an thus repeatedly produces arguments for the desirability, necessity and possibility of the resurrection and judgement.

'The Garden' and 'Gardens'

Following the judgement, the righteous are admitted to the janna. The basic meaning of janna is 'a garden with trees, rivers and fruits'. Another basic element is the shade provided by the numerous luxuriant luscious trees. The garden, with its vitality, abundance and comfort, provides a fitting home for those who 'believe and do good works', especially as it always contrasts in the Qur'an with hell, the abode of evil-doers.

Janna, in the eschatological sense, occurs in the Qur'an thirty-five times in the singular, in the dual (jannatan) twice and in the plural (jannat) sixty-nine times. In the singular it refers to one entity, the entire abode of the righteous, in contrast to hell as the abode of the wicked. Within this large entity of paradise, individual believers with their families will have their own private jannas. The multiplicity of reward, seen here in the use of the plural form, is an example of one of the features of Qur'anic style by

which descriptions of rewards give the impression of unlimited plenty. The dual of janna occurs in a context where the pious are surrounded by two gardens, on the left and on the right – a privilege contrasting sharply with the torment of the evildoers, who roam between fire and boiling water. Usually, more descriptive details recur with the dual and plural (where the righteous reside) than with the singular of janna, the whole realm of paradise, where the references are more general. Compare:

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَعِيمٍ
فَاكِهِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ وَوَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ
كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ
مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَى سُرُرٍ مَصْفُوفَةٍ ۖ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ
وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ مِنْ
عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ
وَأَمْدَدْنَاهُمْ بِفَاكِهَةٍ وَلَحْمٍ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ
يَتَنَازَعُونَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا لَا لَغْوٌ فِيهَا وَلَا تَأْتِيمٌ
وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ غِلْمَانٌ لَهُمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لُؤْلُؤٌ مَكْنُونٌ
وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ
قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ
فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَانَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ
إِنَّا كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلُ نَدْعُوهُ ۚ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْبَرُّ الرَّحِيمُ

[But,] verily, the God-conscious will find themselves [on that Day] in gardens and in bliss, rejoicing in all that their Sustainer will have granted them: for their Sustainer will have warded off from them all suffering through the blazing fire. [And they will be told:] "Eat and drink with good cheer as an outcome of what you were wont to do, reclining on couches [of happiness] ranged in rows!" And [in that paradise] We shall mate them with companions pure, most beautiful of eye. And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste: [but] every human being will be held in pledge for whatever he has earned. And We shall bestow on them fruit and meat in abundance - whatever they may desire and in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin. And they will be waited upon by [immortal] youths, [as if they were children] of their own, [as pure] as if they were pearls hidden in their shells. And they [who are thus blest] will turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives]. They will say: "Behold, aforetime - when we were [still living] in the midst of our kith and kin - we were full of fear [at the thought of God's displeasure]: and so God has graced us with His favour, and has warded off from us all suffering through the scorching winds [of frustration]. Verily, we did invoke Him [alone] ere this: [and now He has shown us] that He alone is truly benign, a true dispenser of grace!"

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ قَالُوا رَبُّنَا اللَّهُ ثُمَّ اسْتَقَامُوا تَتَنَزَّلُ عَلَيْهِمُ الْمَلَائِكَةُ أَلَّا تَخَافُوا وَلَا تَحْزَنُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا بِالْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ تُوعَدُونَ

[But,] behold, as for those who say, "Our Sustainer is God," and then steadfastly pursue the right way - upon them do angels often descend, [saying:] "Fear not and grieve not, but receive the glad tidings of that paradise which has been promised to you!"

41:30

With the exception of very few cases, particularly the final short siras, every sira in the Qur'an has something to say about janna in varying degrees of detail. In dealing with such a vital belief as the judgement and the consequences of human life and actions, the Qur'an does not isolate the discussion of rewards in one comprehensive chapter, which would have been limited, less likely to excite the imagination and less likely to be read, heard or remembered by some people. As it is, in their reading or hearing the Qur'an in daily life and prayer, Muslims are regularly reminded of the consequences of their actions and of their destiny in the more lasting life in the hereafter. The distribution of the material varies in length between one sira and another, sometimes very short (e.g. 85 AL Buruj , 89 al Fajr, 101 Qariah) and sometimes much longer (e.g. 55 ar Rahman , 56 Waqia, 76 al Insan), but even when it is very concise the material recalls and evokes the more extended descriptions. This is brought out particularly in Qur'an commentaries which apply the two principles: al-Qur'an yufassir ba'da uh ba'da 'different parts of the Qur'an explain each other' and yu'mal al-mutlaq 'ala-muqayyad 'unqualified statements should be interpreted in the light of qualified ones'.

Entering the Garden

Understandably, janna is a very special place and it is a great distinction to be admitted through its gates

39:73

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ

But those who were conscious of their Sustainer will be urged on in throngs towards paradise till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide- open; and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!"). 'Entering' is clearly so important that the word is used in different derivations fifty-seven times: e.g. 'enter, then,

فَادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي
وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي

Together with My [other true] servants – yea, enter thou My paradise!" 89:29–30

15:46

ادْخُلُوهَا بِسَلَامٍ آمِنِينَ

Having been received with the greeting, "Enter here in peace, secure!"

22:14

إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُدْخِلُ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يَفْعَلُ مَا يُرِيدُ

VERILY, God will admit those who have attained to faith and have done righteous deeds into gardens through which running waters flow: for, behold, God does whatever He wills.

22:59

لِيُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ مُدْخَلًا يَرْضَوْنَهُ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَعَلِيمٌ حَلِيمٌ

[And] He will most certainly cause them to enter upon a state (of being) that shall please them well: for, verily, God is all-knowing, most forbearing.). Such a public welcome enhances the honor conferred on them in front of all.

Protection

Obviously, an important aspect of defining the rewards in paradise relates to the contrast the Qur'an normally shows in adjacent verses between paradise and hell. The true picture of paradise can be more fully appreciated in the light of the contrasting picture of hell:

قُلْ أَذَلِكَ خَيْرٌ أَمْ جَنَّةُ الْخُلْدِ الَّتِي وُعدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ كَانَتْ لَهُمْ جَزَاءً وَمَصِيرًا

Say: "Which is better - that, or the paradise of life abiding which has been promised to the God-conscious as their reward and their journey's end -25:15

لَا يَسْتَوِي أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ وَأَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ ۖ أَصْحَابُ الْجَنَّةِ هُمُ الْفَائِزُونَ

Not equal are those who are destined for the fire and those who are destined for paradise: those who are destined for paradise - it is they, they [alone] who shall triumph [on Judgment Day]!.

