

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

11th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1447 Hijri

Summary of Verses 13:19-16:89

Sura Ar-Rad (Thunder) (Verses 13:19-43)

Who will achieve the ultimate success in the Sight of Allah? The Quran makes it clear: *"Those who fulfill the Covenant of Allah and fail not in their word, those who join together those things which Allah has commanded to be joined, hold their Lord in awe, and fear the terrible reckoning; Those who patiently persevere, seeking the countenance of their Lord, establish regular prayers, spend out of the gifts We have bestowed for their sustenance secretly and openly, and turn off evil with good: for such, there is the final attainment of the eternal home – gardens of perpetual bliss, they shall enter offspring ..."* (13:20-23)

Examples of things to be combined include faith with action, love of Allah with love of His creation, patience with prayer, gratitude with trust in Allah, good use of time with good deeds, success with humility, and so on. Also note that the verse suggests that righteous parents, spouses, and children may unite in heaven as they were in their earthly lives. This is also implied in verse (52:21).

Allah is the Sustainer of all. To some, He grants life's good things in abundance; to others, He gives in strict measures. It is not a sign of randomness that He gives unequally, but a reflection of His perfect knowledge of His creatures. Everything will be fully accounted for and balanced in the end. *"Allah enlarges, or grants by strict measure, the sustenance which He gives to whomsoever He pleases. The worldly rejoices in the life of this world. But the life of this world is of little comfort compared*

to the Hereafter." (13:26) (This verse, with a subtle variation, also appears in (29:62))

We all seek happiness and fulfillment in our lives, but if our desires go unchecked and our hearts are restless with envy and greed, happiness and contentment will slip away from us. Yet the most dependable source of satisfaction is within every believer's reach. *"He guides to Himself those who turn to Him, those who believe and whose hearts find satisfaction in the remembrance of Allah, for surely, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction."* (13:27-28)

(Notice how these attributes of the believer - (13:20-23) and (13:27-28) - also define the *Muttaqin*, a believer with *Taqwa*.)

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(Sura Ibrahim is a Makki Sura)

Sura Ibrahim (Verses 14:1-52)

What does disbelieving in Allah lead to? *"The example of those who disbelieve in their Lord is that their deeds are as ashes on which the wind blows furiously on a tempestuous day. They are unable to keep a single thing from what they earned. This is straying far, far from the goal."* (14:18)

Those steeped in arrogance who think they are the embodiment of truth because of their numerical dominance and power are warned of the reckoning on the Day of Judgment: *"Do you not see that Allah created the heavens and the earth in Truth? If He wills, He can do away with you and put in your place a new creation. And that is not difficult for Allah. They will all be brought together before Allah, and the weak will say to those who were arrogant, 'Indeed, we were your followers, so can you avail us anything against the punishment of Allah?' They will say, 'If Allah had guided us, we would have guided you. It is all the same for us whether we rage or bear*

these torments with patience. For us, there is no way of escape."

(14:19-21)

At this point, Allah will allow shaitan to deliver a speech that the Quran quotes in full. It is an astonishing speech that reveals the extent of Iblis's malicious work on earth and the pain and regret of those who follow his call to destruction. *"And shaitan will say when the matter has been decided, 'Indeed, it was Allah Who had promised you the Truth. I promised too, but I betrayed you. I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you responded to me. So do not blame me but blame yourselves. I cannot listen to your cries, nor can you listen to mine. Indeed, I reject your former act of associating me with Allah. For wrongdoers, there must be a grievous punishment.'"* (14:22)

As for those who resist shaitan's temptations and follow the Straight Path, there is the reward of paradise: *"And those who believed and did righteous deeds will be admitted to gardens beneath which rivers flow, abiding eternally therein by the permission of their Lord, and their greeting will be, 'Peace!'"* (14:23)

The Quran was revealed to guide all humanity "out of the depths of darkness into the light." This contrast between darkness and light is also emphasized by the parables of "good word" and "evil word."

