

Surah *Ar-Rahman* and the Signs of Divine Mercy

Introduction: *Ar-Rahman* – The Universality of Divine Grace

Surah *Ar-Rahman* (“The Most Gracious,” Qur’an 55) is a celebrated chapter of the Qur’an that majestically showcases God’s attribute of all-encompassing mercy. Named after one of Allah’s most beautiful names, *Ar-Rahman* (The Most Gracious or Most Merciful), this Surah poetically enumerates the blessings of God in the natural world and the hereafter, constantly asking the haunting question: **“Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings will you both deny?”** ¹. In Islamic theology, *Ar-Rahman* signifies a mercy so vast that it extends to every aspect of creation – a mercy for *all* creatures. Classical scholars note that *Ar-Rahman* is a name unique to God, indicating mercy that is *unimaginably immense* and universally bestowed ² ³. Thus, Surah *Ar-Rahman* serves as a thematic showcase of divine grace: from the revelation of the Qur’an and the gift of human knowledge, to the balance of the cosmos and the bounties of the earth, every element of the universe is presented as proof and reminder of God’s benevolence.

Surah *Ar-Rahman* was likely revealed in Makkah (Mecca) and is renowned for its powerful *rhythm and refrain*. Many commentators point out that it forms a pendant to the preceding Surah *Al-Qamar* (54). Whereas *Al-Qamar* warned of divine punishment for past nations (each warning punctuated by a refrain about God’s warnings), *Ar-Rahman* extends an invitation by enumerating divine blessings ⁴ ¹. It opens with the declaration “*Ar-Rahman, taught the Qur’an, created man, and taught him speech*” (55:1–4), linking God’s mercy directly to the gifts of revelation and intellect. As one modern scholar explains, these opening verses mean that the Beneficent (al-Rahman) – “*the One who has shown [creation] mercy, protected them from polytheism, ennobled them with faith... is the One who taught the Qur’an to His servants*” ⁵. In other words, God’s mercy is manifest from the very fact that we have guidance and understanding. Throughout the Surah, blessing after blessing and *sign after sign* are listed – **“enumerating various means through which His mercy has manifested upon humanity”** ⁶. The recurring refrain addressing “**you both**” (the human and jinn kinds together) challenges us to acknowledge that none of these gifts could ever be rightfully denied as from any other source but Allah. The message is clear: every aspect of the observable universe, from the stellar heavens to the soul within, testifies to an All-Merciful Creator.

The Refrain: “Which of Your Lord’s Blessings Will You Deny?”

One of the most striking literary features of Surah *Ar-Rahman* is the refrain: “***fa-bi ayyi ala’i Rabbikuma tukadhdhiban***” – **“Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings will you both deny?”** This verse occurs 31 times in the 78 verses of the Surah, a repetition that gives the chapter a unique, hypnotic cadence. Far from being a needless repetition, this refrain is a deliberate rhetorical device that underlines the Surah’s theological argument. Islamic rhetoricians term this technique *al-taridid* (repetition for emphasis), and *Imam* Jalal al-Din al-Suyuti noted that such refrains are considered “*beautiful, polished, effective, moving, forceful and persuasive*” in Arabic eloquence ⁷. Each instance of “*Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?*” comes after describing a new sign or bounty from God, thereby immediately prompting the listener to reflect on that particular blessing ¹ ⁸. This rhythmic question functions like a drumbeat in the surah’s composition – constantly jolting the audience out of heedlessness and into gratitude. As the *Ma’arif al-Qur’an* commentary explains, “*when a particular bounty of Allah is described, [this] verse is used deliberately as a refrain in order to*

awaken the people and urge them to give thanks to Allah for His favours.” The Qur’an’s use of repetition here is “each time related to a new subject” and thus *not* redundant, but emphatic and cumulative ¹ ⁸ . In effect, the listener is barraged with evidence of grace – the sun, the moon, the stars, the rain, fruits, and ultimately paradise – each followed by the demand: how could anyone deny these as gifts of the Most Gracious?

