Most scholars take all of *al-Raḥmān* to be a Makkān *sūrah*, although Ibn ʿAbbās is said to have maintained that v. 29 is from the Madīnan period (Āl, Q). A minority maintain that the entire *sūrah* is Madīnan (Āl, Q). It takes its name from the mention of the Divine Name *the Compassionate* at the opening, the only Divine Name to be directly equated with the Name Allāh, as in 17:110: Say, “Call upon God (Allāh), or call upon the Compassionate (*al-Raḥmān*). Whichever you call upon, to Him belong the Most Beautiful Names.” Because the last verse of the preceding *sūrah* and the first verse of this *sūrah* contain two Divine Names that can be read in complementary opposition to one another, *Omnipotent King* (54:55) and *the Compassionate* (v. 1), *al-Raḥmān* is seen by some as an extension of *al-Qamar* (Āl). This *sūrah* is known to many Muslims as “The Bride of the Quran” after a well-known yet unauthenticated ḥadīth that says, “For everything there is a bride, and the bride of the Quran is *Sūrat al-Raḥmān*” (Aj, Āl, Q).

Some commentaries maintain that this *sūrah* was revealed in response to the idolaters of Makkah, who are said to have asked the meaning of the Prophet’s frequent references to *the Compassionate*, as in 25:60: And when it is said unto them, “Prostrate before the Compassionate,” they say, “And what is the Compassionate? Shall we prostrate before that [to] which you command us?” And it increases them in aversion. The idolaters’ disbelief in *the Compassionate* is also mentioned in 13:30, where the Prophet is ordered to declare belief in the Lord:
Thus have We sent thee unto a community before whom other communities have passed away, that thou mayest recite unto them that which We have revealed unto thee; yet they disbelieve in the Compassionate. Say, “He is my Lord; there is no god but He. In Him do I trust and unto Him do I turn.”

The first section of the sūrah (vv. 1–25) discusses the nature of the Compassionate as Creator, Teacher, and Revealer and the blessings He provides in the created world. It then transitions into an extended discussion of the blessings of Heaven and its many Gardens. The duality between Heaven and earth and the dualities within them are present throughout the sūrah. This thematic structure is reflected in the grammatical structure, which employs the dual form in many of the verbs and pronouns and in the refrain, addressed to both human beings and jinn, *So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?* This duality is offset by the discussion of the Compassionate in vv. 1–10 and by vv. 26–27, which emphasize that God remains while all else fades away. Appearing in the middle of the sūrah, these verses imply that God’s Essence is the center that lies at the heart of and yet transcends all dualities, even those in the Gardens of Heaven. V. 27 is then echoed in the last verse (v. 78), showing that just as God transcends the blessings of this earth, so too does He transcend the blessings of Heaven.

In the Name of God, the Compassionate, the Merciful

1 The Compassionate taught the Quran; 2 created man; 3 taught him speech. 4 The sun and the moon are upon a reckoning. 5 And the stars and the trees prostrate. 6 Heaven He has raised and the Balance He has set, 7 that you transgress not in the balance. 8 So set right the weight and fall not short in the balance. 9 So set right the weight and fall not short in the balance. 10 The earth has He laid down for creatures. 11 Therein are fruit and date palms bearing sheaths, 12 husked grains and fragrant herbs. 13 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 14 He
created man from dried clay, like earthen vessels, and He created jinn from smokeless fire. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? He mixed the two seas, such that they meet one another. Between them lies a barrier that they transgress not. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? From them come forth pearls and coral stones. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? His are the ships towering aloft upon the sea like standards. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? All that is upon it passes away. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? Those in the heavens and on the earth entreat Him: every day He is upon a task. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? We shall have leisure for you both, O weighty ones. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? O company of jinn and men, if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass, you shall not pass, save by a warrant. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? A flash of fire and molten brass shall be sent against you, and you shall not prevail. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? When the sky shall be rent asunder and when it shall turn ruddy like hide? So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? On that Day no man shall be questioned as to his sin; nor shall any jinn. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? The
guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet. 42 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 43 This is Hell that the guilty deny; 44 to and fro shall they pass, between it and boiling waters. 45 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 46 And for one who fears standing before his Lord, there are two Gardens. 47 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 48 Each abounding in green branches. 49 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 50 In each are two fountains flowing. 51 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 52 In each are two kinds of every fruit. 53 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 54 They recline upon beds lined with rich brocade, the fruits of the two Gardens near at hand. 55 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 56 Therein are maidens of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinn has ever touched. 57 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 58 Even as the ruby and as the coral stone are they. 59 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 60 Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness? 61 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 62 And beyond these two are two Gardens— 63 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?— 64 of deepest green. 65 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 66 In each are two fountains bubbling. 67 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 68 In each are fruits, date palms, and pomegranates. 69 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? 70 Therein are good and beautiful ones; 71 so which of your Lord’s boons do
Maidsens secluded in pavilions; so which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? Untouched as yet by man or jinn; so which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? Blessed is the Name of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.