"A good word is like a good tree. Its root is firmly fixed in the ground and its branches reach up to the sky. It yields its fruit every season by Allah's permission ... And the parable of an evil word is that of an evil tree. It is torn up by the roots from the earth's surface. It has no stability. Allah will establish in strength those who believe, with the Word that stands firm, in this world and in the Hereafter. But Allah will leave to stray those who do wrong ..." (14:24-27)

Tawhid – the absolute oneness, uniqueness, and singularity of Allah - is the foundation of Islam, while idol-worshipping is the basis of rootless lives easily toppled by the slightest breeze.

Prophet Ibrahim (AS) epitomized *Tawhid*. He turned to Allah, and only to Allah, for all his needs. When he decided to briefly settle in the Hijaz in western Arabia, he made this prayer: *“O our Lord! I have settled some of my offspring in a barren valley near Your Sacred House so that they may establish regular Prayer. Lord, make peoples’ hearts incline toward them in kindness and feed them with fruits, so that they may give thanks.”* (14:37)

According to tradition, we can trace this branch of Prophet Ibrahim’s family to Prophet Ismail (AS), his son by his second wife, Hajar, while the other branch can be traced to Ishaq, his son by his first wife, Sarah. His gratitude to Allah knew no bounds. Prayers were his way of expressing gratitude.

“Praise be to Allah who has given me Ismail and Ishaq in my old age. My Lord hears all prayers. O’ my Lord, make me and my descendants steadfast in observing prayer and, our Lord, accept my prayer. O’ our Lord! Grant Your forgiveness unto me, my parents, and all believers, on the Day on which the last Reckoning will be established.” (14:39-41)

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(Sura Hijr is a Makki Sura)

Sura al-Hijr (Rocky Tract) (Verses 15:1-99)

Allah tells us that the Quran will remain pure and in its entirety until the end of time: *“We have, without doubt, sent down the Message and We will assuredly guard it against corruption.”* (15:9)

How were we physically created? *“We created humans from sounding clay, from mud molded into shape, and the Jinn race, We had created before, from the fire of a scorching wind.”* (15:26-27)

While clay and mud are the physical ingredients of humans, Jinns were created from fire. Jinns are a type of living beings and, like humans, they may believe or disbelieve, accept or reject guidance. Scholars believe that they are not merely hidden spirits but beings with a certain amount of free will and, therefore, will be held accountable for their actions like humans.

We are reminded of shaitan's fall from grace and his resolve to lead astray those who do not guard themselves against his whispering. *"I will make all that is evil on earth seem good to them, and I will most certainly tempt them into error, except those who are truly Your servants."* (15:39-40) Allah said, *"The final word on this is that you shall have no power over My servants, except those who are in error and who follow you of their own desires."* (15:42)

The Quran clearly explains how shaitan operates. He has influence over us only if we fail to control our lower selves and stray from guidance; then we start to listen to satanic suggestions. Those who allow themselves to be deceived by him will have no one to blame but themselves for the outcomes. Several Quranic verses detail shaitan's various schemes. By reflecting on them, we can understand shaitan's tactics and stay alert against the one focused on leading us to our ruin.

In the encounter between him and his mysterious guests (also included in verses (11:69-73) and (51:24-32)), Prophet Ibrahim (AS) says at one point, *"And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord but such as go astray?"* (15:56) A hallmark of believers is that they never give in to despair, even in the most difficult circumstances. (Verse (12:87) also asks believers not to despair of Allah's mercy.) Instead, they trust in Allah's infinite mercy to bring relief during and after hardships.

Allah created the heavens and the earth and everything between in perfect proportion and with due rights and responsibilities for all. It is human to

make mistakes but we transcend our limitations when we choose forgiveness over revenge or retaliation. Revenge is easy, magnanimity hard. *"We created the heavens and the earth, and all between them, for just ends. And the Hour is surely coming, so overlook human faults with gracious forgiveness."* (15:85)

Allah honored Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) by revealing His Book to him. The Sura instructs the Prophet, and by extension, all humanity, on how to respond to that honor without succumbing to greed and envy: *"And We have bestowed upon you the Seven Oft-repeated verses and the sublime Quran. So do not turn your eyes longingly toward the worldly benefits we have granted to some who deny the truth, neither grieve over those who refuse to listen to you but spread your wings of tenderness over the believers and say, 'I am he that gives plain warnings.'"* (15:87-89)

(Scholars agree that the seven oft-repeated verses refer to Sura Fatiha, the Opening Chapter that contains the essence of the Quran.)