59:20

إِنَّهَا سَاءَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَمُقَامًا
وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا أَنْفَقُوا لَمْ يُسْرِفُوا وَلَمْ يَقْتُرُوا وَكَانَ بَيْنَ ذَلِكَ قَوَامًا
وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَدْعُونَ مَعَ اللَّهِ إِلَهًا آخَرَ وَلَا يَقْتُلُونَ النَّفْسَ الَّتِي حَرَّمَ اللَّهُ إِلَّا
بِالْحَقِّ وَلَا يَزْنُونَ ۖ وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ يَلْقَ أَثَامًا
يُضَاعَفْ لَهُ الْعَذَابُ يَوْمَ الْقِيَامَةِ وَيَخْلُدْ فِيهِ مُهَانًا
إِلَّا مَنْ تَابَ وَآمَنَ وَعَمِلَ عَمَلًا صَالِحًا فَأُولَئِكَ يُبَدِّلُ اللَّهُ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ
حَسَنَاتٍ ۖ وَكَانَ اللَّهُ غَفُورًا رَحِيمًا
وَمَنْ تَابَ وَعَمِلَ صَالِحًا فَإِنَّهُ يَتُوبُ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَتَابًا
وَالَّذِينَ لَا يَشْهَدُونَ الزُّورَ وَإِذَا مَرُّوا بِاللَّغْوِ مَرُّوا كِرَامًا
وَالَّذِينَ إِذَا ذُكِّرُوا بِآيَاتِ رَبِّهِمْ لَمْ يَخْرُوا عَلَيْهَا سُومًا وَغَمِيانًا
وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ
إِمَامًا
أُولَئِكَ يُجْزَوْنَ الْغُرْفَةَ بِمَا صَبَرُوا وَيُلَقَّوْنَ فِيهَا تَحِيَّةً وَسَلَامًا
خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۖ حَسُنَتْ مُسْتَقَرًّا وَمُقَامًا

Verily, how evil an abode and a station!" -; and who, whenever they spend on others, are neither wasteful nor niggardly but [remember that] there is always a just mean between those [two extremes]; and who never invoke any [imaginary] deity side by side with God, and do not take any human beings life - [the life] which God has willed to be sacred - otherwise than in [the pursuit of] justice, and do not commit adultery. And [know that] he who commits aught thereof shall [not only] meet with a full requital but] shall have his suffering doubled on Resurrection Day: for on that [Day] he shall abide in ignominy. Excepted, however, shall be they who repent and attain to faith and do righteous deeds: for it is they whose [erstwhile] bad deeds God will transform into good ones - seeing that God is indeed much-forgiving, a dispenser of grace, and seeing that he who repents and

[thenceforth] does what is right has truly turned unto God by [this very act of] repentance. And [know that true servants of God are only] those who never bear witness to what is false, and [who], whenever they pass by [people engaged in] frivolity, pass on with dignity; and who, whenever they are reminded of their Sustainer's messages, do not throw themselves upon them [as if] deaf and blind; and who pray "O our Sustainer! Grant that our spouses and our offspring be a joy to our eyes, and cause us to be foremost among those who are conscious of Thee!" [Such as] these will be rewarded for all their patient endurance [in life] with a high station [in paradise], and will be met therein with a greeting of welcome and peace, therein to abide: [and] how goodly an abode and [how high] a station! (25:66–76).

Naturally the most important thing in rewards is first to be protected from hell and its torment. Wiqaya (protection, preservation) occurs twelve times in this context.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَعِيمٍ
فَاكِهِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ وَوَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ

[But,] verily, the God-conscious will find themselves [on that Day] in gardens and in bliss, rejoicing in all that their Sustainer will have granted them: for their Sustainer will have warded off from them all suffering through the blazing fire.

52:17-18

The Qur'an does not just describe the state of the righteous in paradise, but frequently makes them express their state and feelings directly:

وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا فِي قَرْيَةٍ مِّنْ نَّذِيرٍ إِلَّا قَالَ مُتْرَفُوهَا إِنَّا بِمَا أُرْسِلْتُمْ بِهِ كَافِرُونَ
وَقَالُوا نَحْنُ أَكْثَرُ أَمْوَالًا وَأَوْلَادًا وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمُعَذَّبِينَ

For [thus it is:] whenever We sent a warner to any community, those of its people who had lost themselves entirely in the pursuit of pleasures would declare, "Behold, we deny that there is any truth in [what you claim to be] your message!" –and they would add, "Richer [than you] are we in wealth and in children, and [so] we are not going to be made to suffer!"^{34:34–5}

فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَانَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ

And so God has graced us with His favour, and has warded off from us all suffering through the scorching winds [of frustration].

52:27

Even in the world the believers have been praying:

وَمِنْهُمْ مَنْ يَقُولُ رَبَّنَا آتِنَا فِي الدُّنْيَا حَسَنَةً وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ حَسَنَةً وَقِنَا عَذَابَ النَّارِ

But there are among them such as pray, "O our Sustainer! Grant us good in this world and good in the life to come, and keep us safe from suffering through the fire":

2:201

Protection from hell is their first reward, but within janna itself, the righteous are further protected from everything that might spoil their joy.

وَيُنَجِّي اللَّهُ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا بِمَفَازَتِهِمْ لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ السُّوءُ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

But God will safeguard all who were conscious of Him, [and will grant them happiness] by virtue of their [inner] triumphs; no evil shall ever touch them, and neither shall they grieve..

39:61

أَلَا إِنَّ أَوْلِيَاءَ اللَّهِ لَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ

Oh, verily, they who are close to God - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve:

10:62

Protection from 'azan (grief) is repeated fourteen times and the number is about the same for khawf (fear). Unlike those in hell, they will suffer no shame 66:8

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا تَوْبُوا إِلَى اللَّهِ تَوْبَةً نَصُوحًا عَسَىٰ رَبُّكُمْ أَنْ يُكَفِّرَ عَنْكُمْ سَيِّئَاتِكُمْ وَيُدْخِلَكُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ يَوْمَ لَا يُخْزِي اللَّهُ النَّبِيَّ وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مَعَهُ ۖ نُورُهُمْ يَسْعَىٰ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا أَتِمِّمْ لَنَا نُورَنَا وَاعْفِرْ لَنَا ۖ إِنَّكَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

O you who have attained to faith! Turn unto God in sincere repentance: it may well be that your Sustainer will efface from you your bad deeds, and will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, on a Day on which God will not shame the Prophet and those who share his faith: their light will spread rapidly before them, and on their right; [and] they will pray: "O our

Sustainer! Cause this our light to shine for us forever, and forgive us our sins: for, verily, Thou hast the power to will anything!"), no malice will spoil their friendship

15:47

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غَلٍّ إِخْوَانًا عَلَى سُرُرٍ مُتَقَابِلِينَ

And [by then] We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their breasts, [and they shall rest] as brethren, facing one another [in love] upon thrones of happiness.)

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا كِذَابًا

No empty talk will they hear in that [paradise], nor any lie.

78:35

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ حَسِيسَهَا ۖ وَهُمْ فِي مَا اشْتَهَتْ أَنْفُسُهُمْ خَالِدُونَ

No sound thereof will they hear; and they will abide in all that their souls have ever desired.

21:102

No discomfort or ill health will result from eating and drinking there. The drink is pure. It neither dulls their senses nor causes intoxication

37:47

لَا فِيهَا غَوْلٌ وَلَا هُمْ عَنْهَا يُنْزَفُونَ

No headiness will be in it, and they will not get drunk thereon.

56:19

لَا يُصَدَّعُونَ عَنْهَا وَلَا يُنْزَفُونَ

By which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk

52:23

يَتَنَازَعُونَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا لَا لَغْوٌ فِيهَا وَلَا تَأْتِيمٌ

And in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin.

