SO THAT YOU MAY BE REMINDED

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Sándor Fodor was an excellent scholar, a caring friend and a genial host. We saw each other rarely, something we both regretted, but when we met it was as if there had been no gap. The conversation just continued, and it is deeply saddening that it will never do so again. It is a minor comfort that his death was sudden, whilst he was looking after his grandchildren. His memory will live on through them, through his work, and through the department that both he and his successors have maintained as a centre of excellence, despite the cruel government cuts to Hungarian higher education.

He always quizzed me about my work on the Qurʾān, and I remember discussing with him the use of laʿalla. The following piece on laʿalla in the Qurʾān fleshes out our discussion.

By the norms of Qurʾānic vocabulary laʿalla is a common word. It occurs 129 times, being rare in early material, and then rising to a peak in later Meccan and early Medinan material before tailing off. One would expect a particle that occurs so many times to be clearly understood. This is not so, mainly, I suspect, because examples have normally been looked at individually rather than as a group. In addition, scholars of Arabic are overwhelmingly predisposed to think of laʿalla as meaning ‘perhaps’, its meaning in the ‘arabiyya.

However, commentators, grammarians and lexicographers have always allowed that in the Qurʾān laʿalla does not bear the single meaning of ‘perhaps’. From time to time they acknowledge in the briefest of comments that it means ‘so that’. Thus Ibn Manẓūr simply says in his secondary explanation of laʿalla in the Lisān al-ʿarab: wa-qad gāʿat fī l-qurʾāni bi-maʿnā kāy. Similarly al-Bayḍāwī glosses laʿalla-kum tāḥilā (12:2) as kāy tāḥamū-hu. For slightly more detailed explanations, with a leavening of theological argument, see, for example, aṭ-Ṭabarī and az-Zamaḥšarī on 2:21 (laʿallakum tattaqūna). In this case, for example, aṭ-Ṭabarī argues that laʿalla cannot here imply any doubt on the part of God about what might happen if the hypocrites and unbelievers were to serve their Lord.

قال أبو جعفر: فان قال لنا قال: فكيف قال جل تنازه: لعلكم تتقون؟ أو لم يكن عالما بما يصير إليه أمرهم إذا هم عدوه وأطيعوه، حتى قال لهم: لعلكم إذا فعلتم ذلك أن تتقوا، فأخرج الخبر عن عاقبة عبادتهم إياه مخرج الشك؟

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qāla ṣnaʿ ī ṭaʿ āman yakfī ḥamsatan laʿalla adʿū n-nabiyya ḥāmisa ḥamsatin fa-ṣanaʾa lahu ṭuʿayman ṭumma atā-hu fa-daʿā-hu

The rarity of non-Qurʾānic examples of laʿalla meaning ‘so that’ and the relative casualness with which the commentators treat the Qurʾānic examples have led to western grammarians and translators usually getting the meaning wrong. In four very brief passages Wright (1979: 1,290b; 2,82c; 2,83a; 2,108c) fails to mention the meaning ‘so that’, though he is interested in the probably erroneous suggestion that laʿalla was sometimes used with a following genitive. Among the translators Sale gives us in 12:2 ‘that peradventure ye might understand’; Palmer ‘haply ye may understand’; Bell ‘mayhap ye will understand’; Arberry ‘haply you will understand’; and more recently Fakhry has ‘that perchance you may understand’ (Paret ‘Vielleicht würdet ihr verständig sein’; R. Simon ‘Talán fölfogjátok’).

The inevitable conclusion is that the haphazard treatment of laʿalla needs correction. The logical step is to examine all the occurrences and their contexts as a group. As soon as one does this, striking and, in my view, significant patterns emerge.

I.

A convenient place to start is the dozen verses in which it is generally agreed that laʿalla has the meaning ‘perhaps’, the precursor to its usage in classical Arabic. These include what is probably the earliest use of the word (80:30) and one of that is quite late (33:63 – a recasting of 42:17). Let us set them out and remove them from further consideration:

1 I exclude the ḥadīth quoted in the Lisān al-ʿarab, s.v.
Perhaps you are forsaking part of what is revealed to you and your breast is straitened by it, because they say, ‘Why has a treasure not been sent down to him or an angel come with him?’