Classical and contemporary exegesis offers insights into the power of this refrain. *Imam* al-Qurtubi relates a tradition that when the Prophet Muḥammad (peace be upon him) once recited *Surah Ar-Rahman* to his companions, they remained silent, so he remarked: “*I recited it to the jinn, and they responded better than you. Each time I came to [‘Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?’], they replied, ‘None of Your favors do we deny, our Lord! All praise belongs to You.’*” ⁹ . This narrative underscores how the proper response to the refrain is an emphatic “**We deny none of Your blessings, O Lord!**” – an acknowledgment that *all* blessings are from God and cannot be rejected. It is noteworthy that the verse uses the dual form “you both” (*kumā*), addressed to both humans and jinn, implying that all intelligent beings are being jointly addressed to bear witness to God’s bounty ¹⁰ . The Prophet gently rebuked his human audience for not responding, highlighting that even the unseen beings recognized the call to gratitude ¹¹ ⁹ .

Modern commentators have additionally observed the psychological effect of this refrain. Ustadh Nouman Ali Khan, for example, notes that the incessant repetition serves to break through the stubborn indifference of the listener. In a late Meccan context, many disbelievers had grown obstinate despite years of prophetic preaching. Thus, “*when someone becomes stubborn, you say the same sentence again and again... So Allah repeats this ayah again and again so that at least once they would hear and ponder.*” ¹² Like a parent calling a heedless child repeatedly, the Qur’an’s refrain is a **spiritual call to attention** – a persistent knocking on the doors of our hearts. Its very frequency is the point: it leaves us no excuse to claim ignorance of God’s pervasive grace. Each occurrence intensifies the challenge to our conscience: can we really deny any of these evident blessings?

Beyond its admonitory role, the refrain also contributes to the Surah’s enchanting soundscape. Many have remarked on the almost lyrical, symphonic quality of *Ar-Rahman*, wherein the refrain acts as a chorus. Sayyid Qutb, in his *Fi Zilal al-Qur’an* (In the Shade of the Qur’an) commentary, was sensitive to the *rhythmic harmony* and coherence of this Surah. He noted that “**this sura has an arrangement all its own**” and highlighted how the recurring verse punctuates the discourse, giving the recitation a powerful resonance (Qutb 1965, as cited in scholarly analyses ¹³ ¹⁴). Indeed, the aesthetic impact of repeating “*fa-bi ayyi ala’i Rabbikuma tukadhdhiban*” elevates the listener’s emotional response – it drives home the feeling of being surrounded, even *overwhelmed*, by divine favors. Thus, stylistically and thematically, the refrain functions as a constant reminder (*dhikr*) within the Surah – a “*spiritual call to awareness of God’s signs*”, inviting gratitude and humility from all who hear it.

Signs of Mercy in Classical and Contemporary Tafsir

Islamic scholarship, classical to modern, unanimously views *Surah Ar-Rahman* as a showcase of God’s benevolence in creation. **Classical tafsirs** often break down the Surah’s flow to show how it moves from one set of blessings to another, with each followed by the rhetorical question. For instance, *Imam Ibn Kathir* and others note that the Surah transitions from worldly signs to eschatological ones: it begins with worldly blessings (teaching of the Qur’an, creation of man, nature’s wonders), then shifts to the *Day of Judgment* and the afterlife (warnings of Hell, then exquisite descriptions of Paradise for the righteous), and throughout these, the refrain is repeated as a refrain of challenge and reminder ¹⁵ ¹⁶ . Thus both the **dunya**

(temporal world) and the **akhira** (hereafter) are counted as arenas of God's grace. Classical commentators like *Al-Razi* often philosophized about the name *Ar-Rahman*, explaining that it denotes the diffusiveness of God's mercy – reaching believer and unbeliever, worldly and spiritual realms alike. *Fakhr al-Din al-Razi* in his *Tafsir al-Kabir* describes "Ar-Rahman" as a symbol of the Almighty's universal creative mercy – "the symbolic name of the Rabb of the Universe", as later scholars paraphrase ¹⁷. In other words, Ar-Rahman is He whose compassion manifests in *every facet* of the cosmos, a notion that the Surah then illustrates in detail.