أَمْرًا مِنْ عِنْدِنَا ۖ إِنَّا كُنَّا مُرْسِلِينَ

Unlike this world, where everything good is doomed to end, those in paradise will not taste death
44:5

And neither shall they taste death there after having passed through their erstwhile death. Thus will He have preserved them from all suffering through the blazing fire-). Their gifts will have no end

38:54

إِنَّ هَذَا لَرِزْقُنَا مَا لَهُ مِنْ نَفَادٍ

This, verily, shall be Our provision [for you], with no end to it!). The fruits will be unending and unforbidden

56:32

وَفَاكِهَةٍ كَثِيرَةٍ

And fruit abounding, It is an abode of eternity

35:35

الَّذِي أَحَلَّنَا دَارَ الْمُقَامَةِ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ لَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَلَا يَمَسُّنَا فِيهَا لُغُوبٌ

He who, out of His bounty, has made us alight in this abode of life enduring, wherein no struggle can assail us, and wherein no weariness can touch us!). In it they will abide forever

98:8

جَزَاؤُهُمْ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ جَنَّاتٌ عَدْنٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمْ وَرَضُوا عَنْهُ ۚ ذَلِكَ لِمَنْ خَشِيَ رَبَّهُ

Their reward [awaits them] with God: gardens of perpetual bliss, through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: all this awaits him who of his Sustainer stands in awe!). The importance of this sense of security and peace in paradise is borne out by the fact that it is repeated over forty times. It is further emphasized by confirmation that the blessed will not be expelled from it

15:48

لَا يَمَسُّهُمْ فِيهَا نَصَبٌ وَمَا هُمْ مِنْهَا بِمُخْرَجِينَ

No weariness shall ever touch them in this [state of bliss], and never shall they have to forgo it

18:108

خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا لَا يَبْغُونَ عَنْهَا حِوَلًا

Therein will they abide, [and] never will they desire any change therefrom.).

The Physical Picture

The physical picture one gets from Qur'anic references to janna is that it is vast, 'as wide as are the heavens and the earth'

3:133

وَسَارِعُوا إِلَى مَغْفِرَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا السَّمَاوَاتُ وَالْأَرْضُ أُعِدَّتْ لِلْمُتَّقِينَ

And vie with one another to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness and to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for the God-conscious;

57:21

سَابِقُوا إِلَى مَغْفِرَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا كَعَرْضِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ أُعِدَّتْ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ ذَلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ

[Hence,] vie with one another in seeking to attain to your Sustainer's forgiveness, and [thus] to a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, which has been readied for those who have attained to faith in God and His Apostle: such is the bounty of God which He grants unto whomever He wills - for God is limitless in His great bounty.). Its inhabitants can move freely and settle wherever they wish

39:74

وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَبَوَّأُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ ۖ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ

And they will exclaim: "All praise is due to God, who has made His promise to us come true, and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!" And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured [in God's way]!).

69:22

فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ

In a lofty paradise;

88:10

فِي جَنَّةٍ عَالِيَةٍ

In a garden sublime.

This is an essential feature occurring no less than thirty-six times. Rivers in the garden are always in the plural (anhar) and always flow (tajri), which suggests sparkling, cooling and enlivening sounds. There are running springs and fountains (nine times) of fragrant drinking water

76:5

إِنَّ الْأَبْرَارَ يَشْرَبُونَ مِنْ كَأْسٍ كَانَ مِزَاجُهَا كَافُورًا

[whereas,] behold, the truly virtuous shall drink from a cup flavored with the calyx of sweet-smelling flowers; [derived from] a source [to be found] therein, whose name is "Seek Thy Way".) The trees give plentiful, spreading shade

4:57

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ سَنُدْخِلُهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا أَبَدًا ۖ لَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَنُدْخِلُهُمْ ظِلًّا ظَلِيلًا

But those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; there shall they have spouses pure: and [thus] We shall bring them unto happiness abounding;

56:30

وِظِلٍّ مَمْدُودٍ

And shade extended. The temperate climate is unspoiled by harshness of sun or cold

76:13

مُتَّكِئِينَ فِيهَا عَلَى الْأَرَائِكِ ۖ لَا يَرَوْنَ فِيهَا شَمْسًا وَلَا زَمْهَرِيرًا

In that [garden] they will on couches recline, and will know therein neither [burning] sun nor cold severe. An important element in the garden is fruit (twelve times) – plentiful, unforbidden, never ending, its clusters are within easy reach

56:22–3

وَحُورٌ عِينٌ

كَأَمْثَالِ اللُّؤْلُؤِ الْمَكْنُونِ

And [with them will be their] companions pure, most beautiful of eye, like unto pearls [still] hidden in their shells;

69:23

قُطُوفُهَا دَانِيَةٌ

With its fruits within easy reach.

In these pleasing surroundings stand 'goodly dwellings'

9:72

وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا وَمَسَاكِنَ طَيِّبَةً فِي جَنَّاتٍ عَدْنٍ ۚ وَرِضْوَانٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ أَكْبَرُ ۚ ذَلِكَ هُوَ الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ

God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God's goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] -for this, this is the triumph supreme!) with 'lofty chambers above and rivers flowing beneath'

39:20

لَكِنَّ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ لَهُمْ غُرَفٌ مِنْ فَوْقِهَا غُرَفٌ مَبْنِيَّةٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۚ وَعَدَ اللَّهُ ۚ لَا يُخْلِفُ اللَّهُ الْمِيعَادَ

As against this they who of their Sustainer are conscious shall [in the life to come] have mansions raised upon mansions high, beneath which running waters flow: [this is] God's promise - [and] never does God fail to fulfill His promise.). There are detailed descriptions of these goodly dwellings (e.g. 55:52-72 In [each of] these two will two kinds of every fruit be [found]. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? [In such a paradise the blest will dwell,] reclining upon carpets lined with rich brocade; and the fruit of both these gardens will be within easy reach. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? In these [gardens] will be mates of modest gaze, whom neither man nor invisible being will have touched ere then. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? When you are promised splendors] as though [of] rubies and [of] pearls -which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? Could the reward of good be aught but good? Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? And besides those two will be yet two [other] gardens -which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? -two [gardens] of the deepest green Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? In [each of] these two [gardens] will two springs gush forth. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? In both of them will be [all kinds of] fruit, and date-palms and pomegranates. Which,

then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? In these [gardens] will be [all] things most excellent and beautiful. Which, then, of your Sustainer's powers can you disavow? [There the blest will live with their] companions pure and modest, in pavilions [splendid] ;

56:15–34 [They will be seated] on gold-encrusted thrones of happiness, reclining upon them, facing one another [in love]. Immortal youths will wait upon them with goblets, and ewers, and cups filled with water from unsullied springs by which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk; and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire. And [with them will be their] companions pure, most beautiful of eye, like unto pearls [still] hidden in their shells. [And this will be] a reward for what they did [in life]. No empty talk will they hear there, nor any call to sin, but only the tiding of inner soundness and peace. NOW AS FOR those who have attained to righteousness - what of those who have attained to righteousness? [They, too, will find themselves] amidst fruit-laden lote-trees, and acacias flower-clad, and shade extended, and waters gushing, and fruit abounding, never-failing and never out of reach. And [with them will be their] spouses, raised high:

88:13– 16 [and] there will be thrones [of happiness] raised high, and goblets placed ready, and cushions ranged, and carpets spread out...)

We see the dwellers in pleasant company:

'They shall enter the garden of Eden, together with the righteous among their parents, their spouses and descendants' (13:23-24 gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring; and the angels will come unto them from every gate [and will say]: "Peace be upon you, because you have persevered!" How excellent, then, this fulfilment in the hereafter!