Perhaps you will exhaust yourself with grief, following them up, If they do not believe in this discourse,

When he saw a fire and said to his family, ‘Wait. I have spotted a fire. ’ Perhaps I can bring you a brand from it or find guidance at the fire.’

I do not know. Perhaps it is a trial for you, with enjoyment for a time.’

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2 This verse has links with 28:29.
Perhaps I shall act righteously concerning that which I have forsaken.
No indeed. It is only a word that he says.
Behind them is a barrier until the day they are raised.

26:3

Perhaps you are tormenting yourself because they do not believe.

26:40

[They said], ‘Perhaps we shall follow the sorcerers, if they are the victors.’

28:29

He said to his household, ‘Stay [here].
I have seen a fire.
Perhaps I shall bring you news from it or a brand of fire,

33:63

Say, ‘Knowledge of it is only with God.
What will give you knowledge?
Perhaps the Hour is something near.’

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3 This is a variant of the next verse listed. Both are notable for the use of qarīb (best taken as a noun) after as-sāʿata.
42:17

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّ السَّاعَةَ قَرِيبٌ

What will give you knowledge?
Perhaps the Hour is something near.

65:1

لا تَدْرِي لَعَلَّ اللَّهُ يُحْدِثُ بَعْدَ ذَلِكَ أَمْرًا

You do not know.
It may be that God will cause something [new] to happen after that.

80:3

وَمَا يُدْرِيكَ لَعَلَّهُ يَزَكَّىٰ

What will give you knowledge [about this]?
Perhaps he will purify himself.

The group shows some interesting features that contrast with the rest of the examples. Seven (1-3 & 5-8) come at the beginning of a verse or section of a verse; and the other five (4 and 9-12) follow some form of the verb darā/adrā. From a different angle we should note that they include the only three verses in which laʿalla is followed by a noun: 33:63, 42:17 and 65:1. In those verses in which laʿalla has a pronominal suffix we find 3 instances of the 2 m.s. (1 elsewhere), 2 of the 3 m.s. (1 elsewhere), 3 of the 1 s. (also 3 elsewhere) and one of the 1 p. (not found in the other examples). There are no instances of the 2 m.p. and 3 m.p. pronominal suffixes that dominate the rest of the examples. Though example 8 (28:29) has clear links with example 3 (20:10) uniquely it is followed by another clause with laʿalla having the meaning 'so that':

لَعَلُّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ
so that you may warm yourselves (27:7)

2.

There two other verses in which laʿalla occurs twice. Both are in Sūra 12:46, with laʿalla meaning 'so that' on each occasion:

12:46

لَعَلُّي أَرْجِعُ إِلَى النَّاسِ
so that I may return to the people
12:46

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْلَمُونَ
so that they may know

12:62

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَعْرِفُونَ إِذَا انقَلَبُوا إِلَىٰ أَهْلِهِمْ
so that they may recognize them when they go back to their people

32:21

لَعَلَّهُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ
so that they may return

It is also difficult to keep 20:113 in the main group, as the clause including laʿalla is the penultimate one, due, no doubt, to the assonance:

20:113

وَكَذَلِكَ أَنزَلْنَاهُ قُرْآنًا عَرَبِيًا وَصَرَّفْنَا فِيهِ مِنَ الْوَعِيدِ لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَّقُونَ أَوْ يُحْدِثُ لَهُمْ ذِكْرًا

Thus We have sent it down as a Recitation in Arabic, and We have turned about in it some threats, so that they may fear God or that it may create for them a reminder.

One must also note that in 28:38 laʿall-i is at some remove from the end of the verse:

28:38

فَاجْعَل لِِّي صَرْحًا لَّعَلِِّي أَطَّلِعُ إِلَىٰ إِلَـٰهِ مُوسَىٰ وَإِنِِّي لََِظُنُّهُ مِنَ الْكَاذِبِينَ

and make for me a high building so that I may climb up to see the god of Moses.
I think that he is one of the liars.'

