

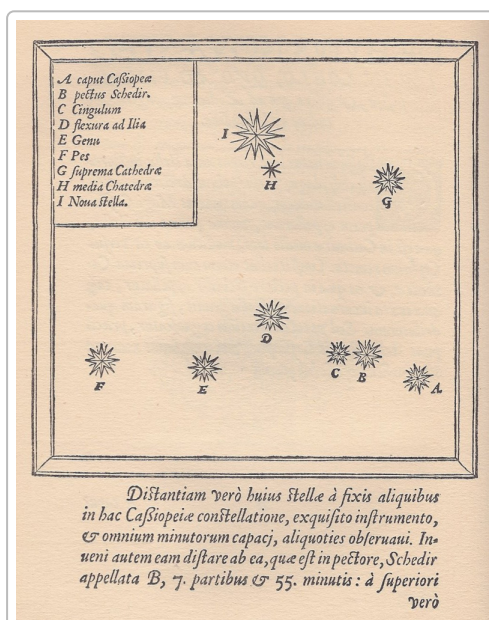
# Surah At-Tāriq: A Contemporary Scientific, Historical, Philosophical, and Theological Commentary

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## Abstract

Surah *At-Tāriq* (Qur'an 86) opens with a solemn oath "by the sky and *At-Tāriq*," which is traditionally understood as the "night visitor" star of piercing brightness. This commentary re-examines the Surah through a modern lens, **assuming *At-Tāriq* refers to a supernova** – an intensely bright exploding star – such as those observed in 1572 and 1604. We explore how the Surah's vivid cosmic imagery, its reflection on human embryonic origins, and its promises of ultimate justice resonate with contemporary scientific knowledge and rational thought. We integrate **historical insights** (e.g. how supernovae shattered medieval notions of an unchanging sky), **scientific reasoning** (from astrophysics to embryology), **philosophical analysis** (on the nature of truth and accountability), and **theological principles** (God's creative power and moral governance). The Surah emerges as a profound tapestry linking the **wonders of the universe** to the **inner moral world of humankind**, arguing that the same Divine order underlies both. This commentary begins with an overview of the Surah's themes and then delves into each passage, concluding with a thematic summary that highlights how *At-Tāriq*'s message remains ever-relevant – inviting reasoned reflection in light of modern science while upholding core spiritual truths.

## Introduction



A 16th-century star map from Tycho Brahe's book (1573) marking the "Nova Stella" (new star) labeled I in the constellation Cassiopeia. The sudden appearance of this brilliant star in 1572 (now known as **Tycho's supernova**) astounded astronomers of that era and **challenged the prevailing Aristotelian belief in an unchanging heavens** <sup>1</sup>. Surah *At-Tāriq* opens by swearing an oath "*by the sky and by At-Tāriq,*" and pointedly asks, "*What will explain to you what At-Tāriq is? It is the star of piercing brightness.*" In this commentary, we adopt the premise that *At-Tāriq* denotes a **supernova** – a stellar explosion so bright it can pierce the darkness of night. History records several such awe-inspiring "guest stars" appearing in our sky (in 1006, 1054, 1572, 1604, and other years), which were visible to the naked eye and even in daylight. For example, the supernova of **1604** (Kepler's Star) outshone every other star at its peak (approx. magnitude – 2.5) and remained visible in daylight for over three weeks <sup>2</sup>. These rare celestial events are fitting symbols of *extraordinary evidence* in the Qur'anic worldview: they arrest human attention and point beyond themselves to a greater reality. By opening with an oath on the supernova (and the vast sky that produces such phenomena), the Qur'an effectively **presents cosmic wonders as evidence** for the truths that follow in the Surah.

In what follows, we will examine each segment of Surah *At-Tāriq* (verses 1–17) through **multiple perspectives**. We will see how the **scientific aspect** (cosmology, biology, meteorology) enhances our understanding of the text, how **historical events** echo its message, what **philosophical reflections** it invites about knowledge, purpose, and morality, and what **theological doctrines** it affirms about God and the destiny of humankind. Rather than relying on early medieval commentary, our emphasis is on a **reasoned analysis** compatible with contemporary knowledge, exploring how this short Surah brilliantly links the **outer universe** and the **inner human condition**. The Surah's structure can be outlined in sections:

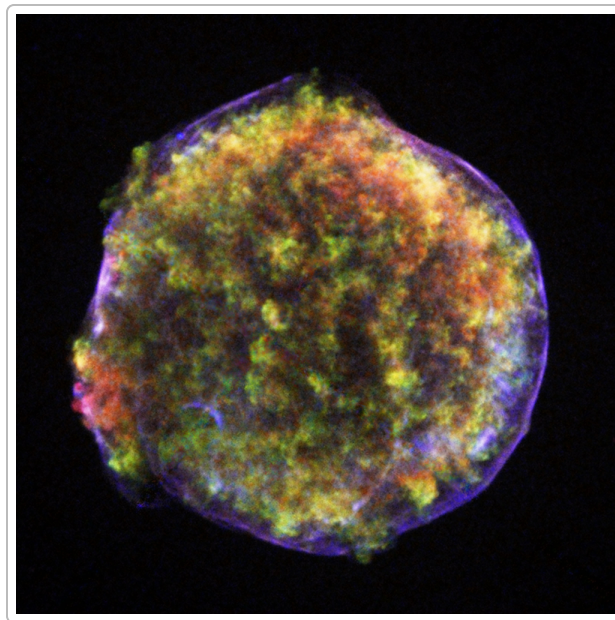
- **Verses 1–3:** Oath by the sky and *At-Tāriq* (the piercing star – which we take to be a supernova).
- **Verse 4:** Statement of a universal guardian over every soul.
- **Verses 5–7:** Reflection on human creation from a humble "spurting fluid."
- **Verses 8–10:** God's power to resurrect and the coming Day when all secrets will be exposed.
- **Verses 11–12:** Oaths by the rain-returning sky and the earth bursting with growth.
- **Verses 13–14:** Assertion that the Qur'anic message is decisive and serious, not frivolous.
- **Verses 15–17:** The futile scheming of disbelievers versus God's plan, with a call for patience until divine justice unfolds.