52:20–1 reclining on couches [of happiness] ranged in rows!" And [in that paradise] We shall mate them with companions pure, most beautiful of eye. And as for those who have attained to faith and whose offspring will have followed them in faith, We shall unite them with their offspring; and We shall not let aught of their deeds go to waste: [but] every human being will be held in pledge for whatever he has earned.)

(80:38–9 Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings.)

—

the effect of life in the hereafter on faces is particularly pronounced in the Qur'an. They will be attended by servants of immortal youth, who, to the beholders' eyes, will seem like sprinkled pearls, offering to them pure drinks, flesh of birds, and fruits of their own choice; they will have whatever they call for

36:57

لَهُمْ فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَلَهُمْ مَا يَدْعُونَ

[only] delight will there be for them, and theirs shall be all that they could ask for;; 52:22–5 And We shall bestow on them fruit and meat in abundance - whatever they may desire: and in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin. And they will be waited upon by [immortal] youths, [as if they were children] of their own, [as pure] as if they were pearls hidden in their shells. And they [who are thus blest] will turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives].; 56:18–21 with goblets, and ewers, and cups filled with water from unsullied springs, by which their minds will not be clouded and which will not make them drunk; and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire.; 76:15–19 And they will be waited upon with vessels of silver and goblets that will [seem to] be crystal –crystal-like, [but] of silver - the measure whereof they alone will determine. And in that [paradise] they will be given to drink of a cup flavored with ginger, [derived from] a source [to be found] therein, whose name is "Seek Thy Way".And immortal youths will wait upon them: when thou seest them, thou wouldst deem m them to be scattered pearls;).

Proper Perspective

The popular conception of paradise in the Qur'an (based perhaps on an exaggeration of this physical picture) is that it is the abode of sensual pleasure⁷ par excellence; but examination of actual descriptions in the Qur'an gives quite a different picture.

It will be seen in the following discussion that:

- (i) the inhabitants of janna are not seen to indulge in sensual pleasures;
- (ii) material rewards are seen to be symbolic of honouring;
- (iii) material rewards are actually outnumbered by moral and spiritual rewards;
- (iv) material rewards are also outranked by these non-material ones.

Although food is provided, throughout the Qur'an the dwellers in paradise are not usually seen actually eating. Four items of food are mentioned: flesh of fowl twice, fruits twelve times, and pure honey and milk once. They are invited to 'eat and drink' but this invitation is made only three times out of the twenty-seven where this expression is used in the Qur'an; the rest of the references are to do with this world. In any case, eating and drinking in the garden is not for the protection of life or health, as God has given the inhabitants bodies that do not deteriorate. The meat and fruit available in paradise (described as being 'of what they choose' and with fruit of any kind that they may choose, and with the flesh of any fowl that they may desire. (56:20–1) are offered as a token of honour (37:42**ARABIC** as the fruits [of their life on earth]; and honoured shall they be).

There are more references to drinking but the inhabitants are still not seen actually drinking:

عَالِيَهُمْ ثِيَابٌ سُنْدُسٌ خُضْرٌ وَإِسْتَبْرَقٌ ۖ وَخُلُّوا أَسَاوِرَ مِنْ فِضَّةٍ وَسَقَاهُمْ
 رَبُّهُمْ شَرَابًا طَهُورًا
 إِنَّ هَذَا كَانَ لَكُمْ جَزَاءً وَكَانَ سَعْيُكُمْ مَشْكُورًا

Upon those [blest] will be garments of green silk and brocade; and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. And their Sustainer will them to drink of a drink most pure. [And they will be told:] "Verily, all this is your reward since Your endeavor [in life] has met [God's] goodly acceptance!"

76:21,22

This is a high honor indeed: the Lord Himself gives them a drink and they are told by God (or the angel) that their endeavors are thanked.

Intoxicants are mentioned by name only once

47:15

مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ
 لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرَ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ
 مُصَفًّى ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَالِدٌ فِي
 النَّارِ وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ

[And can] the parable of the paradise which the God-conscious are promised [a paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed, and the enjoyment of all the fruits [of their good deeds] and of forgiveness from their Sustainer -: can this [parable of paradise] be likened unto [the parable of the recompense of] such as are to abide in the fire and be given waters of burning despair to drink, so that it will tear their bowels asunder?) and drinks there do

not lead to headiness or sin (37:47 No headiness will be in it, and they will not get drunk thereon.; 52:23 and in that [paradise] they shall pass on to one another a cup which will not give rise to empty talk, and neither incite to sin.).

The luxurious couches, cushions, carpets, cups and plates 'which they themselves have measured to their liking' (76:16 crystal-like, [but] of silver - the measure whereof they alone will determine.); the servants, the green silken robes and the ornaments they will wear (with which there is nothing inherently wrong by human standards) are all tokens of the honour given them by their Lord (76:22 [And they will be told:] "Verily, all this is your reward since Your endeavour [in life] has met [God's] goodly acceptance!").

As Mu'ammad 'Abdallah Diraz has rightly asked:

Why should some people insist at all costs on removing any material element from happiness in the afterlife? Does the order and beauty in nature harm the order and beauty in the soul? ... There is no doubt that when a wise person knows their smaller value he will not seek them for their own sake, but he will not reject them either when they are provided. Is it right that we should reject a friendly hand extended to give us a present or place an ornament on our chest? The material value of such things is smaller than their symbolic meaning which indicates satisfaction that we cannot reject in the face of the presenter without injury to the sense of good taste.

The Qur'an repeats (seventeen times) that the righteous will dwell in jannat al-na'im. Na'im has been rendered by some translators as 'pleasure' or 'delight'. This is rather restrictive to the wider meaning of ni'ma (from which na'im is derived) as used in the Qur'an: favouring humanity with religion, prophethood, grace, blessing, causing unity after disunity, freedom, prosperity, cleanliness (among others) – all are said in the Qur'an to be ni'ma from God. Na'im should be interpreted in the light of the full picture of janna; superficial, ill-founded interpretation of ni'ma as 'pleasure' contributes to the distorted popular picture of paradise in the Qur'an. Another aspect of janna which contributes to the popular image of physical pleasure is the houris. Part of God's blessing on the righteous is that they will be joined in paradise with the righteous of their parents, spouses (azwaj) and offspring

13:23-24

جَنَّاتُ عَدْنٍ يَدْخُلُونَهَا وَمَنْ صَلَحَ مِنْ آبَائِهِمْ وَأَزْوَاجِهِمْ
وَذُرِّيَّتِهِمْ ۖ وَالْمَلَائِكَةُ يَدْخُلُونَ عَلَيْهِمْ مِنْ كُلِّ بَابٍ
سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ بِمَا صَبَرْتُمْ ۖ فَنِعْمَ عُقْبَى الدَّارِ

gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring; and the angels will come unto them from every gate [and will say]: Peace be upon you, because you have persevered!" How excellent, then, this fulfilment in the hereafter!). This is in stark contrast to the dwellers of hell who will suffer loneliness. The azwaj (mentioned seven times) are described as being 'made pure'

2:25

وَبَشِّرِ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ أَنَّ لَهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا
الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ كُلَّمَا رُزِقُوا مِنْهَا مِنْ ثَمَرَةٍ رِزْقًا ۖ قَالُوا هَذَا الَّذِي رُزِقْنَا مِنْ
قَبْلُ ۖ وَأُتُوا بِهِ مُتَشَابِهًا ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا أَزْوَاجٌ مُطَهَّرَةٌ ۖ وَهُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُونَ

But unto those who have attained to faith and do good works give the glad tiding that theirs shall be gardens through which running waters flow. Whenever they are granted fruits there from as their appointed sustenance, they will say, "It is this that in days of yore was granted to us as our sustenance!"-for they shall be given something that will recall that [past]. And there shall they have spouses pure, and there shall they abide.; 3:15 Say: "Shall I tell you of better things than those [earthly joys]? For the God-conscious there are, with their Sustainer, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and spouses pure, and God's goodly acceptance." And God sees all that is in [the hearts of] His servants -; 4:57 But those who attain to faith and do righteous deeds We shall bring into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; there shall they have spouses pure: and [thus] We shall bring them unto happiness abounding.) and four times as being hur – i.e. of wide, brilliantly black and white eyes. Beauty of the eyes is part of the beauty of faces, and the dwellers in paradise delight in looking at each other's faces. Al-Janna is not the home of 'believing men' only but also of 'believing women'. This is made clear in such passages as

3:195

فَاسْتَجَابَ لَهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ أَنِّي لَا أُضِيعُ عَمَلَ عَامِلٍ مِنْكُمْ مِنْ ذَكَرٍ أَوْ
 أَنْثَى ۖ بَعْضُكُمْ مِنْ بَعْضٍ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ هَاجَرُوا وَأُخْرِجُوا مِنْ دِيَارِهِمْ وَأُوذُوا
 فِي سَبِيلِي وَقَاتَلُوا وَقُتِلُوا لَأُكَفِّرَنَّ عَنْهُمْ سَيِّئَاتِهِمْ وَلَأُدْخِلَنَّهُمْ جَنَّاتٍ تَجْرِي مِنْ
 تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ثَوَابًا مِنْ عِنْدِ اللَّهِ ۖ وَاللَّهُ عِنْدَهُ حُسْنُ الثَّوَابِ

And thus does their Sustainer answer their prayer: "I shall not lose sight of the labour of any of you who labours [in My way], be it man or woman: each of you is an issue of the other. Hence, as for those who forsake the domain of evil, and are driven from their homelands, and suffer hurt in My cause, and fight [for it], and are slain - I shall most certainly efface their bad deeds, and shall most certainly bring them into gardens through which running waters flow, as a reward from God: for with God is the most beauteous of rewards.; 4:124 whereas anyone - be it man or woman - who does [whatever he can] of good deeds and is a believer withal, shall enter paradise, and shall not be wronged by as much as [would fill] the groove of a date-stone.; 9:72 God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God's goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] -for this, this is the triumph supreme!; 16:97 As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer withal - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life. and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did.; 33:35 VERILY, for all men and women who have surrendered themselves unto God, and all believing men and believing women, and all truly devout men and truly devout women, and all men and women who are true to their word, and all men and women who are patient in adversity, and all men and women who humble themselves [before God], and all men and women who give in charity, and all self-denying men and self-denying women, and all men and women who are mindful of their chastity, and all men and women who remember God unceasingly: for [all of] them has God readied forgiveness of sins and a mighty reward. and 48:5 [and] that He might admit the believers, both men and women, into gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and that

He might efface their [past bad] deeds: and that is, in the sight of God, indeed a triumph supreme. The believing women of this world will be hur there, as the Prophet explains in his hadith. The hur will be lustrous in colour, like rubies and pearls (55:58 [When you are promised splendours] as though [of] rubies and [of] pearls –; 56:23 like unto pearls [still] hidden in their shells.). First they are described as being of modest gaze, then as having beautiful eyes (37:48 And with them will be mates of modest gaze, most beautiful of eye,). They are described once as being hawa'ib and mutually affectionate (78:33 and splendid companions well matched,), and twice as being of similar age to their companions (78:33 ABOVE; 56:37 full of love, well-matched). Many translators render hawa'ib as 'of swelling breasts'. Pickthall gives 'maiden' which is the correct rendering: in the hadith, as Ibn Manzar explains in Lisan al-'Arab, kawa'ib refers to young girls when their breasts are beginning to appear (al-ka'ab: al-mar'a hina yabdi thadyuha li'l-nuhid), so the description actually refers to the young age rather than emphasizing swelling breasts. They have been created anew and made virgin

56:35–6

إِنَّا أَنشَأْنَاهُنَّ إِنِشَاءً
فَجَعَلْنَاهُنَّ أَبْكَارًا

for, behold, We shall have brought them into being in a life renewed, having resurrected them as virgins,).

In fact physical description of women is limited. There is no overt mention in the Qur'an of sex taking place between spouses in janna, although the relationship is lawful between spouses and the Qur'an does not shy away from mentioning it in the context of this world: for example, in explaining what is permissible during the nights of the fast, it says, 'You may lie with your spouses and eat and drink' (2:187 IT IS lawful for you to go in unto your wives during the night preceding the [day's] fast: they are as a garment for you, and you are as a garment for them. God is aware that you would have deprived yourselves of this right, and so He has turned unto you in His mercy and removed this hardship from you. Now, then, you may lie with them skin to skin, and avail yourselves of that which God has ordained for you, and eat and drink until you can discern the white streak of dawn against the blackness of night, and then resume fasting until nightfall; but do not lie with them skin to skin when you are about to abide in meditation in houses of worship. These are the bounds set by God: do not, then, offend against them - [for] it is thus that God makes clear His messages unto mankind, so that they might remain conscious of Him.); but in paradise, even though at times the inhabitants are invited to 'eat and drink', there is no overt mention of relations with spouses and no similar permission is given. The mutual love between spouses in the garden (56:37–8 ARABIC full of love, well-matched with those who have attained to righteousness:) epitomizes the most fulfilling aspect of the relationship between spouses as expressed in the Qur'an:

30:21 And among His wonders is this: He creates for you mates out of your own kind. so that you might incline towards them, and He engenders love and tenderness between you: in this, behold, there are messages indeed for people who think!

People in paradise are never seen lying down or sleeping. Seven times they are said to be muttaki'in. Translators render this as 'reclining', which is incorrect as this is the colloquial meaning and not the one used in the Qur'an. As Ibn Manu'ir observed: 'al-muttaki' in Arabic is anyone who sits on something (like a couch or a chair), firmly seated; the common people know the muttaki' only as someone who is reclining on his side.' The dwellers in Paradise are thus shown in the Qur'an sitting and talking to each other. The most frequently recurring physical characteristic of janna is that rivers run beneath it or beneath the dwellings (thirty-four times, and four times beneath the inhabitants). Water in janna is not seen stagnant, as in a tank, lake or reservoir, but flowing and gushing in rivers or springs (55:50 In [each of] these two [gardens] two springs will flow., 66 In [each of] these two [gardens] will two springs gush forth.; 88:12 Countless springs will flow therein,). It is always beneath so it does not fall on the inhabitants or soak them. They can also look down on it and derive the delight one experiences in gazing from above on running water. This emphasis on the living qualities of water in paradise (which in any case is not surprising in a garden) has to be seen in the light of the importance of water in the Qur'an in general. God declares:

لَا تَسْمَعُ فِيهَا لَاغِيَةً
فِيهَا عَيْنٌ جَارِيَةٌ

wherein thou wilt hear no empty talk. Countless springs will flow therein, 88:11-12

أَوَلَمْ يَرَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا ۖ وَجَعَلْنَا
مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ ۖ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ

ARE, THEN, they who are bent on denying the truth not aware that the heavens and the earth were [once] one single entity, which We then parted asunder? – and [that] We made out of water every living thing? Will they not, then, [begin to] believe?