Thus these four instances (13a, 14a, 15, 16) should also be removed from the main group, which still has a healthy total of 113 occurrences. It is to a crucial part of this remaining group that I wish to turn to next.
3.

In quoting some of the examples above, I have simply stated that the meaning of laʿalla is 'so that', but it is now time to prove this. I set out the dozen verses that make the case. In them we find wa-laʿalla-... as the penultimate phrase of the verse, followed by a second or third person pronominal suffix and an imperfect verb with the ending -ūn. The twelve are: 2:150; 2:185; 7:63; 7:164; 7:174; 16:14; 16:44; 28:73; 30:46; 35:12; 40:67; 45:12.

In ten of these (the exceptions are 7:164 and 7:174, see below) the previous section of the verse begins with li- ‘so that’ or even, with further parallelism, wa-li- ‘and so that’. In each case we find wa-laʿalla-... followed by the pronominal suffix –kum/hum and a second or third person plural imperfect indicative verb. In ten of them what happens is clear:

2:150

 فلا تَخْشَوْهُمْ وَاخْشَوْنِى
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ

Do not fear them, but fear Me.
[This is] so that I may complete my blessing to you
and that you may be guided aright.

2:185

 يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمُ الْيُسْرَ
وَلَيُرِيدُ بِكُمُ الْعُسْرَ
وَلِتُكْمِلُوا الْعِدَّةَ وَلِتُكَبِّرُوا اللَّهَ
عَلَىٰ مَا هَدَاكُمْ
وَلَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ

God desires ease for you,
not hardship,
and [He desires] you to complete the period and to magnify God

4 Or, in some cases, just ‘that’.
5 This raises another point I discussed with Professor Fodor. There are various places in the Qurʾān in which li- is used instead of an. Most of the examples are debatable, but this is hardly the case where the verb arāda is followed by li-. In addition to the two examples in 2:185 set out in the main text see 4:26; 5:6a [three times]; 9:55; 33:33; and 75:5.

4:26

 يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ لِيُبَيِِّنَ لَكُمْ
for having guided you
and to be thankful.

Do you wonder that a reminder from your Lord has come to you through a
man from among you,
that he may warn you and that you may protect yourselves
and that you may be given mercy?

and to guide you by the customs of those who were
before you
and to relent towards you
God is Knowing and Wise

God does not wish to place any difficulty on you,
but He wishes to make you pure
and to complete His blessing on you
so that you may be grateful.

God wishes to punish them through them in the life of this world

God wants to remove abomination from you,
O people of the household,
and to cleanse you.

But man wishes to act wrongly before it.
It is He who has subjected the sea,
so that you may eat fresh fish from it
and bring forth ornaments that you may wear.
And you can see the ships cutting through it.
[That is] so that you may seek some of His bounty
and that you may be thankful.⁶

And We have sent down to you the reminder
for you to make clear to men what has been sent down to them
and that they may reflect.

Of His mercy He has made for you night and day
that you may rest therein
and that you may seek some of His bounty
and that you may be thankful.

And of His signs is that He sends the winds as bearers of good tidings
and to give you a taste of His mercy,
and that ships may run at His command,
and that you may seek some of His bounty,
and that you may be grateful.

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⁶ Largely repeated in 35:12 (24), but with slightly different phraseology.
Yet from each you eat fresh meat
and bring forth ornaments to wear.
And you see the ships cleaving through them
so that you may seek some of His bounty
and so that you may be thankful.

then brings you forth as infants,
then [arranges] that you attain maturity
and then that you become old men
‒ though there are some of you who are taken before it ‒
and that you reach a stated term,
and that you may understand

It is God who has subjected the sea for you,
that the ships may run on it by His command
and that you may seek some of His bounty
and that you may be grateful.

In all these examples the assonance of the passage in which they occur is in –
ūn [⁻⁻⁻⁻], the dominant assonance in the Qurʾān. It is, of course, impossible to have
an imperfect verb ending in–ūn after any of the particles li, likay, liʾan or hattā,
‘so that’, all of which have to be followed by a verb in the subjunctive. This would
require –ā rather than –ūn.
What the verses show is *la'alla-kum/hum* is being used in parallel to *li* in meaning, but with its construction allowing the verse to be rounded off with –*ūn* rather than –*ū*.