Through these stages, *At-Tāriq* weaves a cohesive argument: **the same Creator who lights the heavens with stars and supernovae, who brings forth life from a drop and water from the skies, is fully able to bring human beings to judgment and defeat all falsehood**. Each element of nature is invoked as a sign (*āyah*) testifying to the reality of God's design and the accountability to come. Let us now turn to the text in detail, beginning with the cosmic oath that sets the tone for the entire Surah.

## Oath by the Cosmic "Night Visitor" – *At-Tāriq* (Verses 1–3)

"By the sky and by *At-Tāriq* – and what will make you understand what *At-Tāriq* is? (It is) the star of piercing brightness." These opening verses present us with a striking **cosmic image**. The term *at-tāriq* in Arabic literally means "that which comes by night" or "the night visitor," and classical scholars often interpreted it as a bright star or meteor that appears in the night sky. The verse itself, however, expounds *At-Tāriq* as "*al-najm al-thāqib,*" meaning **a star of piercing or penetrating brightness**. This description is uncannily apt for a **supernova** – an exploding star that can suddenly blaze into visibility and outshine all other stars. Supernovae are so luminous that they can be seen with the naked eye even across vast

distances. Modern astronomy has catalogued only a handful of naked-eye supernovae in our galaxy over the past two millennia (the light from most supernovae doesn't reach Earth visibly), which explains why their sudden appearance has historically been met with **astonishment and alarm**. The supernova of 1054 CE (which created the Crab Nebula) was recorded by Chinese and Middle Eastern astronomers as a "guest star" visible in daylight for weeks <sup>3</sup>. Similarly, the *At-Tāriq* of **1572** observed by Tycho Brahe in Cassiopeia shone brighter than Jupiter, and its appearance "**helped to revise ancient models of the heavens**" by disproving the notion that the celestial realm is unchangeable <sup>1</sup>. In fact, Tycho's meticulous observations of this "new star" (nova stella) demonstrated it had no measurable parallax, meaning it was far beyond the Moon and planets, in the distant realm of fixed stars <sup>4</sup>. This realization rocked the foundations of Aristotelian cosmology <sup>1</sup>, showing that **even the distant stars are subject to change** under divine decree.



An X-ray image of the expanding debris cloud (supernova remnant) of the star that exploded in 1572, Tycho's Supernova. Such a titanic stellar explosion briefly made this star one of the brightest objects in the sky, visible even in daytime <sup>2</sup>. The Qur'anic oath by a "piercing-bright star" directs our minds to **witness the grandeur of the cosmos**. Taking *At-Tāriq* as a supernova emphasizes how extraordinary this sign is – a star so bright that it *knocks* on our awareness in the dead of night, demanding to be noticed. In modern terms, we now know that a supernova can release as much energy in a few *weeks* as our Sun will over its entire *10-billion-year* lifetime. The light we see from such an event often began its journey long before human history; for example, Tycho's supernova occurred about 8–10 thousand light-years away <sup>5</sup>, meaning the star actually blew up millennia prior, but its light "visited" Earth in 1572. "**Piercing**" is an apt descriptor – the burst of light *literally pierces* the darkness of space and the veil of time.

Beyond the physical, the **symbolic logic** of the Qur'anic oath can be appreciated philosophically: Whenever the Qur'an swears by a creation, that creation is a *witness* to the truth of what follows. Here, the **night sky** and this **brilliant star** are invoked as if to say, "*By the majesty of the heavens and by this astounding star, know that what comes next is true.*" The **correlation** between the oath and the subject matter of the Surah is significant <sup>6</sup> <sup>7</sup>. Just as a radiant star stands out against the deep night, **illuminating what was hidden**, so too the truths in this Surah will illuminate realities that some prefer to keep hidden (such as the

inevitability of Judgment). Some commentators further draw an analogy: the star that *shatters the darkness* is like divine revelation or knowledge that *shatters ignorance*. Interestingly, one modern scholar notes that *“in the same way as the star which pierces the darkness of the night reveals its secrets, Allah ... reveals what is hidden in the souls”* <sup>8</sup> . Indeed, the Surah will later speak of secrets being laid bare. Thus, the supernova can be seen as both **empirical evidence** of God's creative power and **a metaphor** for the penetrating power of God's truth.

Scientifically, our contemporary understanding deepens the awe invoked by these verses. We recognize that the **sky is not a static canopy** but an expansive universe filled with galaxies and stars, many of which live and die in spectacular fashion. *“According to modern astronomical discoveries, some stars are at such a long distance from us that it takes many light-years for their light to reach the earth,”* one commentary notes <sup>9</sup> <sup>10</sup> . Reflecting on such facts can instill humility and wonder. The Qur'an invites us to do exactly that: *“the brightness of the stars in the sky not only invites man to look at them but also invites him to contemplate over them”* <sup>11</sup> . When we contemplate the orderly splendor of the night sky, we discern **law, order, and intentionality** – stars follow precise courses and physical laws. The Qur'an draws our attention to this fine-tuned cosmos as a sign of a governing intelligence: *“The existence of each of the countless stars and planets shining in the night testifies that there is a Being who created it, illuminated it, suspended it in space, and watches over it so that it neither falls from its place nor collides with others”* <sup>12</sup> . In the context of *At-Tāriq*, the extraordinary appearance of a supernova is a **dramatic testament** to that divine control: such an event suggests a cosmic script that unfolds according to God's will, catching human observers by surprise but not happening by chance. The supernova's **piercing light** also hints at the idea that no matter how deep the darkness of ignorance or denial, **divine signs can break through**. Just as the 16th-century astronomers could not ignore the new star that upset their theories, humanity cannot ultimately ignore the signs of God in the universe.