Commentary

1 The Compassionate

1 *The Compassionate* translates *al-Raḥmān*, which is considered to denote that aspect of mercy and compassion that is unqualified, boundless, and prior to the created order. In this regard, *al-Raḥmān* has also been rendered “the Infinitely Good” and “the Loving.” It is said to be one of the Divine Names that can only apply to God, for it is one of the Names by which existence itself is made manifest, a universal blessing or mercy (*raḥmah*) that cannot be attributed to anyone other than God. In this regard, many Sufis say that all of creation is brought forth through “the Breath of the Compassionate.” It thus differs from the Merciful (*al-Raḥīm*), which is said to pertain to a more particular form of Divine Mercy and by which human beings may also be described. From this perspective, *al-Raḥmān* relates more directly to the Divine Essence, while *al-Raḥīm* can be seen as referring to the extension of God’s Mercy in all acts (see 1:3c). It is also the Compassionate who is said to assume the Throne of God in 20:5 (cf. 25:59).

2 taught the Quran;

2 That the verb *taught* comes directly after the Divine Name *al-Raḥmān* indicates that teaching revelation is intrinsic to God’s compassionate nature. From one perspective, revelation is a blessing through which God sustains creation. Throughout the Quran teaching is presented as one of God’s essential functions in relation to human beings, for human beings are created for knowledge and God teaches Adam and thus all of humanity (2:31) before commanding, providing laws,
and judging. According to some commentators, this verse is a direct response to the disbelievers who said of the Prophet and the Quran, *He has merely been taught by a human being* (16:103; Q, Sh). Others understand it as an allusion to the manner in which God has made the Quran easy to learn, as in the refrain of the previous sūrah: *And indeed We have made the Quran easy to remember* (54:17, 22, 32, 40; Q). This verse could also be understood as the beginning of a new thought, that is, “He taught the Quran.”

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3 created man;

3 Here *man* is understood by some as a specific reference to the Prophet Muhammad or to Adam (Q). But most understand it as a reference to all of humanity. The creation of human beings following directly upon the mention of God’s teaching the Quran indicates that human beings were made to know revelation (Aj) even before their creation in this world. The correspondence between the mention of human beings and revelation here is similar to the combination mentioned in 96:1–2, which are considered by most to be the first two verses in the chronological order of revelation. The present verse also provides a subtle allusion to the mercy and blessing of the creation of human beings and animals, since the word for “womb,” *raḥīm*, derives from the same root, *r-h-m*, as the Compassionate, *al-Raḥmān*. In this vein a famous ḥadīth says, “The word ‘womb’ (*al-raḥīm*) derives its name from *al-Raḥmān*, and God said [to the womb], ‘I will keep good relations with one who keeps good relations with you, and will sever relations with one who severs relations with you,’” meaning one who severs relations with family and kin; for the importance of maintaining womb relations, see 4:1c.

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4 taught him speech.

4 Just as human beings are distinguished by their ability to know revelation, so too are they distinguished from all other creatures by the faculty of speech through which they both articulate and comprehend (Aj). Vv. 2–4 can also be taken as an allusion to God’s honoring human beings by making the Quran, His very Word, something they are capable of learning and reciting (Q), as in 44:58: *We have only made this easy upon thy tongue, that haply they may remember* (cf. 54:17, 22, 32, 40). *Speech* translates *bayān*, which also means something that is
clear or evident. It is thus seen by some as an allusion to God’s having *taught Adam the names, all of them* (2:31; see 2:31c) or to God’s giving human beings the ability to distinguish between good and evil, between what is permitted and what is forbidden (Q, Sh) or between truth and falsehood, all of which is believed to be taught through revelation. *Bayān* is also considered one of the names of the Quran (Q, R), as in 3:138: *This is an exposition (bayān) for mankind, and a guidance and exhortation for the reverent.*

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5 The sun and the moon are upon a reckoning.