21:30

أَلَمْ تَرَ أَنَّ اللَّهَ أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَتُصْبِحُ الْأَرْضُ مُخْضَرَّةً ۗ إِنَّ اللَّهَ
لَطِيفٌ خَبِيرٌ

Art thou not aware that it's God who sends down water from the skies, whereupon the earth becomes green? Verily, God is unfathomable [in His wisdom], all-aware.

22:63

The cleansing quality of 'pure water' is also clearly emphasized in the

Qur'an, but some verses also indicate moral and spiritual effects of water beyond the physical cleansing.

إِذْ يُغَشِّيكُمُ النُّعَاسَ أَمَنَةً مِنْهُ وَيُنْزِلُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً لِيُطَهِّرَكُم بِهِ وَيُذْهِبَ عَنْكُمْ رِجْزَ الشَّيْطَانِ وَلِيَرْبِطَ عَلَى قُلُوبِكُمْ وَيُثَبِّتَ بِهِ الْأَقْدَامَ

[Remember how it was] when He caused inner calm to enfold you, as an assurance from Him, and sent down upon you water from the skies, so that He might purify you thereby and free you from Satan's unclean whisperings and strengthen your hearts and thus make firm your steps.

8:11

One cannot ignore the juxtaposition of water with moral qualities in paradise, in such verses as:

وَنَزَعْنَا مَا فِي صُدُورِهِمْ مِنْ غَلٍّ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهِمُ الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي هَدَانَا لِهَذَا وَمَا كُنَّا لِنَهْتَدِيَ لَوْلَا أَنْ هَدَانَا اللَّهُ ۖ لَقَدْ جَاءَتْ رُسُلُ رَبِّنَا بِالْحَقِّ ۖ وَنُودُوا أَنْ تِلْكَ الْجَنَّةُ الَّتِي أُورِثْتُمُوهَا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ

after We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their bosoms. Running waters will flow at their feet; and they will say: "All praise is due to God, who has guided us unto this; for we would certainly not have found the right path unless God had guided us! Indeed, our Sustainer's apostles have told us the truth!" And [a voice] will call out unto them: "This is the paradise which you have inherited by virtue of your past deeds!"

7:43

Clearly they delight in contemplating such beauties. They praise God for them and are freed from anger and idle talk.

In none of the numerous passages on al-janna throughout the Qur'an do we get a full picture. What we have, even in the longer passages, is like a photographic snapshot of a scene. These snapshots appear to be taken on arrival after the judgement, of which this reward is the outcome. All the scenes are of groups (not individuals or couples) sitting (not lying down or reclining) on couches lined up (56:15 [They will be seated] on gold-encrusted thrones of happiness,) in 'lounges'. The furnishings provided are clearly for gatherings:

And [by then] We shall have removed whatever unworthy thoughts or feelings may have been [lingering] in their breasts, [and they shall rest] as brethren, facing one another [in love] upon thrones of happiness..

15:47

And they [who are thus blest] will turn to one another, asking each other [about their past lives].
52:25

Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, laughing, rejoicing at glad tidings..
80:38–39

Contrary to what might be expected according to the popular picture, on examining the utterances of the inhabitants of janna they are never heard to say, 'How delicious this food or drink is!' or 'How beautiful this damsel is! How luxurious the furniture, garments or ornaments or rivers or trees or fruits!' These are examples of what they actually do say:

[and] in that [state of happiness] they will call out, "Limitless art Thou in Thy glory, O God!"-and will be answered with the greeting, "Peace!" And their call will close with [the words], "All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the worlds!".'
10:10

And the inmates of paradise will call out to the inmates of the fire: "Now we have found that what our Sustainer promised us has come true; have you. too, found that what your Sustainer promised you has come true?" [The others] will answer, "Yes!"-whereupon from their midst a voice will loudly proclaim: "God's rejection is the due of the evildoers"
7:44

and they will say: "All praise is due to God, who has caused all sorrow to leave us: for, verily, our Sustainer is indeed much-forgiving, ever-responsive to gratitude –He who, out of His bounty, has made us alight in this abode of life enduring, wherein no struggle can assail us, and wherein no weariness can touch us!"
35:34-5

And they will exclaim: "All praise is due to God, who has made His promise to us come true, and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!" And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured [in God's way]!
39:74

and so God has graced us with His favour, and has warded off from us all suffering through the scorching winds [of frustration]. Verily, we did invoke Him [alone] ere this: [and now He has shown us] that He alone is truly benign, a true dispenser of grace!"
52:27–8

In fact, the examination of Qur'anic material reveals that the number of

references to spiritual and moral rewards in janna exceed those to material rewards:

For them there is the glad tiding [of happiness] in the life of this world and in the life to come; [and since] nothing could ever alter [the outcome of] God's promises, this, this is the triumph supreme!
10:64

ARABIC Oh, verily, they who are close to God - no fear need they have, and neither shall they grieve:

10:62;

O you who have attained to faith! Turn unto God in sincere repentance: it may well be that your Sustainer will efface from you your bad deeds, and will admit you into gardens through which running waters flow, on a Day on which God will not shame the Prophet and those who share his faith: their light will spread rapidly before them, and on their right; [and] they will pray: "O our Sustainer! Cause this our light to shine for us forever, and forgive us our sins: for, verily, Thou hast the power to will anything!"66:8

No empty talk will they hear there, nor any call to sin,.
56:25;

No empty talk will they hear in that [paradise], nor any lie. 78:35

And [so,] convey to the believers the glad tiding that a great bounty from God awaits them;.
33:47

[Hence,] behold, As-Safa and Al-Marwah are among the symbols set up by God; and thus, no wrong does he who, having come to the Temple on pilgrimage or on a pious visit, strides to and fro between these two: for, if one does more good than he is bound to do-behold, God is responsive to gratitude, all-knowing..

2:158;

[And they will be told:] "Verily, all this is your reward since Your endeavour [in life] has met [God's] goodly acceptance!"76:22

It is they who follow the guidance [which comes from their Sustainer; and it is they, they who' shall attain to a happy state!.

2:5

As for anyone - be it man or woman - who does righteous deeds, and is a believer withal - him shall We most certainly cause to live a good life. and most certainly shall We grant unto such as these their reward in accordance with the best that they ever did..

16:97;

For those who persevere in doing good there is the ultimate good in store, and more [than that]. No darkness and no ignominy will overshadow their faces [on Resurrection Day]: it is they who are destined for paradise, therein to abide.10:26

Who is it that will offer up unto God a goodly loan, which He will amply repay, with manifold increase? For, God takes away, and He gives abundantly; and it is unto Him that you shall be brought back.

2:245

If you avoid the great sins, which you have been enjoined to shun, We shall efface your [minor] bad deeds, and shall cause you to enter an abode of glory..

4:31;

[and] He will most certainly cause them to enter upon a state (of being) that shall please them well: for, verily, God is all-knowing, most forbearing.22:59

On their way to paradise their light will be seen 'shining forth before them and on their right hands' (57:12 on the Day when thou shalt see all believing men and believing women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and on their right, [and with this welcome awaiting them:] "A glad tiding for you today: gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide! This, this is the triumph supreme!").