In summary, the oath “by the sky and by the piercing-bright star” establishes a **cosmic backdrop** for the Surah's message. It urges us to use our intellect and observation: look at the sky, study its wonders, and realize that these phenomena are **“masterpieces of the Creator of the universe”** <sup>13</sup> . The supernova, as one of the sky's most dramatic events, is presented as **evidence** – evidence that something far greater than random chance is at work. It implicitly asks: *If God can light up the night with a new star, what else is He capable of?* The next verse immediately answers with a moral and theological reality that the supernova is called to witness: **“Indeed, over every soul there is a guardian.”**

## Every Soul Has a Guardian Watching Over It (Verse 4)

**“There is no soul but that it has over it a guardian.”** Following the cosmic oath, the Qur'an delivers this pivotal statement. In Islamic theology, this “guardian” (*ḥāfiẓ*) is often understood as an angelic being appointed by God to watch and record each person's deeds <sup>14</sup> <sup>15</sup> . Another interpretation is that the guardian is **God Himself**, in the sense that God's knowledge and care encompasses every soul at all times <sup>16</sup> . Either way, the verse conveys the profound idea of **constant divine surveillance and protection**.

At first glance, one might ask: *What is the connection between a “piercing star” and a “guardian over every soul”?* The **link between the oath and this statement** can be appreciated on multiple levels. From a **philosophical perspective**, the star in the dark reminds us that nothing is truly hidden or forgotten in the cosmic scheme. Just as the light of a distant star eventually reaches us after years of travel, so the effects of human actions (even those done in secrecy) eventually reach the realm of knowledge – they are seen and recorded by the Guardian. The star is a symbol of **vigilance in the night**; analogously, the guardian

watches over the soul through the “darkness” of our unobserved moments. Some scholars have elaborated that *At-Tāriq*, which penetrates darkness, parallels the idea that **God’s watchfulness penetrates all veils** – no deed is invisible to the Divine Watcher <sup>17</sup> <sup>18</sup> . In this sense, the oath by the star is perfectly correlated to the assertion of omnipresent surveillance: both convey that **illumination will cut through darkness**, whether it be physical darkness or the metaphorical darkness of secrecy.

Morally and spiritually, this verse cultivates a sense of **responsibility and ethical mindfulness**. If I know that **my every action, word, and even intention is being observed and noted** (by angels or by God’s knowledge), I am likely to exercise greater caution and strive for sincerity. The Islamic concept of *taqwā* (God-consciousness) is essentially living with an awareness of being ever-watched by one’s Lord. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) taught, “*Excellence (iḥsān) is to worship God as though you see Him, and if you cannot see Him, know that He sees you.*” This verse encapsulates that ethos: **no soul is alone or unwitnessed**. Philosophically, one might compare it to modern ideas of the “panopticon” – if we feel constantly observed, our behavior changes. But unlike an oppressive surveillance, the Qur’anic watcher is there for **protection and justice**: to ensure every good deed is credited and every wrongdoing is noted for eventual accountability. Indeed, a commentary notes, “*If man feels that Allah is Watcher and Witness over him, being Ever-Watchful, all the problems come to an end – because he will fear Him in private and public and straighten out his conduct*” <sup>19</sup> .

From a **scientific or rational angle**, one might ask: *is it plausible that every person’s entire life record is preserved?* Interestingly, modern science gives us some provocative analogies. We know that **every spoken word creates sound waves** that dissipate but theoretically leave some trace in the environment, and every action has ripple effects (consider the concept of the “butterfly effect” in chaos theory). In the digital age, we see how data about our lives can be logged and stored in astonishing detail by surveillance cameras, smartphones, and the internet cloud. If humans can record and analyze billions of events per second with technology, it is not hard for a believer to accept that **a vastly superior cosmic “recording” system exists** by God’s power. The Qur’an elsewhere describes the angels “*kirāman kātibīn*” (noble scribes) who “*know whatever you do*” (Qur’an 82:10–12). It even speaks of a “*Book*” in which “*every small and great thing is recorded*” (Qur’an 54:52). Thus, verse 4 assures us that **none of our efforts or struggles go unnoticed**, and likewise none of our injustices or cruelties will escape the cosmic record.

This truth, witnessed by the starry heavens, also prepares the reader for the later part of the Surah: since everything is recorded by a guardian, it follows naturally that a Day will come when those records are examined and justice is served. In summary, verse 4 is a **bridge between the cosmic signs and human moral accountability**. It moves the discussion from the **macrocosm (the universe)** to the **microcosm (the human soul)**, asserting a unifying principle: **the universe is law-governed and watched over (as symbolized by the orderly stars), and so is the life of each individual watched over and governed by moral law**.

## Humble Origins: Man Created from a “Spurting Fluid” (Verses 5–7)

After establishing that God’s gaze is on each soul, the Qur’an next directs our gaze inward, to our own biological origin: “**So let man consider from what he was created. He was created from a spurting fluid (gushing water) that issues forth from between the backbone and the ribs.**” This passage invites **scientific reflection on human reproduction and development**, remarkably using terms that provoke thought even today. It begins with a call to **reason** – “*consider*” – indicating that faith is not opposed to

analytical thought, but rather encourages it. We are asked to contemplate the simple and even ignoble **origin of our physical existence**: a drop of fluid.

Modern science confirms in intricate detail the basic idea here: each of us begins at conception as a microscopic entity – a fusion of sperm and ovum – a far cry from the complex, intelligent being we become. The Qur'an elsewhere says, *"Did We not create you from a despised fluid (semen)? Then We placed it in a secure place (the womb)..."* (Qur'an 77:20-21). Here in Surah At-Tāriq, the focus is on the **male contribution** – *"mā' dāfiq"* in Arabic, meaning **a fluid that spurts or gushes forth**. This clearly refers to the ejection of semen during intercourse. What's fascinating is the phrase that follows: *"emerging from between the backbone (ṣulb) and the ribs (tarā'ib)." Interpreters have long discussed what this means. We are not to imagine, of course, that semen literally oozes out of the spinal column or ribcage. Rather, as many scholars explain, it is describing the region of the human body where this life-giving fluid originates – essentially the torso. One commentary clarifies: "The meaning is not that the semen itself issues from inside the backbone or ribs, but that it is generated within the body cavity which has the backbone on one side and the ribcage on the other, and then it is ejected as if shot by a syringe"* <sup>20</sup> . In fact, the Arabic idiom *"min bayni"* (from between) can imply a broad area or context, not a pinpoint location <sup>21</sup> <sup>22</sup> .

