27 Shadhrah

That Day

Muzaffar Iqbal

While working on the IEQ entry "Day and Daytime" (*yawm, nahār*), and following the word *yawm* through a thousand years of Arabic lexical reflection, I came upon a brief remark by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī that opened a new window of reflection. After explaining that *yawm* may signify any duration of time, whatever its length, and after pointing to its use in the Days of Allah and the days of creation, he observes, almost in passing, that *yawm* may be joined to *idh*, producing *yawmaʾidhin*: "on that Day," or "at that time." He cites: *Then that Day shall be a difficult Day* (Q 74:9), and adds that the expression may be inflected or be treated as indeclinable, the latter resulting from its annexation to *idh*.

It is the kind of grammatical observation through which al-Rāghib so often opens a precious semantic door. Here, however, he is brief, yet something in his remark would not allow me to pass on. What happens to a day when *idh* is joined to it?

I began to look for the other places where the Qurʾān joins *yawm* to *idh*. Slowly, a whole new world of Qurʾānic semantics began to open. The first search yielded six verses in which *yawm* and *yawmaʾidhin* appear together:

> *The Day the Trumpet is blown, and We shall gather the guilty that Day, blue-eyed (Q 20:102).*
>
> *The Day they see the angels, there shall be no glad tidings that Day for the guilty (Q 25:22).*
>
> *The Day the Hour rises, that Day they shall be divided (Q 30:14).*
>
> *The Day the Hour rises, that Day the falsifiers shall be lost* (Q 45:27).

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> *Then that Day shall be a difficult Day* (Q 74:9).
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> *The Day no soul shall possess anything for another soul, and the Command that Day shall belong to Allah* (Q 82:19).

Placed beside one another, the verses begin to reveal the pattern.

In five of them, *yawm* first names the Day. The discourse then returns to it through yawmaʾidhin, linking what follows to the Day already announced. The Trumpet will be blown, and the guilty will be gathered that Day. The sinners will see the angels, and no glad tidings will remain for them that Day. The Hour will rise, and people will be separated that Day. The Hour will rise, and the falsifiers will be lost that Day. No soul will possess anything for another on the Day already announced, and the Command that Day will belong wholly to Allah.

Q 74:9 moves in the other direction. The sounding of the Trumpet has already evoked the Day. *Yawmaʾidhin* recalls it, and *yawmun ʿasīr* then tells us what kind of Day it will be: *Then that Day shall be a difficult Day*.

The first search, however, was not complete. It had been formed by looking for verses in which an independent *yawm* and the compound *yawmaʾidhin* occurred together. It did not show what happened when *yawmaʾidhin* carried the Day from one verse into the next:

> *To your Lord that Day is the final destination. The human being shall be informed that Day of what he sent ahead and left behind (Q 75:12–13).*

Nor did it show the most concentrated recurrence of all:

> *And Hell shall be brought forth that Day; that Day the human being shall remember—but how shall remembrance avail him? (Q 89:23).*

The pattern widens. In Sūrat al-Qiyāma, *yawmaʾidhin* holds two successive verses within the same Day. The first announces the final destination: *To your Lord that Day is the final destination*. The next verse remains within that Day and moves from destination to disclosure: *The human being shall be informed that Day of what he sent ahead and left behind*.

In Sūrat al-Fajr, *yawmaʾidhin* returns twice within a single verse. Hell is brought forth that Day. The human being remembers that Day. The outward disclosure and the inward recognition occur within one eschatological present. What was denied has become visible; what was forgotten has become unforgettable. But remembrance has awakened after the time in which it could have changed the human being's course.

What, then, is *yawmaʾidhin* doing within these passages?

The joining of *yawm* to *idh* gives the expression a power of return. The Day has already been named, evoked, or brought before the hearer.

Yawmaʾidhin reaches back to it and keeps the discourse within it. It does not allow the Day to dissolve into an indefinite future. It recalls the Day already brought before the hearer through the words of revelation.