When commenting on specific verses of *Ar-Rahman*, classical exegetes often marveled at the intertwined order and mercy in creation. For example, verse 5 declares, "The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation (bi-husban)". Sayyid Qutb eloquently remarked that the precision of the celestial bodies – their fixed orbits and regularity – "**helps to promote life on this planet as part of God's Mercy.**" The alternation of day and night governed by the sun and moon, and the ability to measure time by their cycles, are seen as intentional facilitation for human life ¹⁸ ¹⁹. Qutb notes that these cosmic rhythms not only make agriculture and daily work possible, but they also imbue life with order and meaning – surely a favor of the Most Gracious. Many early scholars, such as *Imam Al-Qurtubi* and *Al-Tabari*, also pointed out that "*al-husban*" (calculation) hints at the *finitude* of time – the sun and moon are like a cosmic clock ticking down, reminding us that our opportunities are limited ²⁰. In that sense, even the warning of life's brevity is a mercy, goading us to use our time wisely.

Another key set of verses (7–9) proclaims that God "raised the sky and set the Balance (*al-mizān*)" so that you may not transgress the balance. Almost all classical commentators interpret "*Balance*" here as **justice and harmony**. *Allama Maududi* summarizes the classical view: "*Allah has established the entire system of the Universe on justice. Had there been no harmony and balance among the countless stars and planets...and the innumerable creatures and things found here, life on earth would not have functioned even for a moment.*" ²¹. In other words, the cosmos is inherently tuned to equilibrium – a balance of forces and conditions that makes our world stable and livable. This systemic justice is itself a sign of the Merciful: "*full justice and balance has been established in the means and factors conducive to life; in case there occurs a slight imbalance of any kind, every tract of life would become extinct*" ²¹. The Qur'an's mention of *mizān* (balance) thus impressed scholars like *Razi* and *Maududi* as an indication that ethical balance (justice) and natural balance are intertwined gifts of God – humans too are called to "**not transgress the balance**" in their moral and social conduct ²² ²³. The *Most Gracious* One not only created a finely balanced cosmos, but also revealed a code of life (the Qur'an) to help us maintain balance within and without.

Contemporary scholars and speakers continue in the same spirit, often drawing modern parallels. Sayyid Qutb in the 20th century and Nouman Ali Khan in the 21st have both emphasized the *interactive* nature of Surah *Ar-Rahman*. Sayyid Qutb noted the Surah's "*inner coherence*" and how its structure moves in pairs and contrasts – e.g. two periods of day (morning, evening), two kinds of beings (human, jinn), two gardens of Paradise, two springs, etc. – reinforcing a theme of balance and completeness in God's plan ¹³ ²⁴. Nouman Ali Khan, analyzing the Surah's pattern, observes how it balances scenes of worldly beauty with scenes of the Judgment, and punishment with reward, to instill both hope and caution. He especially focuses on the linguistic and psychological effect of the refrain in a modern context: as people today are easily distracted, the Qur'an's repeated question functions like repeated notifications to refocus our attention on what truly matters – the divine blessings around us. Modern commentaries also highlight that *Ar-Rahman* is one of the rare Surahs that directly addresses **both humans and jinn**, implying a universal invitation. As one scholar notes, by questioning *both species* throughout, "*Allah places full responsibility on the reader (or listener) to decide what kind of relationship they want to have with their Creator based on their response*" ¹⁶. The refrain demands a personal answer: will we live in grateful recognition of the Merciful, or

in denial? In sum, classical and contemporary exegesis together paint *Ar-Rahman* as an awe-inspiring tapestry where every thread – linguistic, thematic, scientific, and spiritual – weaves into the central motif of **rahma** (mercy). Both old and new scholars urge that as we hear “Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?”, our hearts should respond, “None of them, O Lord!”, and our lives should reflect that awareness.