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(Sura Nahl is a Makki Sura)

Sura Nahl (Bee) (Verses 16:1-89)

To the discerning eye, the signs of the Creator are everywhere: *"It is He who sends down rain from the sky. From it, you drink, and out of it grows the vegetation on which you feed your cattle. With it, He produces for you corn, olives, date palms, grapes, and every kind of fruit. Surely in this is a sign for those who think!"* (16:10-11)

(Ihab Habib Hassan (1925-2015), an Arab American literary theorist and writer, eloquently expressed the interconnectedness of nature this way:

“Unknowingly, we plow the dust of stars, blown about us by the wind, and drink the universe in a glass of rain.”)

Can we ever count the favors Allah blesses us with? No. “... *Never will you be able to count them, for Allah is Oft-Forgiving, Most-Merciful.*” (16:18)

How forgiving and merciful Allah is that He always gives us chance after chance to get on the right path. What we need to ask ourselves is: Are we grateful to Allah for His mercy and blessings?

Believers show gratitude to Allah not only during times of ease but also during times of hardship. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said in a hadith: “The magnitude of Allah’s reward is proportional to the magnitude of the affliction, and surely when Allah loves a people, He afflicts them with tribulation. So whoever is content and pleased with Allah will receive Allah’s good pleasure but whoever is dissatisfied and angry will receive Allah’s anger.” In other words, we must be content with the divine decree after we have done our best, no matter how it may appear to us, if we are to be truly grateful. Sometimes, when going through difficulties, we may ask ourselves: Is Allah testing us, or is He punishing us for our sins? The answer lies in this hadith: If we remain unwavering in our trust in Allah during hardships, He is testing us. Conversely, if we become bitter and accusatory, it’s likely He is punishing. We have enough free will to turn difficulty into ease if we stay steadfast in our trust in Allah.

The arrogant are those who refuse to believe in Tawhid and life after death. “*Your God is One God. As to those who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts refuse to know, and they are arrogant.*” (16:22). These are people who will not only bear their own burdens but also some of the burdens of those they misled. In verses (6:164), (17:15), (35:18), (39:7) and (53:38), we learn that no one can bear the burden of another. In Islam, there is no

doctrine of vicarious atonement. We are all responsible for our sins. However, misleading others is a sin committed by the misleaders who will be held responsible for that sin as well. This does not relieve the misled of the responsibility for their sins. Those who mislead others *"may bear, on the Day of Judgment, their burdens in full, and also the burdens of those without knowledge, whom they misled. Alas, how grievous the burdens they will bear!"* (16:25)

Reference to the Prophet's (s.a.w) migration from Makkah to Madinah, and the general obligation for Muslims to migrate to places where they can freely practice their faith, is clearly stated.

"To those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression, We will assuredly give a goodly home in this world; but truly the reward of the Hereafter will be greater if they only realized it! They are the ones who have patiently endured, and in their Lord they put their trust." (16:41-42)

(This idea also permeates verse (9:100): *"And the first to lead the way, of the Muhajirin (migrants from Makkah to Madinah) and the Ansars (helpers of the migrants in Madinah), and those who followed them in goodness - Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, and He has made ready for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the supreme triumph,"* and verse (29:56): *"O My believing servants! My earth is truly spacious, so worship Me alone."*)