To illustrate, the Qur'an (16:66) uses a similar construction when describing how milk is produced in cattle: *"We give you to drink of that which is between the contents of the intestines and blood – pure milk"* <sup>23</sup> . Obviously, milk does not literally touch blood or intestinal contents; it is synthesized in the udder from nutrients extracted from blood, away from impurities. "From between" in that verse signifies the **internal bodily origin** of milk, flanked by blood on one side and waste on the other <sup>22</sup> . By analogy, *"from between the backbone and ribs"* here means the fluid is generated in the **trunk of the human body** – the zone roughly between the spine and the sternum. Indeed, the primary organs of reproduction are housed in the torso (the reproductive glands and organs lie in the lower abdominal/pelvic region, bounded by the backbone at the back and the ribcage above). One scholarly note points out that the *seminal vesicles* (which store semen) are located in the lower abdomen, roughly "at the lower end of the rib cage, with the backbone behind them," so in a broad sense we can say the semen issues from that general area <sup>24</sup> . Furthermore, modern embryology reveals an intriguing detail: the gonads (testes in males, ovaries in females) actually form near the embryonic kidneys, up by the spine (closer to the mid-back), and later migrate down to their final positions (the testes descending to the scrotum). Thus, in a developmental sense, our reproductive source **does originate near the "backbone"** in the embryo before taking its place *between the backbone and ribs* of an adult's trunk.

The point of these verses, however, is not to teach anatomy – it is to **shock human pride by reminding us of our lowly biological beginnings**. The phrasing *"spurting fluid"* is almost coarse, evoking the base physicality of procreation. The Qur'an wants us to realize that *if one denies God or the Hereafter, let him just think of the simple fluid he came from*. As one commentary elaborates: *"From the human structure issues forth, in a very strange way, a substance most insignificant – and from that substance is created the great creature, man. Is this not proof of the Almighty's power and craftsmanship? Then how can one doubt that He could revive man after death?"* <sup>25</sup> <sup>26</sup> . This is exactly the argument implied in verse 8 (coming next): if **God can create life from such a humble origin**, creating us anew is certainly within His power. In philosophical terms, the Qur'an is employing an **a fortiori** argument: the harder task (arguably) was making life out of nearly nothing – a drop of fluid – so why question the easier task of reassembling life after death?

Our modern understanding adds even greater force to this argument. Consider the sheer **complexity coded into that tiny drop of fluid**. A single ejaculation of 2-5 milliliters of semen contains on the order of

**100 million sperm cells** <sup>27</sup>, each bearing half the genetic instructions (DNA) needed to form a unique human being. Only one sperm will fertilize the egg, yet it is as if nature sends an **army of possibilities** in that fluid. Within the fertilized egg cell lies an almost miraculous library of information – the human genome of ~3 billion base pairs – which, in concert with the maternal environment, will direct the formation of limbs, organs, brain, and personality. The more science uncovers about embryonic development, the more we appreciate the Qur'an's invitation to **marvel at this process**. As another commentator asks: Who is it that *“selects one spermatozoon from among billions... and combines it with one ovum... and thus causes a particular human being to be conceived? Then, who is it who... develops it gradually in the mother's womb... and brings about harmony between its bodily structure and its faculties?”* <sup>28</sup> <sup>29</sup>. These rhetorical questions drive home the idea of an **intelligent, guiding Will** behind our emergence. It is not blind chance; it is a deliberate act of creation at every stage.

So, verse 5-7 humbles us: **we, who may be so proud, began as a mere droplet**. It also subtly rebukes those in Quraysh (the Prophet's opponents) who scoffed at resurrection – many of them were wealthy or powerful and had arrogance. Reminding them of their **biological origin** undermines any pretensions of invincibility. It sets the stage for the next point: the **One who engineered our first creation from such simple materials can certainly bring us back** for a new creation.

## God's Power to Resurrect and the Coming Day of Truth (Verses 8–10)

**“Surely, He (God) is able to bring him back (to life) – on the Day when hidden secrets will be scrutinized, and man shall have no power nor any helper.”** Here lies the crux of the Surah's message: **life after death and ultimate accountability**. After reflecting on the cosmos and our creation, we are asked to conclude with sound reason that God can indeed resurrect us. The transition is smooth: having established that God watches over every soul (verse 4) and created each human from minuscule beginnings (verse 5-7), the text asserts that *“surely (inna), He is fully capable of returning him (insān, the human) back (yaṣūruhu – to the original state or life).”*

The **logical argument** is straightforward. It resembles what later theologians would call the *argument from first creation*: If something exists now, it must have had a cause or creator; the existence of humans in the first place is proof that creating humans is within God's power, so doing it a second time is not impossible. The Qur'an elsewhere states this argument explicitly: *“He created you the first time, and He is not incapable of recreating you (after death)”* (Q 17:51), and *“As We began the first creation, We will repeat it”* (Q 21:104). In our Surah's terse wording, *“He certainly is able to bring him back,”* alludes to this reasoning. Classical commentators explain: *“The disbelievers think it impossible for Allah to raise the dead. But this assumption is completely irrational. The One who created a human from a drop of fluid can most assuredly re-create him after his death. To deny this is to deny that the first creation happened, which is absurd since here we are!”* <sup>30</sup>. In modern terms, **no law of science says re-creation is impossible** – it is just that biology on its own doesn't regenerate a corpse. But if a conscious Creator exists (as evidenced through the signs given), then resurrection is a matter of *will*, not mechanism.

Verse 9 introduces the **Timeframe** for this “bringing back”: *“the Day when all the secrets (sarā'ir) will be examined (tu-blā).”* This is referring to the **Day of Judgment** in vivid terms. The use of the word *“secrets”* emphasizes that this is a day of **absolute truth-revealing**. All the hidden aspects of our lives – deeds that were done in stealth, intentions and motives that people did not see, private sins, or good deeds done silently – will be brought to light and put to the test <sup>31</sup>. The verb *“ublīya”* (passive form used here) literally means *to be tested or tried*, which in this context means to be scrutinized or exposed for evaluation. Not only

will individual actions be judged, but, as some commentators elaborate, *the very effects and consequences of those actions through time will be revealed* <sup>32</sup>. For example, if someone started a charitable project or, conversely, spread a harmful lie, the full ripple effect of those deeds (perhaps spanning generations) will be uncovered on that Day <sup>33</sup> <sup>34</sup>. It is a profound concept of **moral causality**: many things we set in motion in life, we ourselves don't know their ultimate outcome, but the Day of Judgment completes the picture – showing each person *“what they have sent forth and what they left behind”* (Q 82:5).