The Observable Universe as Proof of God’s Mercy

The theological argument at the heart of Surah *Ar-Rahman* is that *the entire created order is an ongoing testament to Allah’s grace*. The Quran elsewhere states, “We shall show them Our signs in every region of the earth and in themselves, until it becomes clear to them that this [Qur’an] is the Truth” (41:53). In Islamic thought, **the natural world is full of āyāt* – *signs** or messages from God – precisely so that observing them leads to recognition of the Creator. As one writer puts it, “the Qur’an insists that all nature extols divine glory, as every single thing in the universe contains divine signs (ayat) whereby God communicates with us... every piece of scientific information represents an ayah, a divine message.”²⁵ . Surah *Ar-Rahman* exemplifies this outlook by cataloguing the phenomena of nature as direct blessings (*ala*) from “The Most Gracious.” The underlying implication is profoundly *theocentric*: none of these phenomena exist *by chance or by themselves* – they are deliberate acts of divine giving. The sun shines with measured brilliance, the rain falls and revives dead land, fruits and grains spring forth, the seas yield pearls and sustenance – not due to random nature but by the command of *Ar-Rahman*. Each verse essentially says: *This too is a gift from the Most Merciful – so, O jinn and men, can you honestly deny it?*

Modern scientific discoveries in physics, biology, and cosmology have only magnified this sense of wonder, providing us with new “eyes” to appreciate the mercy imbued in creation. Far from diminishing the spiritual significance of nature, scientific insights can be seen as *unveiling even more intricate layers* of God’s grace. Below, we consider a few areas – spanning the cosmic scale to the microscopic – and how they reinforce the Qur’anic argument that the universe is finely tuned for life as a blessing from the Most Gracious.

The Fine-Tuned Cosmos: Physics and Cosmology as Signs

Image: A sky full of stars – modern astronomy has revealed an immense, orderly cosmos. The Qur’an invites us to reflect on how the sun, moon, and stars all operate on precise laws to benefit life, as signs of Allah’s wisdom and mercy.

Fourteen centuries ago, Surah *Ar-Rahman* pointed to the **sun, moon, and stars** to draw our attention to cosmic order: “The sun and the moon [move] by precise calculation; the stars and trees prostrate” (55:5–6). Today, cosmology has quantified just how *precise* that calculation is. Modern astrophysics shows that the celestial bodies follow elegant laws of motion and gravity. The earth rotates on its axis every 24 hours, producing the regular alternation of day and night that is “crucial for organisms’ circadian rhythms and climate stability”. If our planet spun significantly faster, days and nights would be chaotic; if slower, one side might scorch while the other froze. In either case, life as we know it would be disrupted²⁶ ²⁷ . Likewise, the earth’s yearly orbit around the sun yields seasons and a stable climate band suitable for agriculture – a delicate balance that we often take for granted as “normal,” but which in truth reflects an exceptional set of parameters. As *Maududi* wrote, if there were the slightest disharmony in the cosmic forces, “life on earth would not have functioned even for a moment”²¹ . The Qur’an’s ancient assertion that “He has raised the sky and set the balance” (55:7) thus resonates deeply with what we now understand: the entire universe operates within tight constraints of physical law (*mizan*) that allow life to flourish – a fact that believers interpret as a sign of purposeful design rather than unguided happenstance²¹ ²³ .