5 *Are upon a reckoning* (cf. 6:96) means that the sun and the moon run according to a known and established pattern from which they do not deviate and without which human beings would have no temporal or geographical bearings (Q), as in 10:5: *He it is Who made the sun a radiance, and the moon a light, and determined for it stations, that you might know the number of years and the reckoning [of time].* This is of particular importance to Muslims, as the position of the sun and the moon determines the times for the performance of three of the five pillars of the faith: prayer, fasting, and pilgrimage. This verse can also be seen as an allusion to the fact that celestial bodies were created and are therefore transient, as in 13:2 and 39:5: *and He made the sun and the moon subservient, each running for a term appointed* (Q). It would then be a rebuke to those who worshipped celestial bodies, as in 41:37: *Prostrate not unto the sun, nor unto the moon. Prostrate unto God, Who created them, if it is He Whom you worship* (cf. 6:76–78).

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6 And the stars and the trees prostrate.

6 As translated, this verse alludes to the prostration before God of all celestial and earthly entities, as in 22:18: *Hast thou not considered that unto God prostrates whosoever is in the heavens and whosoever is on the earth* (cf. 16:49). *Stars* translates *najm,* which occurs in the singular, but is understood as a reference to all stars. *Najm* could also be translated “herbs,” in which case the verse could be read as a reference to herbs, or all soft-stemmed plants, and trees, or all hard-stemmed plants (Aj, ظ). In either interpretation, their prostration is an indication of their complete submission to God’s Will.
Heaven He has raised and the Balance He has set,

The Balance is seen by most as a reference to justice (JJ, Q, T), religious law (al-sharīʿah), or the Quran itself (Q; see 57:25c). It can also be seen as a reference to honoring the balance and harmony of the created order.

that you transgress not in the balance.

So set right the weight and fall not short in the balance.

In the translation, v. 8 is taken as a subjunctive. But it can also be taken as an imperative: “So transgress not in the balance.” The injunction differs slightly in each translation: the first indicates that one must not be tyrannical and oppressive; the second indicates that one must not withhold what is due to another (Aj), a theme found in many other passages; see 11:84; 83:1–3c. Insofar as the balance is related to justice, the fact that it is here thrice mentioned indicates the fundamental importance of justice as intrinsic to the order of God’s creation and also to human transactions. As the Prophet is reported to have said, “The heavens and the earth are founded upon justice.”

The earth has He laid down for creatures.

Vv. 1–9 mentioned the realities that provide spiritual nourishment; vv. 10–12 now move to those that provide physical nourishment (Aj). This verse is taken variously as an allusion to all domesticated animals, to all that crawls upon the earth, or to all human beings and jinn (Q).

Therein are fruit and date palms bearing sheaths,

The word for fruit, fākhah, derives from the same root as tafakkah.
meaning to “take delight” in something. This verse is thus interpreted by some as an allusion to all the blessings of this earth in which people take delight (Q). The date was for the Arabs the best of fruits. It is thus interpreted as a reference the greatest of God’s Blessings in the physical realm and indirectly as an allusion to all forms of fruit.

**

12 husked grains and fragrant herbs.

When v. 11 is taken as a reference to the delights one can find in food and earthly blessings in general, this verse can be understood as a reference to the more nutritive dimension of food (Aj). Some say husked grains refers to the stems of plants and fragrant herbs to their leaves (Q).

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13 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

This refrain, which is addressed to both human beings and jinn, is repeated thirty-one times in this sūrah. Both the possessive pronoun in your Lord (rabbukumā) and the predicate in do you two deny are in the dual form, referring to human beings and jinn. Deny may indicate their refusal to acknowledge that a particular blessing is from God by attributing it implicitly or explicitly to themselves or to some other human or natural agency. It could also be taken to indicate the denial of one aspect of God, while accepting another, as do those who believe in God, but scoff at the idea of resurrection or deny the reality of revelation. It is reported that the Prophet recited this sūrah to some of his Companions and said, “Why do I see you silent? The jinn respond better than you for I come not upon So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny? but that they say, ‘There is naught among Thy blessings, Our Lord, that we deny. Unto Thee be Praise; unto Thee be thanks’” (Aj, N, Q).