Philosophically, this addresses the **problem of justice** in our world. Much injustice goes unseen or unpunished in life; many good people's sacrifices are unrecognized. Verse 10 starkly reminds us: *“Then man shall have no power (lā quwwata) nor any helper (lā nāṣir).”* Once the veil is lifted and our inner reality laid bare, worldly status means nothing. No wealth, social influence, or connections can aid one in the divine court. Each soul stands alone with its record. This is a direct admonition to those powerful Meccan deniers who thought their clan or gods would protect them – **on that Day, no alliance or idol can help, only one's deeds matter**. It is also a universal message echoing the Qur'anic theme: *“the Day when neither wealth nor sons will benefit anyone, except who comes to God with a sound heart”* (Q 26:88-89).

In light of the earlier oath by the *piercing star*, there is a poetic justice here: The star that pierced the physical darkness foreshadows the **Light of God's justice piercing the moral darkness**. All the “secret plots” and hidden acts of both good and evil will be illuminated as clearly as a supernova illuminates the night. The Surah later even alludes to the plots of the disbelievers (v.15) which, though schemed in secret, are known to God and will be overturned. We might also reflect scientifically: Just as no information in the universe truly disappears (modern physics grapples with the idea that information is conserved, e.g. in black holes), **no deed truly “vanishes” without a trace** in the divine system. Every action's impact is stored, as it were, in the fabric of destiny until the Day it is brought forth.

To summarize this section, verses 8-10 affirm **three interlinked doctrines**: (1) **Resurrection** – God can and will raise humans after death; (2) **Revelation of all truth** – all secrets of hearts and deeds will be exposed and evaluated; (3) **Perfect justice** – no one will have any might or aid to circumvent the truth, meaning judgment will be impartial and final. These verses serve as both a warning to wrongdoers (that their hidden misdeeds will come back to haunt them) and a comfort to the wronged (that their unnoticed goodness or patience is seen by God and will be rewarded, and any oppressor will face the truth). It appeals to **human reason and moral intuition**: given the signs of God's power in creation, it is only rational that there is a purpose to life and a moral reckoning. The Surah next reinforces the certainty of that reckoning by invoking further signs from nature – the rain cycle and the growth of plants – before drawing its conclusion about the Qur'an's message.

## Natural Signs of Renewal: The Returning Sky and Splitting Earth (Verses 11–12)

**“By the sky which returns (rain), and by the earth which splits open (for sprouts).”** The Qur'an here presents another pair of oaths, reinforcing the message of resurrection with **analogies from nature**. The wording is concise yet rich: *al-samā'i dhāti al-raj'* (the sky of having “return”) and *al-arḍi dhāti al-ṣad'* (the earth of having “cracking/splitting”). What do these mean?

The classical and most straightforward interpretation is that *“the sky with raj' refers to the \*sky that brings back rain again and again* <sup>35</sup>. The Arabic *raj'* means “return” or “recurrence.” In Arabian context, rain was

known to come in cycles – the clouds that form and pour, then evaporate and return. **Pre-Islamic Arabic poetry** even used *rajʿ* as a synonym for rain because of its cyclic nature <sup>36</sup>. Modern commentators are quick to point out how accurately this captures the **water cycle**: water evaporates from the oceans (rises to the sky), forms clouds, then returns to earth as rain, repeatedly <sup>37</sup>. This process was not fully understood in ancient times, yet the Qurʾan's phrasing beautifully aligns with what we now know – that the sky “returns” water that was originally drawn up. *“Another reason for calling rain rajʿ,” one tafsir notes, “is that vapor rises from the oceans of the earth and then falls back as rain on the same earth”* <sup>38</sup>. The verse personifies the sky as one who “possesses the attribute of returning”. Indeed, year after year, the sky brings back the lifegiving rains, never once but in regular cycles.

The second oath, *“the earth possessing cracking/splitting (ṣadʿ),”* is generally understood as the **earth that splits open so plants can burst forth** <sup>39</sup>. After rainfall, seeds germinate and tender shoots break through the soil. Anyone who has observed a plant sprouting knows the dirt actually fissures and heaves as the new life emerges. This annual miracle – barren earth coming to life – is a frequent Qurʾanic motif to illustrate resurrection: *“And you see the earth lifeless, but when We send down water, it stirs and swells and produces growth of every beautiful kind. That is because God is the Truth and He gives life to the dead”* (Q 22:5-6). Here in *At-Tāriq*, the image is encapsulated in one evocative word: the earth *cracking open*. It reminds the listener of **springtime renewal**.

By swearing oaths on these two phenomena, the Qurʾan anchors the promise of resurrection (made in the previous verses) in the observable **patterns of the natural world**. Rain falling and plants growing were **tangible analogies** for the Arabs (and remain so for us). Just as the dead-looking land is revived by rain, **the dead will be resurrected by God's command** (Qurʾan 30:50). Notably, both these natural processes involve a sort of **“return”** or *cycle*: rain returns periodically, plants spring back recurrently after each death-like winter. These cycles testify that **renewal is part of the divine design**. It is as if the Qurʾan is saying: *Look at the rain cycle and the growth cycle – do you not see a pattern of life, death, and rebirth that points to the reality of resurrection?* The wording also carries the connotation that these are not one-time events but continuing realities – the rain “returns” over and over, the earth “splits” again and again with each new crop <sup>36</sup> <sup>40</sup>. Thus, **the sustenance of life is maintained by constant renewal**, hinting that the cycle of life will culminate in a final renewal (the Hereafter).