Modern cosmology has further revealed that the universe had a beginning – the Big Bang – and that its fundamental constants and initial conditions were astonishingly fine-tuned to permit the formation of galaxies, stars, planets, and eventually life. Physicists speak of “**Goldilocks conditions**” in the universe: for example, if the force of gravity were a few percent stronger or weaker, stars like our sun might never form or burn so erratically that life would be impossible ²⁸ ²⁹ . If the rate of expansion right after the Big Bang had deviated even slightly, the universe might have either collapsed back on itself or expanded too rapidly for any stars and planets to coalesce ²⁸ . Yet, as it is, the cosmos behaves “*not chaotically*” but according to consistent laws everywhere we look – from distant galaxies to our local solar system ³⁰ ²⁸ . Such uniformity (known as the **cosmological principle**) and fine-tuning have led many scientists to remark that the universe seems “strangely tailored” for observers like us. Nobel laureate physicist Steven Weinberg once noted that if certain constants were not just so, “there would be no life and no one to ask why” – a sober echo of the Quranic invitation to contemplate a universe “*not created in vain*” (3:191). Even Albert Einstein’s famous aphorism, “*God does not play dice with the universe,*” conveyed his intuition that underlying physical law is an *ordered*, reliable reality – something believers readily view as a reflection of the Creator’s intentional design ³¹ ³² .

From an Islamic perspective, all these scientific findings deepen our appreciation of *Ar-Rahman’s* signs. The more we learn about astronomy and physics, “*the more we perceive the ‘signs for people of understanding’ that Qur’an 2:164 invites us to see.*” ³³ ³⁴ Our atmosphere’s precise composition (about 21% oxygen) provides breathable air while also serving as a shield – causing deadly meteors to burn up before they strike the ground ³⁵ ³⁴ . Earth’s magnetic field, likewise, deflects harmful solar wind radiation, effectively acting as a “**guarded canopy**” over the world (cf. 21:32) – another layer of protection indispensable for life ³³ . These features are not *incidental*: they appear to be deliberate safeguards built into the fabric of nature, much like the Qur’an describes the sky as a well-protected roof. Believers see in this a direct manifestation of divine mercy – the *Most Gracious* prepared a habitation for His creatures that is *just right*, full of nurturing qualities. As a science writer beautifully put it, the list of such fortuitous phenomena – the regularity of sunrise, the water cycle, Earth’s protective “shields” – “*all speak to a habitable design. Believers interpret this as evidence of a merciful Creator, while scientists marvel at the rare balance of conditions that make Earth our thriving home.*” ³⁴ . In Surah *Ar-Rahman*, after mentioning that God “*has subjected the sun and the moon [to their courses]*” and “*raised the skies and set the balance,*” the refrain pointedly asks: “*Which of your Lord’s favors will you deny?*” Indeed, when standing under a star-filled night sky, aware of the immense scales and exactitudes at work that allow our very existence, the only appropriate response is one of humility and awe. The cosmic order is not a cold, indifferent mechanism – for the person of faith it is a warm assurance that *Ar-Rahman’s* grace pervades even the law of gravity and the orbits of the planets.

The Miracle of Life: Biological Signs of Mercy

If the vast cosmos illustrates mercy at the macro-scale, the living world provides equally powerful signs at the micro-scale. Surah *Ar-Rahman* draws attention to earthly blessings that sustain life: “*He laid out the earth for all living creatures; in it are fruits, and palm trees with sheaths of dates, and grain in the blades, and fragrant herbs. So which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?*” (55:10–13). Here the Qur’an appeals to simple yet profound observations – that our planet’s soil yields a stunning abundance of sustenance, from fruits and grains to spices – all of which delight the senses and nourish the body. Classical commentators like *Ibn Kathir* note that these verses encompass **all forms of provision** by mentioning diverse plant foods, implicitly including the animal sustenance that depends on those plants. In this recognition of sustenance, they see a direct reminder of God’s name *al-Razzaq* (The Provider) – itself an aspect of His *rahma* (mercy). Modern biology has peeled back further layers of how remarkable these provisions are. Consider the

humble seed that grows into a laden date palm, or a tiny grain that can sprout and multiply to feed multitudes; contained in each is an intricate design, a genetic code (DNA) that orchestrates life with unfathomable precision. A single seed can carry within it the information to produce an entire tree and orchard – an efficiency and foresight that reflect wisdom far beyond any human engineering. The Qur'an's phrasing "**afnan**" (branches, diverse shades) in describing the gardens of Paradise (55:48) hints at the luxuriant diversity of plant life, something Qutb and others likened to the rich diversity of blessings in this world ³⁶ . Every leaf and fruit is a product of divine programming in the biology of the plant, a mercy that continuously renews itself as long as conditions remain balanced.

