

Commentary and Tafsir from Tarawih – (8)

Surat Al-An ‘am

Tonight, many mosques recite Surat al-A ‘raf in Tarawih prayer. As part of this daily series, we present brief reflections and thematic insights from the surahs recited in prayer—bringing their meanings closer to our hearts and highlighting their central messages.

Surat al-A ‘raf is a major Makkah chapter and one of the seven long surahs (al-sab ‘al-ṭīwal) of the Qur’an, consisting of 206 verses according to most scholars. It derives its name from the mention of “al-A ‘raf” (the Heights) in verse 7:46. It has also been referred to as Surat al-Mithaq (The Covenant), due to the primordial covenant verse (“Am I not your Lord? They said: Yes”), and Surat al-Miqat (The Appointment), for its reference to the appointed meeting of Prophet Musa (Moses), peace be upon him.

The surah centres upon the affirmation of pure monotheism (tawhid), the warning against shirk, and the manifestation of divine law in the rise and fall of nations. Coming after Surat al-An‘ am, which establishes theological foundations in a declarative manner, al-A ‘raf presents those same principles in a historical and experiential form through the narratives of earlier prophets—thus combining doctrinal grounding with lived historical illustration.

It recounts the stories of Nuh (Noah), Hud, Salih, Lut (Lot), Shu ‘ayb, and especially Musa (Moses), peace be upon them all. The extended account of Musa is particularly significant, as classical exegetes note that it offers consolation and reinforcement to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), highlighting the enduring struggle between truth and falsehood and the trials faced by the followers of divine guidance.

Among its powerful eschatological scenes is the mention of the people of al-A‘raf. Some exegetes described them as those whose good and bad deeds are equal, reflecting the precision and justice of divine judgment. The surah also places strong emphasis on the concept of fitrah (innate disposition), especially in the verse of the primordial covenant, which many scholars interpreted as evidence that recognition of God is embedded in human nature.

Furthermore, the surah warns against Satan’s enmity toward humanity since the creation of Adam, exposing his methods of deception through desires and doubts. It prohibits corruption on the earth that God has set in order and calls for reform rooted in sincere servitude to God.

Its methodology of da‘wah is comprehensive—combining hope and fear, rational argumentation, historical narrative, and moral parables—making it a deeply formative chapter in shaping theological consciousness and ethical reform.

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