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14 He created man from dried clay, like earthen vessels,

Dried clay is literally “sounding clay,” referring to the sound fired clay makes when struck. Several verses discuss the creation of the human being from
various forms of earth: from dust (3:59); from dried clay, made of molded mud (15:26); and from a viscous clay (37:11). When combined with v. 14, these verses can be seen as describing the stages of human creation: from dust, to viscous clay, to molded mud, to dried clay, like earthen vessels (Q), at which point it is then ready for the Spirit to be blown into it. For the breathing of the Spirit into the human being, see 32:9c; 38:72c.

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15 and He created jinn from smokeless fire.

15 Smokeless fire translates mārij min nār, which can also mean “something in which soot has been mixed.” The verse could thus mean that the jinn are created from either pure fire, a substance mixed with fire, or a unique kind of fire (Aj). For a fuller discussion of the nature of the jinn, see the introduction to Sūrah 72.

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16 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

17 The two easts, translating mashriqayn, could also mean “the two places from which the sun rises,” as the word for the rising of the sun, sharaqa, derives from the same root (sh-r-q) as “east,” mashrq. The two wests, translating maghribayn, could also mean “the two places in which the sun sets,” as the word for the setting of the sun, gharaaba, derives from the same root (gh-r-b) as “west,” maghrib. The two easts and the two wests could thus be understood as a reference to the winter and summer solstices, which mark the farthest point of each rising and setting of the sun. To mention the limits in this fashion can be taken as an allusion to all the settings and risings of the sun, since to mention the limits on each end of the spectrum is to imply the whole; see also 70:40c.

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17 Lord of the two easts and Lord of the two wests.

18 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

19 He mixed the two seas, such that they meet one another.
Between them lies a barrier that they transgress not.

19–20 This is a reference to the two seas in 35:12: Not equal are the two seas: one sweet, satisfying, pleasant to drink, and the other salty, bitter (see also 25:53). As the predicate in they transgress not is in the dual form, most interpret it as a reference to the two seas themselves, but some take it as a reference to human beings and jinn. In the first interpretation, it indicates that these two seas with their distinct natures may meet, but will not intermingle and thus dilute or compromise one another (IK, Q). Some understand the two seas as an allusion to the sky and the earth (Q, Ṭ). Others see them as an allusion to this world and the Hereafter, between which lies the barrier of God’s Decree (Q). Others see them as an allusion to formal religious knowledge and spiritual knowledge (ma‘rifah), which meet in the complete human being, though the intelligence remains between them as a barrier preventing either form of knowledge from exceeding its bounds, such that one does not stifle the spiritual with the formal or compromise the formal in the name of the spiritual (Aj).

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

From them come forth pearls and coral stones.

22 This verse can be understood as a reference to God’s provision of ornaments that human beings extract from the sea, as in 16:14: He it is Who made the sea subservient, that you may eat fresh meat therefrom, and extract from it ornaments that you wear. Coral stones translates marjān, which is understood by some to indicate small pearls (Aj, IK) and by others to indicate large valuable pearls (IK, Q, Ṭ). The verse can also be read, “Pearls and coral stones are brought forth” (Q).

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

His are the ships towering aloft upon the sea like standards.
24. Most read this verse as describing the sails of ships towering aloft upon the sea like standards and take it as a reference to God’s providing human beings with the ability to navigate and traverse the sea, as in 14:32: He has made the ships subservient unto you, so that they sail upon the sea by His Command. In this sense, it can be connected to the blessings mentioned in v. 5, for without the ability to measure the celestial bodies seafaring would be impossible. Towering aloft translates munshaʾāt, which can also be read as the past participle of the verb anshaʾa, “to bring into being.” It could thus be understood as an allusion to all that has been brought into being, that is, all created things (IK, Q).