Modern ecology teaches us how **interdependent** and finely balanced life's systems are. Trees and plants, for instance, not only provide food but also generate oxygen and maintain the atmosphere; the Qur'an alludes to the role of plants in "*purifying*" the air by saying "*the stars and the trees prostrate*" (55:6), which some commentators metaphorically interpreted as all creation (sun, stars, trees) submitting to God's law and thus benefitting others (the tree's "prostration" could be seen in how it yields fruit and oxygen selflessly). The water cycle – another theme touched on in *Ar-Rahman* (55:19-20, the meeting of fresh and salt waters) – is now understood as a global process crucial for life: evaporation, cloud formation, and rain distribution ensure that water (the basis of life, cf. 21:30) is continuously cycled to sustain ecosystems. "**Modern science reveals a profound interconnected order in these phenomena,**" notes one commentary, emphasizing that none of it is arbitrary: "*rain revives barren land, the cosmos sustains life; such harmony suggests a purposeful design, encouraging gratitude and faith.*" ³⁷ ³⁸ . The Qur'an invites us to see a rain-laden cloud not just as a meteorological event but as *mercy made visible*. In fact, one of the Arabic words for rain, *ghayth*, also means relief or mercy. Surah *Ar-Rahman* later describes the lush scenes of Paradise with gushing springs and fruits in pairs (55:50-52) – imagery that mirrors the earthly grace of water and vegetation, but in superlative form. The underlying message is that the same *Rahman* who waters a dead earth to bring forth gardens (a recurring Qur'anic motif) will likewise revive human beings and bestow gardens of eternal bliss upon them. The **mercy in biology**, from the regenerative cycles of nature to the nurturing bonds (the Quran repeatedly reminds of the mercy God placed in mother's milk, in familial love, etc.), all point back to the source: "*Blessed be the Name of your Lord, Owner of Majesty and Honor*" (55:78).

Modern discoveries in fields like genetics and medicine also reinforce the notion of mercy. The more we discover about the human body, the more we find *astounding precision and benevolence* built into our biology. Our immune system, for example, tirelessly protects us from countless microbes; our brain, a mere 3-pound organ, enables consciousness and intellect (Allah "*taught man speech (and intelligence)*", 55:3-4, a gift of mercy unique to our species ³⁹ ⁴⁰). Contemporary Muslim scholars often point out that the very ability to *study* science is itself a mercy springing from those opening verses of *Ar-Rahman*: God "*taught the Qur'an, created man, and taught him al-bayan (articulate expression)*". *Al-bayan* can be translated as "*communication and reasoning*". Nouman Ali Khan highlights that Allah mentioned teaching the Qur'an even before creating man – indicating that imparting knowledge and guidance is the highest act of divine love, and then He blessed humans with the faculty to receive and articulate that knowledge ⁴¹ ³⁹ . Many see in this a harmony between revelation and scientific exploration: both are enabled by God's grace. Our capacity for rational inquiry (science) and moral inquiry (scripture) are twin gifts from the *All-Merciful*. Thus, every scientific discovery that uncovers a new intricacy of creation is, in essence, uncovering another *ayah* (sign) of God. As one writer aptly said, "*Knowledge of the natural world is knowledge of the Divine Will manifested through the intelligible systems of ecology, biology, chemistry, and physics*" ⁴² ⁴³ . In sum, whether one peers through a microscope at a living cell or through a telescope at a galaxy, the believing heart sees the same

truth: **Grace abounds.** Surah *Ar-Rahman's* refrain urges us not to deny these graces, and modern science provides us with ever more reasons to affirm them.