In two further verses the link between clauses is more oblique and therefore less definitive:

7:164

They said, ‘As an excuse to your Lord, and so that they may be god-fearing

7:174

Thus We set out in detail the signs, so that they might return.

4.

There are three instances in which the assonance is not in –*ūn*. The first two are verses from *Sūra* 20, in which the dominant assonance is in –*ā*:

20:44

Speak to him gently so that he might be reminded or be afraid

20:130

So endure patiently against what they say …. so that you may be pleasing

The third is from *Sūra* 40, in which the dominant assonance is in –*āb*:
وَقَالَ فِرْعَوْنُ يَا هَامَانُ ابْنِ لِي صَرْحًا لَّعَلِّي أَبْلُغُ الَِْسْبَابَ

Pharaoh said, ‘O Hāmān, build me a high building so that I may reach the ropes.’

This leaves a further 96 examples where a verse is rounded off immediately by *laʿalla-kum/hum* and the appropriate plural verb, plus 2 (6:154 and 13:2) where a phrase is interposed between the suffix and the verb. Dundes (2003) and his ilk would say ‘formulae’, but much successful rhetoric has what may be viewed as a formulaic basis.

<table>
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<th>English</th>
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<td>so that you may protect yourselves</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:52</td>
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<td>so that you might be grateful</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:53</td>
<td>لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ</td>
<td>so that you might be guided aright</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:56</td>
<td>لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ</td>
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<tr>
<td>2:63</td>
<td>لَعَلَّكُمْ تَتَّقُونَ</td>
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<td>2:73</td>
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<td>2:179</td>
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<td>2:183</td>
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<td>2:187</td>
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<td>so that you might be grateful</td>
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<td>3:200</td>
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<td>so that you may prosper</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 This verse has some connection with 28:38 (16 above), where *laʿall-i* is used in the middle of the verse.
so that you will be grateful
so that you may prosper
so that you may prosper
so that you may prosper
so that they might be humble
so that they may protect themselves
that they may understand
that they may protect themselves
that you may understand
that you may be reminded
so that you may protect yourselves
so that they might believe in their meeting with their Lord
so that you may receive mercy
so that they may be reminded
so that you might be reminded
so that you may prosper
so that might become humble
so that they may be reminded
so that you may be led aright
so that they may return
so that you may protect yourselves
so that they may reflect
so that you may receive mercy
that you may be thankful
so that you may prosper
so that they may be reminded
so that they may desist
so that they may be careful
so that you may understand
so that they may know
so that they may return
so that you may be convinced that you will meet your Lord
14:25 لَعَلَّهُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may be reminded
14:37 لَعَلَّهُمْ يَشْكُرُونَ so that they may be thankful
16:15 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ so that you may be guided aright
16:78 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَشْكُرُونَ so that you may be thankful
16:81 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَسْلِمُونَ so that you may submit yourselves
16:90 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that you might be reminded
21:13 لَعَلَّكُمْ تُسْأَلُونَ so that you may be questioned
21:31 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَهْتَدُونَ so that you may be guided aright
21:58 لَعَلَّكُمْ يَرْجِعُونَ that they might return to it
21:61 لَعَلَّكُمْ يَتَذَكَّرُونَ that you may be reminded
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22:77 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَلْفَحُونَ that you may prosper
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24:56 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَرْحَمُونَ so that you may receive mercy
24:61 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ that you may understand
26:129 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَحْلُدُونَ so that you may dwell there forever
27:7 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ so that you may warm yourselves
27:46 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَرْحَمُونَ so that you may be treated mercifully
28:29 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَصْطَلُونَ so that you may warm yourselves
28:43 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may be reminded
28:46 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may be reminded
28:51 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may be reminded
30:41 لَعَلَّكُمْ يَزْجَعُونَ so that they may return
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36:74 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَنْصِرُونَ so that they might be helped
39:27 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may be reminded
39:28 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَذَكَّرُونَ so that they may protect themselves
41:26 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَنْظُمُونَ so that you may prevail
43:3 لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ so that you may understand
SO THAT YOU MAY BE REMINDED

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