Historical background: When Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) began inviting the Makkans to accept the Monotheistic and Universal Message of Islam, the ruling Quraish tribe felt threatened that their polytheistic beliefs would be swept away. They started subjecting those who followed the Prophet's call to social isolation, economic boycott, persecution, and torture. In the summer

of 621 CE, a group arrived in Makkah from Yathrib (later renamed *Madinah al-Munawwarah* – the Radiant City), an oasis town 200 miles north. They claimed to be on a pilgrimage to Makkah’s pagan shrines but had actually come to meet Muhammad (s.a.w) and pledge their allegiance to him as Muslims. In 622 CE, a larger group of converts from Madinah traveled to Makkah and took an oath to defend Muhammad as their kin. The Prophet immediately encouraged his followers in Makkah to migrate to Madinah in small groups. When the Quraish leaders discovered that the Muslims had started leaving, they plotted to assassinate the Prophet (s.a.w). Being aware of the plan, Muhammad (s.a.w) escaped unnoticed with his companion Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, who later became the first Khalifah. During this risky eight-day journey, they hid for three days in a cave, narrowly escaping capture, and then arrived in Madinah, completing their Hijrah in September 622 CE. This marked the beginning of Islamic history. In 638 CE, the second Khalifah, Umar Ibn al-Khattab al-Faruq, regarded the Hijrah as so significant that he officially recognized 622 CE as the start of the Islamic, or Hijri, calendar. Note that while the Gregorian calendar is solar, with 365 days per year and an extra day in leap years, the Islamic calendar is lunar, averaging 354 days annually. This causes Ramadan to shift through the Western calendar, starting about 11 days earlier each year.

Reviving the earth after it seems dead (often caused by drought and other climate changes driven by human greed and recklessness) through the blessing of rain is a recurring theme in the Quran. *“And Allah sends down rain from the skies and gives therewith life to the earth after its death. Surely in this is a Sign for those who listen. And surely in cattle too will you find an instructive sign. From what is within their bodies, between excretions and blood, We produce, for your drink, milk, pure and agreeable to those who drink it.”* (16:65-66)

The magnificence of Allah's creativity is suggested in the wonder of bees and the honey they produce: *"And your Lord inspired the bees: 'Make your hives in the mountains, on trees, and in human habitations. Then feed from the flower of any fruit you please and follow the ways your Lord has made easy for you.'* From within these bees comes a drink of different colors in which there is healing for humans. In all this, behold, there is a message for those who reflect" (16:68-69)

These two verses offer insight into the wondrous world of bees and their complex community and sophisticated social structure. Allah grants them the ability to choose where to build their hives and where to find flowering fields for pollen and nectar. Bees work together selflessly for the benefit of the colony as they perform their hive tasks, creating a near-perfect symphony of duties and responsibilities. The hexagonal shape of the cells in the bees' honeycomb is a sight to behold. Although there is a division of labor in the hive, specialists can become generalists and vice versa if and when the hive's well-being calls for it. They *"follow the ways your Lord has made easy for you."* This is how honey is created, the result of practicing the ways Allah has taught the bees, fulfilling their destiny. While Allah allows bees the freedom to sip nectar from any flower, bees are also endowed with the ability to search for flowers that produce more nutrient-rich nectar to make higher-quality honey. In this miraculous substance, redolent of sunlight and wildflowers, Allah has placed *shifa*, or medicinal healing, giving us yet another reason to be grateful to Him.

The temptations of worldly comfort and pleasures make us forget about the reality of the Hereafter. That is why the Quran repeatedly reminds us that the Hour of Reckoning is not a distant event but can happen at any moment. The wisest choice for us is to stay spiritually aware and avoid all forms of sin. *"To Allah belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and the matter of the Hour of Judgment is as the twinkling of an eye, or even*

quicker, for Allah has power over all things.” (17:77) (This theme is also repeated in 10:45 and 30:55)

We should always thank Allah for the blessings He has given us. He reminds us in four Quranic verses, with some slight variations, to be grateful for our hearing, sight, heart, and mind.

“And Allah has brought you out from the wombs of your mothers not knowing a thing, and He made for you hearing and sight and intellect and affections, that you may be grateful.” (16:78)

(The other three verses are: *“And it is He who produced for you hearing and sight and hearts; little are you grateful.” (23:78) “Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His created soul and made for you hearing and sight and hearts; little are you grateful.” (32:9) “Say, ‘It is He who has created you and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful.’” (67:23))*