Structure, Rhetoric, and Spiritual Impact of *Ar-Rahman's* Message

Beyond its content, the **structure** of Surah *Ar-Rahman* itself carries theological meaning and showcases divine artistry. Many analysts have observed how the Surah is constructed in symmetrical sections: it begins with cosmic and earthly blessings (verses 1–30), then moves to discuss human accountability and the transient nature of life (verses 31–45, including the declaration “*All that is on earth will perish, but the Face of your Lord shall endure*”, 55:26-27). It then describes the terrors of Judgment and Hell for the guilty (verses 46–55), followed by two grand descriptions of Paradise for the righteous – in two levels or degrees (verses 46–61 for the higher gardens, and 62–77 for another set of gardens of lesser, but still splendid, bliss). The refrain “**Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?**” runs like a thread through all these sections, unifying the Surah’s theme that *every outcome – whether punishment or reward – is ultimately a manifestation of God’s justice and mercy*. For those who spurned God’s signs, the very warnings they ignored become proof against them (a difficult mercy, one might say, since the warning was meant to help them desist). For those who cherished God’s signs, the culmination is *mercy perfected* in Paradise. Sayyid Qutb commented on this elegant structure, noting that the Surah’s “*arrangement all its own*” guides the listener from grace to accountability to destiny, all under the overarching spirit of *rahma* (mercy) and *adl* (justice) ¹³. The pairing of two gardens, two springs, two kinds of fruit in the Paradise sections also mirrors the earlier dualities (two easts, two wests, two seas, etc.), creating a sense that creation’s dualities find their ultimate harmony and reward in the hereafter ⁴⁴. Such symmetry in content and form adds to the rhetorical power: it is as if the Surah itself is *balanced* like the scales it preaches, further underscoring the divine signature in its composition.

From a literary perspective, the refrain’s rhetorical power cannot be overstated. Repeating a question 31 times in a relatively short chapter is a bold device. Yet, it is incredibly effective in lodging the question deep into the listener’s soul. The refrain in *Ar-Rahman* works on multiple levels. Firstly, it is a **reminder**: humans by nature are forgetful (*insān* in Arabic is thought to share a root with *nisyān*, forgetfulness ³⁹). The refrain therefore continually brings our focus back to gratitude whenever our attention might drift. Secondly, it serves as a **challenge** or indictment: by addressing those who would “deny” or “believe” God’s favors, it forces anyone reciting or hearing the Qur’an to examine themselves – am I guilty of ingratitude? Each blessing mentioned is like evidence laid out in a courtroom of conscience, and the refrain is the prosecuting question that follows – can you really deny this evidence? Thirdly, the refrain has a **mesmeric, poetic quality**. This is lost in mere explanation but felt strongly in recitation. The Arabic phrase with its balanced rhythm and end-rhyme “*-tukadhhibān*” produces an almost musical effect, enchanting the listener. Many have reported that hearing *Surah Ar-Rahman* recited (especially by skilled reciters) moves them to tears or a state of spiritual ecstasy. The refrain contributes immensely to this by acting as a familiar, anchoring chorus that the heart comes to anticipate and *yearn* for as the recitation continues. The eminent exegete *Al-Qurtubi* preferred the view (supported by narrations) that this Surah was revealed in Makkah, where its powerful rhetorical style would have had the greatest impact on a primarily poetic and oral culture ⁴⁵ ⁴⁶. Early Muslim audiences, whether human or jinn, were so taken by this refrain that, as noted earlier, the believing jinn responded vocally to each repetition in affirmation of God ⁹. In a sense, the refrain creates a dialogue within the text: God asks the question, and we the audience are expected to respond – if not aloud, then in our hearts and ultimately in our life’s choices.