25. So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

26. All that is upon it passes away.

27. And there remains the Face of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.

26–27. Cf. 28:88: All things perish, save His Face. These verses mark an important turn in this sūrah, as vv. 10–25 refer to the blessings or boons of this world and the remaining verses refer to the blessings of the Hereafter. It is taken by most as a reference to the earth, the face of the earth, or this world in general, thus indicating that all of creation will eventually “pass away.” Grammatically it is the Face that is Possessed of Majesty and Bounty. Since the Arabic word for “face” (wajh) is often employed to indicate the very essence of a thing, it is here taken as a reference to God’s Being and Essence (Q). Some theologians who see a distinction between God’s Attributes and God’s Essence maintain that this verse indicates that God’s Attributes will also “pass away” and only the Divine Essence will remain (R). Al-Rāzī, however, maintains that for this to be the meaning, one would need to say, “And there remains nothing except the Face of thy Lord.” According to some, the Face of thy Lord is used instead of the Face of God, which is used in several other verses (e.g., 2:115, 272; 30:38; 76:9), because “Lord” is closer to the theme of blessing and bounty that pervades this sūrah (R). The use of Majesty and Bounty can be seen as a reference to God’s Attributes of Majesty and God’s Attributes of Beauty, respectively, a division often made in the discussion of God’s Names and Attributes in Islamic theology. For many Shiites the Attributes of Beauty are those positive attributes that are inherent in God’s Essence and manifest the perfection of His Nature, whereas the Attributes of Majesty are the “negative
attributes,” those attributes having to do with physical qualities such as body, appearance, or movement that would imply limitation. The result of the negation of such possibilities is thus seen as a reaffirmation of the positive Divine Attributes.

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28 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

29 Those in the heavens and on the earth entreat Him: every day He is upon a task.

29 The first phrase indicates that, although the angels in the heavens may be seen as higher than human beings, who live on earth, all are dependent upon God and entreat Him, though those in the heavens are seen as supplianting on behalf of those on earth, while those on earth supplicate on behalf of themselves (Q). Even those who do not call upon God directly do so indirectly (Aj).

Following upon the assertion that everything entreats God, every day He is upon a task can be seen as an indication that God is constantly attending to requests made by those in the heavens and on earth. Regarding this interpretation of the verse, the Prophet is reported to have said, “Among God’s tasks is to forgive sin, relieve distress, raise one people, and humble another” (Aj, IK, Q).

Every day He is upon a task can also be understood as a response to those who maintain that God “rested on the seventh day from all the work that He had done” (Genesis 2:2), for as 2:255 asserts, Neither slumber overtakes Him nor sleep. From an Islamic perspective, were God to be absent from His creative and sustaining activity for even the blink of an eye, creation would vanish and disappear (Qu). In this vein, this verse is taken by Ibn ʿArabī as a reference to God’s Self-Disclosure, or theophany (tajallī), which never repeats and is never renewed, as God never discloses Himself in the same form to two individuals or twice in the same form to one individual (Futūbah, II 77.25–26). In more conventional terms, this verse indicates that God’s creative Power is inexhaustible and that, as an object of knowledge, God is inexhaustible.

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30 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

31 We shall have leisure for you both, O weighty ones.
We shall have leisure translates nafrughu, which indicates leaving one task in order to attend to another, though in relation to God it is understood to indicate that there is no task or collection of tasks that will keep God from attending to other tasks (Ṭb). This verse is thus taken as a warning to jinn and human beings that they should not think that God will be too busy to resurrect them and call them to account on the Day of Judgment (Ṭb), though it could also be understood as an indication that God is always available to His servants and always watching over them. Weighty ones, which is in the dual form, is taken by most as a reference to jinn and human beings, indicating either that they are made from substances that are heavy (unlike angels who are made from light) or that they bear the weight of the responsibility of their deeds (Aj). A Shiite interpretation sees weighty ones as a reference to the Quran and the Prophet’s household (Kā, Qm).

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

O company of jinn and men, if you are able to pass beyond the regions of the heavens and the earth, then pass, you shall not pass, save by a warrant.

According to some commentators, these words will be said to people and jinn on the Day of Reckoning when the angels surround them (IK, Q,Ṭ). The implication is that they will never be able to evade God’s Commands and Decrees (IK), except with God’s Authority, for though there may be intercessors, none will be able to intercede, save by His Leave (2:255); see 2:48c; 2:255c. This verse can also be understood to mean that human beings cannot know or dominate over anything in creation except by God’s Authority and Sanction.