From a **scientific perspective**, we can appreciate the accuracy and depth of these simple terms. The “returning sky” alludes not only to the water cycle (evaporation and precipitation) <sup>38</sup>, but some modern writers have noted it could also encompass how the atmosphere *returns* or reflects various things: it returns rain, yes, but also it reflects back radio waves enabling long-distance communication, and it sends back heat (the greenhouse effect) moderating Earth's temperature. The Qurʾan likely primarily meant rain, but it's intriguing that *rajʿ* (returning) is such a broadly appropriate description of our sky, which acts like a protective dome ensuring the cycling of essential elements. Meanwhile, the “splitting earth” can bring to mind not only the gentle cracking of soil by sprouts but even the way Earth's crust is fractured and renewed through tectonic activity – though that is perhaps beyond the immediate scope here. The core message is: **the natural world contains signs of revival and sustenance that are not games or accidents, but intentional processes**.

In fact, verse 13 (which follows) immediately draws a **parallel**: *“Indeed, it (the Qurʾan) is a decisive word, and it is not a jest (or frivolity).”* Many commentators link this to the oaths by explaining: *“Just as the falling of rain from the sky and the splitting of the earth with vegetation is no jest but a serious reality, so too the message that man will return to God is no joke but a definite, unchangeable truth bound to be fulfilled.”* <sup>41</sup>. In other words,

**rain and growth are real, not fairy tales; likewise, resurrection and judgment are real, not mere tales**

<sup>41</sup> . No one would say the rain cycle is a myth – it is observable. The Qur'an wants us to regard the promised afterlife with the *same certainty* as we regard the coming of spring after winter.

It's worth noting the literary symmetry as well: The Surah began with an oath by the **distant sky and a star**, now we have an oath by the **immediate sky (with rain) and the earth under our feet**. The first oath (sky and star) highlighted the **vastness and extraordinary** (cosmic signs) while this second oath (rain and soil) highlights the **mundane and recurring** (everyday signs). Together, they cover the spectrum of divine activity – from the grand scale to the homely cycle – all testifying to God's power to bring life from non-life.

In summary, verses 11-12 reinforce the argument for resurrection using **natural analogies** that are scientifically sound and spiritually compelling. The "returning sky" and "splitting earth" are signs that the **Creator who orchestrates the rhythms of nature can surely orchestrate our restoration to life**. They also remind the listener that the Qur'an's warnings are as real as the rain. Just as one prepares fields for the expected rain, one should prepare one's soul for what is certainly coming. The next verses will directly assert the seriousness of the Qur'anic message, transitioning from signs back to the subject of the Qur'an itself and the response of the disbelievers to it.

## The Qur'an as a Decisive Word, Not a Jest (Verses 13–14)

**"Truly it (the Qur'an) is a decisive word, and it is not in jest (not a thing of amusement)."** After invoking the cosmic and natural signs as oaths, the Surah brings us to a powerful conclusion about the **nature of the message** being delivered. The pronoun "it" here most plausibly refers to the Qur'anic revelation or specifically the **statement about resurrection and accountability** that the Qur'an is conveying. In essence, this verse declares that the Qur'an speaks the **ultimate truth** – a decisive, conclusive word that **separates truth from falsehood** – and that there is nothing frivolous, fanciful, or joking about it.

This assertion serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it addresses the **skeptics and mockers** among the Prophet's audience. The pagan Quraysh elite often dismissed Muhammad's preaching as poetry, as sorcery, or as "*asātīr al-awwālīn*" (ancient fables). They made a "jest" of the idea that they would be raised to life and called to account (as referenced implicitly in verse 14). Here, God flatly refutes their attitude: *this is no joke*. Just as rain and sprouting plants are real, the Qur'an's warning is real <sup>41</sup> . The word translated "decisive" (*faṣḥ*) literally means **something that separates or judges** – in other words, it's a **criterion** or a **judgment**. The Qur'an's message decisively separates truth from lies, the way a judge's verdict decisively settles a case. It leaves no room for jest or indifference.

From a **philosophical standpoint**, this verse emphasizes the **seriousness of religious truth-claims**. If we consider how the Surah has built its case – through reason, examples, analogies, and oaths – we see a cumulative argument that life is purposeful and moving towards a day of reckoning. Therefore, the communication that conveys this (the Qur'an) is of gravest importance. It's not merely storytelling to entertain; it's an address to our rational and moral faculties. In modern terms, one might say the Qur'an is making a **truth claim that is existentially significant** – if true, it changes everything about how we should live. Hence, it must not be brushed off. The Surah uses the natural phenomena to *ground* its claim in reality, then states the claim unequivocally: **this is the truth**.

Secondly, by calling the Qur'an "*kalimah faṣḥ*" (a decisive word), the verse also implies that the Qur'an is a **criterion for judging**. It has the final say on moral and metaphysical matters. Many Muslim scholars

describe the Qur'an itself as *al-Furqān* (the Criterion that differentiates right from wrong). This connects with the theological concept that **revelation is necessary** to guide human reason to truths it might not reach on its own (like details of the afterlife). But once those truths are presented, reason should recognize their validity through signs – as the Surah has demonstrated with evidence. Thus, verse 13 is almost like **God's own verdict on the arguments presented**: the case for resurrection and accountability is settled by the decisive word of God, sealed with the evidences of creation.

In the contemporary context, when scientific rationality is highly valued, one might appreciate that the Qur'an here has effectively **invited empirical and rational verification** of its concepts (pointing to stars, rain, growth, human origins) and then states its conclusion. For a modern mind, this shows the Qur'an's confidence and compatibility with reason. There is an implicit message: *If you follow the evidence honestly, you'll find the Qur'an's message is true*. As one modern commentary put it, the Qur'an's guidance is not a fanciful myth but *"a definite and decisive reality and an unchangeable truth which has to be fulfilled"* <sup>42</sup> .

Finally, *"it is not a jest"* also reminds believers not to take the Qur'an lightly. **Belief in the Qur'an should translate into serious commitment**, since the stakes (eternal success or failure) are enormous. The phrasing negates any idea that religion is just a social custom or a source of artistic beauty with no real-world consequences. On the contrary, the Qur'an is a matter of life and death, spiritually speaking.