On their arrival the angels will greet them (39:73 But those who were conscious of their Sustainer will be urged on in throngs towards paradise till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide-open; and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!");

when they are settled the angels will go and visit them

(13:22 and who are patient in adversity out of a longing for their Sustainer's countenance, and are constant in prayer, and spend on others, secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance, and [who] repel evil with good. It is these that shall find their fulfilment in the hereafter:).

They will be in good company:

For, all who pay heed unto God and the Apostle shall be among those upon whom God has bestowed His blessings: the prophets, and those who never deviated from the truth, and those who [with their lives] bore witness to the truth, and the righteous ones: and how goodly a company are these!' (4:69).

Within individual examples; the order of importance is made clear. Thus

the inhabitants of janna are 'brought nearer to God' first and 'in Gardens of bliss' (56:10–11 But the foremost shall be [they who in life were] the foremost [in faith and good works]: they who were [always] drawn close unto God!) afterwards. enter, then, together with My [other true] servants –yea, enter thou My paradise!" (89:29–30). The spouses are 'kept pure' first, then 'wide-eyed' (37:48 And with them will be mates of modest gaze, most beautiful of eye,); 'good' first, then 'comely' (55:70 In these [gardens] will be [all] things most excellent and beautiful.).

'And Greater Still ...'

Furthermore, spiritual rewards are clearly designated as the most important ones. The blessed will have 'Do people deem it strange that We should have inspired a man from their own midst [with this Our message]: "Warn all mankind, and give unto those who have attained to faith the glad tiding that in their Sustainer's sight they surpass all others in that they are completely sincere-? [Only] they who deny the truth say, "Behold. he is clearly but a spellbinder!" (10:2):

they who were [always] drawn close unto God!.

56:11

Some faces will on that Day be bright with happiness, looking up to their Sustainer;.

75:22–3

in a seat of truth, in the presence of a Sovereign who determines all things..

54:55

Their reward [awaits them] with God: gardens of perpetual bliss, through which running waters flow, therein to abide beyond the count of time; well-pleased is God with them, and well-pleased are they with Him: all this awaits him who of his Sustainer stands in awe!..

98:8

God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God's goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] -for this, this is the triumph supreme!.

9:72

This theme, of God's pleasure, which is greater than anything else, occurs no less than twelve times.

'Allocation Most Fitting'

Ibn Rushd (Averroes) observed that the allocation of physical and spiritual rewards in Islam is most fitting. The physical rewards appeal more to the understanding of the majority and are a greater incitement to them to gain the advantages in the abode of rewards, while the spiritual illustrations would

appeal to the minority. The fact that the popular picture has exaggerated the material enjoyments of the garden goes only to confirm this observation. But in janna people will have whatever they individually or collectively wish, desire, or call for (16:24 and [who], whenever they are asked, "What is it that your Sustainer has bestowed from on high?"-are wont to answer, "Fables of ancient times!"; 36:57 [only] delight will there be for them, and theirs shall be all that they could ask for;; 42:22 [In that life to come,] thou wilt see the evildoers full of fear at [the thought of] what they have earned: for [now] it is bound to fall back upon them. And in the flowering meadows of the gardens [of paradise thou wilt see] those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds: all that they might desire shall they have with their Sustainer: [and] this, this is the great bounty –; 50:35 In that [paradise] they shall have whatever they may desire - but there is yet more with Us.; 52:22 And We shall bestow on them fruit and meat in abundance - whatever they may desire:)

Style

The style in which janna is presented in the Qur'an is thus appropriate to addressing people of varying tastes, at different times and places. Everything in janna is understandably very special. Nouns are normally qualified: 'a janna as broad as the heavens and earth'; there is water which is not staled by time; milk, the taste of which does not alter, drink that will not give rise to headiness or lead to sin; flesh of fowl which the blessed desire; fruits of their own choice, unending and undenied; spouses kept pure, of similar age with mutual love. Life there is ra{iya, pleasing, contented; the faces of the inhabitants are jocund, laughing and rejoicing at glad tidings. They will enter through an entrance that will please them; there will be plenty of shade (uill ualil) and flowing springs; they will live in goodly dwellings. The intensive forms of the adjectives are frequently employed, for example al-fawz al-'auim (the supreme triumph) and al-fa{l al-kabir (the great bounty). The order of merit is maintained: God's pleasure is the greatest bliss of all (9:72 God has promised the believers, both men and women, gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide, and goodly dwellings in gardens of perpetual bliss: but God's goodly acceptance is the greatest [bliss of all] -for this, this is the triumph supreme!). The frequent use of ma (whatever), which has a universal application (min alfau al-'umim) provides for individuals ma yasha'in – whatever they wish, ma yadd'in – whatever they call for, ma yashtahin – whatever they desire.

The frequent use of the plural – jannat and anhar – helps maintain the scale. The attribution of provision to God in the plural of majesty ensures a very special privilege e.g. adkhalnahum (We made them enter), amdadnahum (We provided them) and zawwajnahum (We joined/paired them); when provision is attributed to Him in the singular it is given in the form of

rabbuhum (their Sustainer) (e.g. 2:63 AND LO! We accepted your solemn pledge, raising Mount Sinai high above you, [and saying;] "Hold fast with [all your] strength unto what We have vouchsafed you, and bear in mind all that is therein, so that you might remain conscious of God!"; 3:169 But do not think of those that have been slain in God's cause as dead. Nay, they are alive! With their Sustainer have they their sustenance;; 42:22 In that life to come,) thou wilt see the evil-doers full of fear at [the thought of] what they have earned: for [now] it is bound to fall back upon them. And in the flowering meadows of the gardens [of paradise thou wilt see] those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds: all that they might desire shall they have with their Sustainer: [and] this, this is the great bounty –; 45:30 Now as for those who have attained to faith and done righteous deeds, their Sustainer will admit them to His grace: that will be [their] manifest triumph!; 68:34 For, behold, it is the God-conscious [alone] whom gardens of bliss await with their Sustainer;; 76:21 Upon those [blest] will be garments of green silk and brocade; and they will be adorned with bracelets of silver. And their Sustainer will them to drink of a drink most pure.) or in the form of 'My servants' (21:105 AND, INDEED, after having exhorted [man], We laid it down in all the books of divine wisdom that My righteous servants shall inherit the earth;; 89:29 enter, then, together with My [other true] servants –). On the other hand, the use of the passive form of the verb, which is noticeably frequent, gives finality of action effective in its contexts: the garden which the righteous 'were promised' 'has been prepared' and 'brought near to them'; they were 'made to enter and inherit it'; were 'made happy' in it. In passive structures the active subject is deleted; but the deletion of the object can also be very effective: 'ala'l-ara'iki yanuurin ... (upon couches, gazing ...)' (83:23 [resting on couches, they will look up [to God]:) – the object of 'gazing' is left to the imagination.

We have noticed that the Qur'an presents 'scenes' of gatherings in janna. The scenes as presented in this style in Arabic give the impression of the present. Most of the translators into English provide a future auxiliary, 'will', taking the view that we are now in the present life and in these scenes the Qur'an is talking about the hereafter. They are also governed by the stricter rules of tense in English grammar. This practice, however, weakens the effect inherent in the Arabic style. The Qur'an in fact brings the future into the present, or takes the present to the time when people are in janna. This is facilitated in Arabic by an introduction in the preceding verses (not necessarily immediately preceding) of a phrase like 'on that day' to announce a scene in janna after which we find the present tense and 'today' (which is admissible in Arabic grammar and style), thus:

The inhabitants of janna today are busy in their rejoicing.

