

## DAILY QUR'ANIC REFLECTIONS

## From Juz' 26: Rivers of Water, Milk, Wine, and Honey

مَثَلُ الْجَنَّةِ الَّتِي وُعدَ الْمُتَّقُونَ فِيهَا أَنْهَارٌ مِّن مَّاءٍ غَيْرِ آسِنٍ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّن لَّبَنٍ لَّم يَتَغَيَّر طَعْمُهُ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّن خَمْرٍ  
لَّذَّةٍ لِلشَّارِبِينَ وَأَنْهَارٌ مِّن عَسَلٍ مُصَفًّى وَلَهُمْ فِيهَا مِن كُل الثَّمَرَاتِ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِّن رَّبِّهِمْ ...

A description of the paradise promised to the Godwary: therein are rivers of unstaling water and rivers of milk unchanging in flavour, and rivers of wine delicious to the drinkers, and rivers of purified honey; there will be every kind of fruit in it for them, and forgiveness from their Lord ... (Muḥammad 47:15)

**Reflections:**

One of the most repeated descriptions of Paradise in the Qur'ān is the following: “gardens with rivers running under them.” How are we to understand these gardens and these rivers? Some 'ulamā have taken them to be metaphors for higher realities. For example, in the same way that water has a role to play in our physical life—“We made every living thing out of water”<sup>1</sup>—the water that nourishes the life of our souls is best exemplified by knowledge. Hence, when the Qur'ān describes the different types of rivers in Paradise, these are the different types of knowledge that will be available for its inhabitants. Other 'ulamā, without discounting the higher forms of pleasure that exist in the Ākhirah, insist that such descriptions are to be taken literally. In other words, there will be literal rivers and bodily pleasures—though the “bodies” that will experience the pleasure will not be physical and constrictive as we know it; rather, they will be of a higher and more subtle order.

In any case, the verse indicates four different types of rivers. The first is a river of water, which will never go stale over time. The second is a river of milk, which will never spoil. The third is a river of wine, which will be delicious for those that consume it. And the last is a river of honey that will have been purified from any impurities (such as wax or pollen).

The most interesting of these rivers, and according to some 'ulamā, the most important of them, is the river of wine. How can that be? After all, we know that wine is forbidden in this world: “O you who have faith! Indeed wine ... [is] filth from the work of Satan”<sup>2</sup> And there is no doubt that consumption of alcohol eclipses our intellect and prevents it from making proper judgements. Yet, not only is wine a river in Jannah, but it is the only one described as being pleasurable in the verse above.

There is no doubt that the paradisaal river of wine is not “filth” (*rijs*) for there is no room for such in that realm. Nonetheless, there is a connection between the wine of this world and that of the next. Both render the intellect inoperative ... but for different reasons. Whereas the wine of this world inhibits the intellect from functioning properly, the wine of the Ākhirah immerses the heart in the infinite beauty and majesty of the Eternal Truth. Hence, the intellect, which normally functions by conceptualizing, perceiving, and reasoning, is instead immersed in the light of direct vision (*shuhud*). In that moment, the intellect ceases its usual operations and simply experiences pure delight!

The Ahl al-Bayt (‘a) had tasted this heavenly pleasure in this world, and hence were able to offer us the beautiful du‘ās recommended during the month of Ramaḍān: “Take my forelock towards Your comprehensive pleasure with Your love, O Hope of the Enamoured” and “Enable me to taste the sweetness of Your remembrance.”<sup>3</sup> It is only because they had drunk from that paradisaal source that they were able to call out to God in this way.

**To ponder:** What does “forgiveness” in the verse above mean for those who are already in Jannah?

**References:** Āyatullāh Jawādī Āmulī, *Tafsīr Tasnīm*; Allāmah Tehrānī, *Imām Shināsī*.