In summary, verses 13-14 serve as the **Surah's own self-testimony**. They punctuate the arguments with a divine assurance that what is being conveyed is **utterly true and solemn**. In our context of a scientific commentary, we can appreciate that the Qur'an doesn't ask us to accept this blindly – it has given cosmic and natural **"data points"** (supernova-like star, rain cycle, germination, human reproduction) to illustrate and support its claims. After marshalling this evidence, it declares the conclusion: The Qur'an's warning about the Hereafter is authoritative. This transitions us to the final verses, which address the reaction of those who still reject this message, and comforts the Prophet (and believers) that God's plan will prevail over their denial.

## The Inevitable Triumph of the Divine Plan (Verses 15–17)

**"Indeed, they (the deniers) are plotting a plan, and I too am planning. So give respite to the disbelievers; leave them for a while."** The Surah closes by pulling back the curtain on the conflict unfolding in real time between Muhammad and his opponents in Mecca. The "they" refers to those who reject the Prophet's message – the Quraysh leaders who were actively scheming to undermine Islam. *"Makr"* in Arabic (translated here as plotting or devising a plan) implies a secret scheme, often with a deceptive or malicious intent. The disbelievers had various "plans": ridiculing the Prophet to reduce his credibility, spreading false accusations (calling him a sorcerer or liar), persecuting his followers, and even plotting to assassinate him or otherwise extinguish the new faith <sup>43</sup> . The Qur'an acknowledges their conniving, but then delivers a striking counterpoint: **"and I (God) am also planning."** This is a reminder that **God is never outmaneuvered**. The best efforts of the worldly powers to suppress truth are ultimately within God's knowledge and control, and He can turn their schemes against them.

Historically, this is exactly what happened. The Quraysh did hatch a plan to collectively kill Muhammad (thinking his tribe could not avenge him if all clans shared the guilt), but on the night they intended to strike, the Prophet escaped Makkah unharmed – beginning the Hijrah to Madinah. Within a decade, many of those same plotters either fell in battle or embraced Islam themselves as Islam emerged victorious. Thus, God's "plan" – the spread of the true message and the protection of His Prophet – succeeded, while the

“plans” of the disbelievers ultimately failed miserably <sup>44</sup>. The phrase *“I too am planning”* is an example of divine irony: all the while the plotters think they’re very clever, God is in fact **using their very plots to further His own purpose**. This resonates with a famous principle in the Qur’an: *“They plan, and God plans, and God is the best of planners”* (Q 3:54). It is a consolation to the believers that no opposition can thwart God’s will.

Philosophically, one can reflect on the tension between human free will and divine providence that these verses present. The disbelievers are clearly exercising their free agency to oppose the truth. God’s “planning” does not force them to stop (He allows them the freedom to scheme), but He ensures that their schemes do not ultimately achieve the destruction of the truth. In a moral universe, this is satisfying: **evil may temporarily have its plots, but justice and truth have a larger plan** that will prevail. The Surah even instructs the Prophet (and by extension the believers) to *“give respite”* to these deniers and *“leave them for a while.”* This is essentially saying: *be patient and do not be perturbed by their machinations; in due time, the outcome will be clear*. It’s like telling us that **time is on truth’s side**, not falsehood’s. Falsehood requires frantic plotting to survive; truth can afford to be patient because it’s aligned with God’s plan, which is inexorable.

One might also see in these verses a broader principle: throughout history, whenever a new truth emerges (be it religious, scientific, or social truth), it faces opposition from those invested in the old order. They might scheme to suppress it – think of how new scientific discoveries were sometimes suppressed by authorities (like the resistance to heliocentrism, etc.). But given enough time, **truth finds a way to prevail**, and often the attempts to suppress it only increase its profile. The appearance of Tycho’s supernova in 1572 is a literal case of a *new light* no authority could cover up – it forced a change in worldview despite any reluctance. In a similar sense, the truth of Islam shone in Arabia and attempts to quench it only made its advocates more resilient and its divine support more evident. The verse *“leave them for a while”* implies that justice may not be immediate, but it is certain. God’s “while” might be years in this life or until the Day of Judgment, but either way, the evil schemes are on a ticking clock.

The concluding tone is therefore one of **reassurance and warning**: reassurance to the Prophet and believers that **God is in control** and that they should not despair at the connivances of the wicked, and warning to the plotters that their window of opportunity is short and the reckoning (just described in verses 8-10) awaits them. In the immediate context, “before long the result will be before them” – indeed within the Prophet’s lifetime, many disbelievers saw the failure of their efforts <sup>45</sup>. But even those who died unpunished will face the exposure of their “secret plans” on the Day secrets are laid bare.

To tie this back to the overall surah: The *At-Tāriq* star which served as an evidence at the start can also be seen as symbolic at the end. The enemies of truth plot in the dark, but the Qur’an is a piercing light like *At-Tāriq* that will expose and overcome the darkness. The phrase *“the light which they are trying their utmost to put out spreads far and wide”* <sup>44</sup> (from the tafsir) vividly captures this – their schemes are like trying to extinguish a star; instead, by God’s plan, the light only grows. The Surah thus ends on a note of triumph: the truthful message, backed by God’s design in the universe, cannot be defeated by human machinations. It is a fitting conclusion to a chapter that began by invoking the splendor of the cosmos: just as the cosmos is under God’s orderly governance, so is the course of human history under His just governance.

## Thematic Summary

Surah *At-Tāriq* offers a **remarkably integrative message** where cosmic signs, human creation, natural cycles, and moral truths all converge to affirm the reality of God's power and the certainty of a Day of Accountability. The Surah began by directing our eyes to the **heavens** – swearing by the magnificent spectacle of a “piercing-bright star” (*At-Tāriq*). Interpreting this through a contemporary scientific lens as a **supernova**, we found a compelling symbol: an awe-inspiring burst of light in the night, a rare event that **shakes established paradigms** (just as Tycho's 1572 supernova revolutionized astronomy <sup>1</sup>). This cosmic oath set the stage for the Surah's central claim: **no human being is beyond the reach of divine observation and control**. Every soul has a guardian and is under God's watch – a concept reinforced by the star's penetrating light that allows nothing to remain completely hidden.