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

A flash of fire and molten brass shall be sent against you, and you shall not prevail.

This verse is understood to indicate that when people are brought forth
from their graves, a flash of fire that they will be unable to escape will spur them on to the Day of Reckoning. *Molten brass* translates *nuḥās*, which is taken by some to mean the smoke of the fire (IK, Ṭ) and by others to mean liquid copper (IK, Ṭ).

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36 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

37 When the sky shall be rent asunder and when it shall turn ruddy like hide?

37 The splitting or rending asunder of the sky is one of several events said to mark the end of this world and the coming of God’s Judgment; see also 25:25; 42:5; 69:16c; 73:18; 82:1; 84:1.

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38 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

39 On that Day no man shall be questioned as to his sin; nor shall any jinn.

39 Cf. 28:78: *And the guilty will not be questioned about their sins*; and 77:35–36: *That is the Day on which they speak not; nor is permission granted them, such that they might offer excuses*. None shall be questioned that day, since their deeds have already been recorded (see 17:71; 18:49; 50:17–18; 69:19–28; 82:11–12). And they will not be able to speak for themselves, for *on that Day We shall seal their mouths. Their hands will speak to Us, and their feet will bear witness to that which they used to earn* (36:65); and *their ears, their eyes, and their skins will bear witness against them for that which they used to do* (41:20). Interpreting the present verse in light of 15:92–93, *So by thy Lord, We shall question them all concerning that which they used to do*, some say that they will be questioned, and then their mouths will be sealed (Aj, IK). It is also said that they will not be questioned in order to elicit a response, but only rhetorically, as a form of reproach (Aj). From a Sufi perspective, when the attributes of the lower self have been effaced, after one has passed through the stations of both annihilation and subsistence in God, no sin remains, since at this stage one cannot but act in accord with the Will of God (Aj).
So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

The guilty shall be known by their marks; and they shall be seized by the forelocks and by the feet.

41 The first part of this verse can also be read as an adverbial clause modifying v. 39, meaning that they will not be asked about their sins, because they will already be known by their marks. This is in contrast to the marks by which the believers will be known, such as the light that shines from the parts of their bodies they washed when performing ablutions (IK) or the mark upon their faces . . . from the effect of prostration (48:29). Being seized by the forelocks and by the feet is interpreted by some to mean that their heads will be bent down and bound to their feet (IK, Q), and by others to indicate that the angels will drag them by the forelock or by the feet (Q). From a Quranic perspective, there is no creature that crawls, but that He holds it by its forelock (11:56).

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

This is Hell that the guilty deny;

43 For a similar verse, see 32:20: And as for those who are iniquitous, their refuge is the Fire. Whenever they desire to go forth therefrom, they are returned unto it, and it is said unto them, “Taste the punishment of the Fire that you used to deny.”

to and fro shall they pass, between it and boiling waters.

44 It is interpreted by most as a reference to the Fire of Hell, meaning that they will sometimes be punished with Fire and sometimes with boiling liquid (IK), which could be taken as a reference to experiencing the punishment of Hell both externally and internally. A similar passage is 40:71–72: They will be dragged,
with shackles and chains around their necks, into boiling liquid; then they will be set aflame in the Fire (cf. 20:19; 44:48; 56:42). For verses that speak of those who are made to drink boiling liquid, see 6:70; 10:4; 18:29; 37:67; 38:57; 44:46; 47:15; 78:24–25; 88:5. The word here translated boiling, ān, indicates something that has reached the highest possible temperature (IK, Ţ); others say ān means “prepared” (IK, Ţ), though the two readings do not necessarily contradict one another (IK).

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45 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