Finally, the function of the refrain as a **spiritual call to awareness** is perhaps its most important aspect. The Quran declares that one of the reasons it repeats signs and warnings is *“in order that they may reflect and be reminded”* (20:113) ⁴⁷. Repetition is thus a pedagogical mercy in itself. For a forgetful and oft-neglectful mankind, what better way to remind than to repeat and reinforce? As Al-Suyuti and others pointed out, sometimes a message must be repeated *“if the speech is lengthy and there is fear that what was said at the beginning may be forgotten, so it is repeated to keep the idea fresh”* ⁴⁷ ⁴⁸. Surah *Ar-Rahman* epitomizes this principle. By the time one finishes reading or listening to it, the question *“Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?”* will have been imprinted in the mind at least 31 times. It is as if the Qur’an is training our inner sight to always view the world through the lens of gratitude and wonder. Every sunrise, every breath, every scientific marvel we learn should trigger that Quranic echo in the soul: *Which of these favors can I possibly deny as not from Allah?* In an age of science, we arguably have *more* signs at our fingertips than any prior generation – yet the risk of heedlessness remains if we do not approach those signs with the humility that Surah *Ar-Rahman* instills. Hence the Surah’s abiding relevance: it calls us to integrate knowledge with reverence, to let the observable universe deepen our awareness of the Unobservable Lord.

Conclusion: Gratitude – The Answer to the Call

Surah *Ar-Rahman* offers a panoramic theological argument: **the natural world and the order of the cosmos are living proofs of the Divine Mercy that permeates reality**. Its haunting refrain – *“Which, then, of your Lord’s blessings will you both deny?”* – is both a question and a gentle scolding, urging us to admit that *none* of the blessings that surround us could ever be denied or attributed to another. The Surah’s powerful interplay of imagery and repetition engraves on the receptive heart the fundamental Quranic view that *the universe is not silent about its Maker*, but rather, *“every single thing in the universe contains divine signs or messages (ayat) whereby God communicates with us”* ²⁵. The proper human (and jinn) response to this constant outpouring of mercy is humble gratitude and worship of *Ar-Rahman*.

Drawing on the rich heritage of Quranic exegesis, we saw how classical scholars like Qurtubi, Ibn Kathir, and Razi emphasized the encompassing scope of God’s grace in this Surah – extending to all creation and linking the patterns of nature to the moral and spiritual law. Contemporary voices like Sayyid Qutb and Nouman Ali Khan have in turn highlighted the Surah’s literary beauty and its relevance to modern man’s mindset, reminding us that in an age overflowing with new discoveries, we must not become blind to the *Source* of all that knowledge and bounty. Modern science, rather than render the divine moot, has unveiled layer upon layer of fine-tuned order and complexity in the universe – from the spinning of galaxies to the coding of DNA – which a believer can readily embrace as ever more elaborate illustrations of what the Qur’an calls *ayat Allah* (signs of God). As one reflection notes, *“The faithful observer sees in the blue sky, in each sunrise and rainfall, a message of divine mercy and a call to give thanks.”* ³⁸ ⁴⁹. This is precisely the spirit Surah *Ar-Rahman* evokes.

In the end, the Surah closes without explicitly telling us the answer to its repeated question – because **we** are meant to supply the answer through our attitude and deeds. The last verse simply states: *“Blessed be the Name of your Lord, Possessor of Majesty and Honor”* (55:78). Implicitly, the answer to *“Which of your Lord’s blessings will you deny?”* is *“None, O Lord! Blessed and Exalted are You!”* The Jinn who heard the Prophet recite *Ar-Rahman* gave this very answer: *“None of Your favors do we deny, our Lord, and to You is all praise!”* ⁹. May we, as readers of this magnificent Surah, be inspired to respond the same – not only with our tongues, but with lives that recognize and uphold the signs of the Most Gracious in everything around us. In a world filled with blessings large and small, from the stars above to the cells within, the refrain of *Ar-Rahman* calls

us to a consciousness of continuous gratitude. Which of our Lord's blessings will we deny? **Not a single one** – for in truth, “if you tried to count Allah's favors, you could never enumerate them” (14:34). Everything in existence is an invitation to know and thank the One who is *rahman* and *rahim*. Surah *Ar-Rahman*, through its sublime words and persistent call, trains us to see the universe as a tapestry of divine mercy – and to bow in prostration, along with the “sun and the moon, the stars and the trees” (55:5-6), to the Lord of All Blessings.

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