36:55 so that they may eat of the fruit thereof, though it was not their hands that made it. Will they not, then, be grateful? see also 23:101 Then, when the trumpet [of resurrection] is blown, no ties of kinship will on that Day prevail among them, and neither will they ask about one another.; 43:68 [And God will say:] "O you servants of Mine! No fear need you have today, and neither shall you grieve –; 57:12 on the Day when thou shalt see all believing men and believing women, with their light spreading rapidly before them and on their right, [and with this welcome awaiting them:] "A glad tidings for you today: gardens through which running waters flow, therein to abide! This, this is the triumph supreme!"

where the verb is in the present tense. In such cases as:

gardens of perpetual bliss, which they shall enter together with the righteous from among their parents, their spouses, and their offspring; and the angels will come unto them from every gate [and will say]: "Peace be upon you, because you have persevered!" How excellent, then, this fulfilment in the hereafter!

13:23–4

translators insert 'saying' between the two sentences; the Arabic text does not, which creates immediacy and dramatic effect.¹⁹ Reading through a number of these 'scenes' in the Arabic will show the reader the extent to which the present tense is used. The past tense in the Arabic text is also used as if events had already taken place: 'We gave them ...', 'We provided them ...'. In the following example the pattern of Arabic tenses is retained to give an idea of the effect, although English scholars and translators seem bewildered by the apparently illogical shift of tense/pronoun:

وَسِيقَ الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا رَبَّهُمْ إِلَى الْجَنَّةِ زُمَرًا ۖ حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءُوهَا وَفُتِحَتْ أَبْوَابُهَا وَقَالَ لَهُمْ خَزَنَتُهَا سَلَامٌ عَلَيْكُمْ طِبْتُمْ فَادْخُلُوهَا خَالِدِينَ
وَقَالُوا الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي صَدَقَنَا وَعْدَهُ وَأَوْرَثَنَا الْأَرْضَ نَتَّبِعُوهُ مِنَ الْجَنَّةِ حَيْثُ نَشَاءُ ۖ فَنِعْمَ أَجْرُ الْعَامِلِينَ
وَتَرَى الْمَلَائِكَةَ حَافِّينَ مِنْ حَوْلِ الْعَرْشِ يُسَبِّحُونَ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ وَفُضِيَ بَيْنَهُم بِالْحَقِّ وَقِيلَ الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ

But those who were conscious of their Sustainer will be urged on in throngs towards paradise till, when they reach it, they shall find its gates wide- open; and its keepers will say unto them, "Peace be upon you! Well have you done: enter, then, this [paradise], herein to abide!" And they will exclaim: "All praise is due to God, who has made His promise to us come true, and has bestowed upon us this expanse [of bliss] as our portion, so that we may dwell in paradise as we please!" And how excellent a reward will it be for those who laboured [in God's way]! And thou wilt see the angels surrounding the throne of [God's] almightiness, extolling their Sustainer's glory and praise. And judgment will have been passed in justice on all [who had lived and died], and the word will be spoken: "All praise is due to God, the Sustainer of all the worlds!"

39:73–5

The picture is full of lively, vibrant actions – happening now or already having happened.

The Real Nature of Reward in Janna

It is inevitable that rewards [in janna] should be made in a kind which is pleasing (and torment be made in a kind painful) and that its nature cannot be apprehended except by giving a standard or gauge for it of what human senses have experienced.

Thus commented the tenth-century Muslim philosopher, al-'Amiri

(d.381/992). We have already seen how material objects in janna are named in the Qur'an to give some idea of what will be there, but even these objects are different from what we know in this world: pure water which time does not corrupt, milk, the taste of which never alters, food and drink which one never gets bored of, which is always enjoyable and always healthy, trees whose shade and fruit are eternal. In the hereafter, people themselves will be created as 'a new creation' in forms 'which you do not know' (56:35 for, behold, We shall have brought them into being in a life renewed, ,61 from changing the nature of your existence and bringing you into being [anew] in a manner [as yet] unknown to you.). [His promise will be fulfilled] on the Day when the earth shall be changed into another earth, as shall be the heavens and when [all men] shall appear before God, the One who holds absolute sway over all that exists. (14:48). It is not surprising that Ibn 'Abbas, the Prophet's cousin and an authoritative commentator on the Qur'an, observed: 'There is nothing in this world which it shares with what is in janna except the names of things.'

The Qur'an clearly states that the descriptions that are given of janna are given as mathal

13:35

مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ ۖ أُكْلُهَا دَائِمٌ وَظِلُّهَا ۚ تِلْكَ عُقْبَى الَّذِينَ اتَّقَوْا ۖ وَعُقْبَى الْكَافِرِينَ النَّارُ

THE PARABLE of the paradise promised to those who are conscious of God [is that of a garden] through which running waters flow: [but, unlike an earthly garden,] its fruits will be everlasting, and [so will be] its shade. Such will be the destiny of those who remain conscious of God-just as the destiny of those who deny the truth will be the fire.; 47:15

مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وَعَدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ ۖ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِنْ مَاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ لَبَنٍ لَمْ يَتَغَيَّرْ طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ خَمْرٍ لَذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِنْ عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى ۖ وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِنْ كُلِّ الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنْ رَبِّهِمْ ۖ كَمَنْ هُوَ خَالِدٌ فِي النَّارِ وَسُقُوا مَاءً حَمِيمًا فَقَطَّعَ أَمْعَاءَهُمْ

[And can] the parable of the paradise which the God-conscious are promised [a paradise] wherein there are rivers of water which time does not corrupt, and rivers of milk the taste whereof never alters, and rivers of wine delightful to those who drink it, and rivers of honey of all impurity cleansed, and the enjoyment of all the fruits [of their good deeds] and of forgiveness from their Sustainer -: can this [parable of paradise] be likened unto [the parable of the recompense of] such as are to abide in the fire and be given waters of burning despair to drink, so that it will tear their bowels asunder?) which the translators have rendered as

'parable, 'similitude' or 'likeness' – in other words, specific representations of things that belong to this world but are used to refer to the next. Numerous

mathals are employed in the Qur'an:

لَوْ أَنزَلْنَاهُ هَذَا الْقُرْآنَ عَلَى جَبَلٍ لَّرَأَيْتَهُ خَاشِعًا مُّتَصَدِّعًا مِّنْ خَشْيَةِ اللَّهِ ۚ وَتِلْكَ الْأَمْثَالُ نَضْرِبُهَا لِلنَّاسِ
لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَفَكَّرُونَ

HAD WE bestowed this Qur'an from on high upon a mountain, thou wouldst indeed see it humbling itself, breaking asunder for awe of God. And [all] such parables We propound unto men, so that they might [learn to] think. 59:21

Full knowledge of the real nature of the rewards of the righteous, the Qur'an says, 'is kept hidden', it has not been given to any human. The same verbal form is used in Arabic to negate such knowledge - la ta 'lamu - applies to the present and to the future: fa-la ta 'lamu nafsun ma 'ukhfiya lahum min qurrati a 'yinin'. (No soul knows what joy is laid up for them secretly as a reward for what they were doing.)