46 And for one who fears standing before his Lord, there are two Gardens.

Cf. 79:40–41: As for one who fears standing before his Lord and forbids the soul from its caprice, truly the Garden is the refuge. In both verses, the phrase standing before his Lord translates maqāma rabbihī, which could also be translated “the station of his Lord.” It can be understood to indicate that one will stand before God on the Day of Judgment, answering for all of one’s deeds, as in 83:6: A day when mankind shall stand before the Lord of the worlds, for the reckoning. Or it could be understood as a reference to God’s overseeing every soul, as in 13:33, where God is referred to as He Who attends to (qāʾim ʿalā) every soul in accordance with what it has earned. According to Mujāhid, one of the leading scholars among the second generation of Muslims, “One who fears standing before his Lord is one who thinks of committing a sin, then remembers God and abandons it out of fear” (Aj, Q). There are many interpretations to explain the meaning of two Gardens: one as a reward for faith, the other as a reward for good deeds (Aj, Q); one for fearing God, another for abandoning lusts (Aj); one that is spiritual, another that is physical (Aj); one that is created especially for the believer, and one that the believer inherits (Q); one garden of eternity, another of blessing (Q); one that is one’s own abode, the other for celestial spouses (Q); one for human beings, the other for jinn; or one for the foremost, the other for the companions of the right (Aj); also see commentary on 56:8–10.

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47 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?
Each abounding in green branches.

This verse begins the description of the first two Gardens, which extends to v. 58 or v. 60. Two other Gardens are then described in vv. 62–76. According to some these first two Gardens are for the foremost (see 56:10c), who are also identified with those brought nigh (56:88), while the next two Gardens are for the companions of the right (see 56:8–9; Aj, IK). This interpretation finds support in a ḥadīth: “Two golden Gardens for the foremost and two silver Gardens for the companions of the right” (Aj, IK). Green branches translates afnān, which denotes branches that bear fruit and leaves providing both shade and nourishment. Afnān could also be read as a plural of fanna, meaning “sort” or “variety,” thus indicating many different kinds of trees and fruits.

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

In each are two fountains flowing.

Some see this verse as indicating that each garden has a spring of water that flows in it (Q). Others see it as an allusion to the springs mentioned in other verses, such as Tasnīm (83:27) and Salsābīl (76:18; Aj, IK, Q, T). It could also be understood as a reference to the rivers of wine and milk in 47:15.

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

In each are two kinds of every fruit.

Two kinds translates zawjān, which can also mean “varieties” or “pairs.” Here it is understood to mean one kind that is familiar and one that is not (Z).

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?
They recline upon beds lined with rich brocade, the fruits of the two Gardens near at hand.

Cf. 76:13–14: Therein they recline upon couches, seeing neither sun nor bitter cold. Its shade shall be close above them, and its clusters shall be made to hang low. Reclining upon beds or couches is seen as an allusion to being content and at peace (R). The rich brocade is said to be a thick silk embroidered with gold (IK, T). Many comment on this verse with a sense of wonderment, remarking, “If this is the exterior, then what about the interior?” (Aj, IK). The fruits being near at hand indicates that they will be easy to access whenever one wishes (Aj, IK), similar to the reference to low-hanging clusters in 69:23.

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

Therein are maidens of modest gaze, whom neither man nor jinn has ever touched.

Therein refers to the two Gardens. But it could also be rendered “upon them,” as a reference to the beds mentioned in v. 54 (IK). Some also allow that it could refer to all the dwelling places of Heaven (Aj). Maidens of modest gaze means those who look upon none but their own spouses (Aj, IK, Q). Touched translates ūamatha, which also implies loss of virginity when a woman is the direct object of the sentence and menstruation when she is the subject of the sentence (Iṣ). This verse can thus be taken to indicate both that the women of Paradise are chaste and that they are free of the burdens of menstruation and childbearing that beset women in this world.

So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

Even as the ruby and as the coral stone are they.

The maidens of Paradise are said to be as pure as rubies and as white as coral stones (marjān; IK), which can be taken to mean tiny pearls as well as coral.
stone. If the latter, it is said to refer to the rosy color of their complexion (Aj). A ḥadīth states, “If a woman among the women of the people of the Garden were to look upon the earth, she would fill what is between them [the Garden and earth] with a scent, and all that is between them would become delightful. The veil (naṣīf) over her head is better than this world and all that is in it” (IK). The description of their beauty in this verse hearkens back to the description of the blessings of this earth in v. 22.