Yawm may announce the Day. *Yawmaʾidhin* returns us to it. This return may occur within the same verse, from one verse to the next, or twice within a single verse. It may gather into that Day the final destination, the disclosure of deeds, the bringing forth of Hell, the human being's belated remembrance, the separation of peoples, the loss of the falsifiers, and the disappearance of every claim to possession or command.

Ordinary usage gives solidity to "today" and distance to "that day." Today is near because we are living within it. That day belongs to a future not yet reached and therefore seems less real. But the Qurʾān quietly unsettles this arrangement. The day we call today is already passing. Its morning is lost by noon; its noon is gone by evening; its evening enters the record before sleep overtakes us. Even while we say "today," the word refers to a span being taken from us moment by moment.

That Day does not possess this instability. It is appointed, its time known only to Allah Most High, and it is the Day toward which all other days proceed. Its events are described with a striking clarity that gives them the force of scenes already opened before the hearer: the Trumpet is blown; the angels are seen; the Hour rises; people are separated; Hell is brought forth; the human being remembers; no soul possesses anything for another; the Command belongs to Allah.

That Day lies in the future of human chronology, but it is present in the Divine address. This is one of the immediate impacts of Qurʾānic recitation received by an attentive heart. That which is in the *ghayb* is no longer an abstraction. The words bring the hearer to its threshold. Every recurrence of *yawmaʾidhin* keeps the Day from slipping back into remoteness. The Qurʾān names it, returns to it, and then opens what it contains. The human being hears of the Day and is made to stand within its disclosures before arriving there.

The Qurʾānic accounts of that Day carry a force unlike ordinary descriptions of the future. They are reports of the *ghayb*, beyond perception, but the language repeatedly brings what belongs to the ghayb before the listening heart. The verses do not invite speculation about when that Day will arrive; they place before us what will become manifest when it does.

The final destination that Day is to your Lord. The record that Day will disclose what each human being sent ahead and left behind. Hell that Day will be brought forth. Remembrance that Day will awaken. The Command

that Day will belong to Allah.

An attentive reader of the Qurʾān does not remain a spectator outside these scenes. The one who listens is already travelling toward that Day. The deeds that will be disclosed are being performed now. What is being "sent ahead" is being sent ahead during this passing day. What is being "left behind" is being left behind through the choices by which the present moment is filled. But *yawmaʾidhin* turns the gaze toward that Day while placing responsibility upon the present. It is "that Day," but its moral claim falls upon today.

Perhaps this is also why the human being will remember when Hell is brought forth. The Day will not introduce an entirely unknown truth. It will uncover what revelation had repeatedly placed before him. He will remember the warnings, the verses, the moments of recognition, and the days in which another course remained open. His tragedy will not be that he had never heard of that Day. It will be that "that Day" had been brought near through revelation, yet he continued to live as though it were remote.

Al-Rāghib's undertaking in the *Mufradāt* is not merely lexical. He opens windows onto vistas rarely encountered in other lexicons. This is one of the abiding gifts of the Qurʾānic lexical tradition. Its scholars sometimes explain at length; sometimes they leave a sentence whose depth emerges only when the reader returns with it to the Qurʾān. Their work places a thread in the reader's hand and quietly directs him toward an opening.

A thousand years after al-Rāghib wrote his brief observation, that thread remains. Following it brings into view the Day announced and recalled, sustained across verses, repeated within one verse, and filled with the events that will determine the final condition of every human being. A grammatical joining opens into destination, accounting, remembrance, loss, separation, and divine sovereignty. While living this day, one is brought before *that Day*.

The day in which these words are written will pass, as every earthly day passes. The Day to which *yawmaʾidhin* repeatedly returns is appointed, and its coming is certain. *That Day no soul shall possess anything for another soul, and the Command shall belong to Allah*. On that Day, every illusion of possessing power independently of Allah will be no more.

Wa-Allāhu aʿlam.

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