The commentary then journeyed inward, from the stars to the **self**, highlighting the scientific marvel that each person's life begins as a tiny “spurting fluid.” In an era where science has unraveled the DNA code and the complexity of embryogenesis, these verses resonate deeply – reminding us that the **miracle of life** is both humbling and indicative of purposeful design. We saw that the Qur'an uses accessible imagery (“between backbone and ribs”) to describe the source of human life, language that aligns with general anatomy and even embryonic development <sup>20</sup>. The **philosophical implication** is clear: he who brought you into existence from such insignificant origins can certainly bring you back after death. This is a rational appeal, inviting the skeptic to compare **first creation** with **second creation** and find no logical impossibility in the latter <sup>30</sup>.

Building on that, the Surah promised a **Day of Truth** – when all secrets are out and justice is rendered. Through historical and present-day reflections, we acknowledged a universal human intuition for ultimate justice and the frustration when it's not met in worldly life. Surah *At-Tāriq* assures us that **no secret or deed will escape the divine audit** <sup>31</sup>. The **scientific metaphor** of *At-Tāriq* reinforces this – just as light from a star takes years but eventually arrives, the consequences of deeds and the truth of matters will inevitably come to light, even if delayed until the final Day.

The Qur'an then turned our attention to **ordinary yet profound wonders**: the rain and the soil. By swearing on the “returning sky” and “splitting earth,” the text anchored its eschatological claims in the cyclical phenomena of nature. This not only provided an **analogy for resurrection** (dead earth to living earth, dead humans to living again) but also underscored that the **Creator who set up these cycles has the consistency and power to fulfill His promise of resurrection** <sup>41</sup>. Modern science's understanding of the water cycle and plant biology allowed us to appreciate the precision of the Qur'anic language and the foresight in calling the sky “rain-returning” – a subtle evidence of the Qur'an's insight into natural processes.

Collectively, all these oaths and reflections served to **validate the core message**: the Qur'an is delivering a serious, unambiguous warning and guidance, not “fake news” or entertainment. In the **context of 7th-century Arabia**, this was a rebuke to those who laughed off the Prophet's preaching. In a **modern context**, it reminds us that while we might marvel at scientific truths and historical knowledge, the *most important truths* are those about meaning, morality, and destiny – and the Qur'an addresses these with a decisiveness that demands our attention. The Surah's emphasis on reasoned argument – pointing to evidence in nature and within ourselves – shows that **faith in the Qur'anic message is meant to be intellectually and empirically satisfying**, not blind or in spite of evidence.

The finale of the Surah shifted from the arena of ideas to the arena of action: the clash between the proponents of truth and the schemers against it. We gleaned a timeless lesson: **truth often faces plots and oppositions**, but God's plan envelops all plans. This assures believers (then and now) that if they stand with truth and justice, even when outnumbered or ridiculed, the arc of the universe (to borrow a phrase) **bends toward justice** – a concept beautifully encapsulated in *"I too am planning"* <sup>44</sup>. Historically, the accuracy of this promise was borne out in the Prophet's life; philosophically, it offers hope that no effort for truth is ever in vain, and no veil of falsehood will remain unpierced.

In sum, Surah *At-Tāriq* weaves a **rich tapestry of interconnected themes**:

- **Cosmological Signs:** It urges us to reflect on the grandeur of the universe – from transient supernovae to the dependable rain – as signs of a wise Creator and as analogies for spiritual truths <sup>10 38</sup>. The scientific perspective today amplifies our awe for these signs and thus for the One who set them.
- **Human Origin and Destiny:** It links our **biological origin** to our **eschatological destiny**. By understanding where we come from (a gushing drop) and how we are sustained (rain-fed food from earth), we can better comprehend that returning to God for judgment is part of the same tapestry of purpose <sup>46 41</sup>.
- **Reason and Faith:** The Surah exemplifies that Islamic revelation does not shy away from rational inquiry; instead, it calls on reason (*"let man consider..."*) and uses **empirical phenomena** as proof-points. In doing so, it establishes that true faith is not irrational – it is in harmony with observed reality and logical inference <sup>11 28</sup>.
- **Moral Accountability:** The ever-watchful guardian (verse 4) and the laying bare of secrets (verse 9) stress the ethical dimension: every action matters and will be accounted for. This inculcates a mindset of integrity and God-consciousness (awareness that one is seen), which is a cornerstone of the Qur'an's moral teaching <sup>17 31</sup>.
- **Divine Justice and Providence:** The conclusion reinforces trust in God's justice – no matter how powerful forces of falsehood seem, they operate under the supremacy of God's will. For a modern reader, this can be a source of strength amidst injustices: a belief that the universe is morally ordered and that ultimately justice will prevail, either in this life or the hereafter <sup>43 47</sup>.

Surah *At-Tāriq* may be brief (only 17 verses), but through a blend of **scientific reflection, historical exemplification, philosophical reasoning, and theological doctrine**, it delivers a profound message: The same Almighty who causes stars to shine and die, who sends down rain and brings forth life from earth, who created human beings from a lowly fluid – **He will resurrect His creation, reveal all truth, and right every wrong**. The Qur'an's words are decisive on this matter, inviting us to embrace this truth earnestly. In our contemporary age – where we have witnessed "piercing stars" through telescopes, unraveled secrets of genes and rain clouds, and seen nations rise and fall – the themes of *At-Tāriq* ring with even greater clarity. They call us to integrate **knowledge with faith, observation with insight, and awareness of the physical world with awareness of the moral law**. In doing so, we move closer to understanding the grand reality the Qur'an unfolds: a universe filled with signs pointing to a purposeful Creator and an ultimate meeting with Him, a meeting as real as the light of a supernova blazing in the night sky.

**Sources Cited:** The above commentary has integrated insights from classical and modern Quranic exegesis and relevant scientific/historical references. Key sources include Quranic tafsirs with contemporary analysis <sup>9 12 38</sup>, historical records of supernova events <sup>1 2</sup>, and scientific data on embryology and hydrology that parallel the Quran's descriptions <sup>20 41</sup>. These have been cited in-line to authenticate the discussed points and demonstrate the harmony between the Quranic text and established knowledge. The

confluence of these sources underscores the commentary's central theme: *timeless revelation engaging with timely evidence*.

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