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59 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

60 Is the reward of goodness aught but goodness?

60 Cf. 10:26. According to many, this verse indicates that the reward for performing good deeds in this life is goodness in the Hereafter (Aj, Q), as in 42:23: And whosoever accomplishes a good deed, We shall increase him in goodness thereby. In this vein, it is said that the Prophet told his Companions this verse means, “Is the reward of one whom I have blessed with testifying to oneness (tawḥīd) aught but the Garden?” (Aj, Ţs). According to al-Suddī, it means, “Is the reward of those who live a life of obedience in this world aught but generosity in the Hereafter?” (Aj). And a saying attributed to Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq asserts that the meaning is, “Is the reward of those to whom I have shown My Goodness before creation (fiʾl-azal) other than that I shall continue to show them My Goodness after creation (fiʾl-abad)” (Aj, Q). Some also connect this verse with the famous ḥadīth of Gabriel, in which the Prophet says that goodness (iḥsān) is “to worship God as if you see Him, for if you do not see Him, He nonetheless sees you” (Aj). It can furthermore be taken to mean that a virtuous act is its own reward.

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61 So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

62 And beyond these two are two Gardens—

62 For the difference between the two Gardens described in vv. 62–76 and vv. 48–60, see 55:48c.

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?—

of deepest green.

64 Deepest green (mudhāmmatān) indicates a very dark shade of green due to the density of vegetation. This is taken by some to indicate that the ground of these two Gardens is covered with thick vegetation, while in the first two Gardens trees predominate, so that they are abounding in green branches (v. 48).

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

In each are two fountains bubbling.

66 The springs here are bubbling, whereas the springs of the higher Gardens mentioned in v. 50 are free-flowing (Aj, IK) and thus believed to be more copious.

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

In each are fruits, date palms, and pomegranates.

68 According to some, this verse means that the fruits of the two lower Gardens are more limited than those of the higher Gardens, in which there were pairs or two kinds of every fruit (v. 52). Date palms and pomegranates are said to be specified because the former is particularly nutritious and the latter has medicinal properties (IK). These, along with the fig and the olive, are also considered fruits given to human beings here on earth that still retain something of their paradisal quality.

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?
Therein are good and beautiful ones;

so which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

Maidens secluded in pavilions;

so which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

Untouched as yet by man or jinn;

70–74 Whereas the maidens of the higher Gardens are said to be of modest gaze (qāṣirāt al-tarf; v. 56), the maidens of the lower two Gardens are secluded (maqṣūr), which could indicate that they are enclosed or that their gaze is lowered. Those in the higher Gardens are described with an active participle in the Arabic, while those in the lower gardens are described with the passive participle from the same root, q-ṣ-r. This implies that those of the higher Gardens are chaste women who restrain their glances themselves, while those of the lower Gardens have their glances guarded for them (IK). For wide-eyed maidens, see 44:54c.

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so which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?

They recline upon green cushions and beautiful wonders.

76 The cushions (rafraf) indicate thickly brocaded cushions or fabric that can be found wherever the inhabitants of Heaven desire (Aj); they can also be understood as a metaphor for ease and comfort. Wonders translates ʿabqarī, a word used to indicate anything of genius, magnificence, or rarity (Aj, IK). ʿAbqar is said to be the land of the jinn and is employed as an epithet for anything displaying great skillfulness or being beyond the ken of human understanding (R).

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So which of your Lord’s boons do you two deny?
77 Regarding the thirty-one times that this refrain occurs in this surah, al-Nasafī writes, “Eight are mentioned following verses that enumerate the marvels of God’s creation. . . . Seven follow verses wherein are mentioned the Fire and its severities, in accordance with the number of the doors of the Fire. After these seven, there are eight that follow a description of the two Gardens and their inhabitants, in accordance with the number of the doors of the Garden. And there are eight after that for the two Gardens that are below them. So whoever affirms the first eight and acts in accord with what that requires, the doors of the Garden will be open to him and the doors of Hellfire will be shut to him.”

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78 Blessed is the Name of thy Lord, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty.

78 Just as the phrase Possessed of Majesty and Bounty marks the end of the discussion of earthly blessings in v. 27, here it marks the end of the discussion of heavenly blessings. Here it modifies thy Lord, just as it modified the Face of thy Lord in v. 27. According to another canonical reading, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty could here be read as modifying the Name (i.e., dhū, rather than dhī; Q, Z). It is said that the Prophet advised his followers, “Persist [in invoking] ‘O Possessor of Majesty and Bounty’” (IK). Many record an account attributed to ʿĀʾishah that after prayers the Prophet would often sit and say, “O God, Thou art Peace, and peace comes from Thee. Blessed art Thou, Possessed of Majesty and Bounty” (IK).