بِسْمِ اللهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِيْمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

14th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1447 Hijri

Summary of Verses 21:51-24:20

Sura Ta-Ha (21:51-135)

Reason and intelligence can reveal ignorance and error. It was the same with Prophet Ibrahim (AS). In his youth, he once destroyed some of the polytheists' stone idols, leaving the largest one intact. When asked if he was responsible, he replied*, "No, it was done by their chief idol! Ask it if it can speak!*" (21:63). The polytheists were confounded with shame: "*You know full well these idols do not speak!*" (21:65). It was all Ibrahim (AS) needed to prove his point. "*Do you then worship, besides Allah, things that can neither be of any good to you nor do you harm?*" (21:66). Enraged, the idol-worshipers threw Ibrahim into the fire, but Allah saved him: "*We said, O Fire! Be cool and a means of safety for Ibrahim!*" (21:69)

The Sura narrates the story of Prophet Lut, Prophet Ibrahim's nephew and his helper in fighting the disbelievers, along with the stories of Prophets Noah, Daud, and Sulaiman.

Daud and Sulaiman differed in judgment in the case of the straying sheep: "*And remember Daud and Sulaiman, when they gave judgment in the matter of the field into which the sheep of certain people had strayed by night, We did witness their judgment. To Sulaiman, We inspired the right understanding of the matter. To each of them, We gave Judgment and Knowledge …*" (21:78-79)

According to scholars, King Daud awarded the owner of the field all the stray sheep as compensation for the damage to his field. His son, Sulaiman, a boy

of only eleven, argued that the field's owner should not take the sheep unconditionally but keep them long enough to recover his loss and then return the sheep to the shepherd. Daud recognized the wisdom in his son's argument, and Sulaiman demonstrated the wisdom to offer a better judgment, both blessings from Allah.

The moral of the story is that healthy and often necessary differences of opinion are valuable. Regardless of who is right or wrong, both sides should be credited for their efforts, as long as they sincerely seek justice and thank Allah for His blessings. Our tendency to see differences of opinion as threats and causes of division goes against the spirit of the Quran. Remember the Prophet's (s.a.w) saying: "The difference of opinion among the learned in my community is a sign of Allah's blessings."

Prophet Ayub, who had lost almost all his wealth and power and was afflicted with a debilitating illness, but who relied only on Allah for help throughout his ordeal, was rewarded with far more than he had lost: "*And remember Ayub who cried to his Lord, 'I am sorely afflicted, but You are the Most Merciful of all.' So We listened to him. We removed his affliction. And We restored his people to him, and doubled their number, a blessing from Us and a reminder for all who serve Us.*" (21:83-84)

(We should recite these verses when suffering from serious illnesses so that, by Allah's Will, pain can give way to ease.)

We learn from the example of Yunus (RA) that no one can escape accountability, including prophets. We recite the short and powerful Dua (*La Ilaha Illa Anta Subhanaka Inni Kuntu Minaz Za'limeen*) that Yunus (RA) invoked from the belly of the whale to acknowledge our failings and to plead for Allah's mercy. "*And mention the man of the fish when he stormed off from his city in a rage, thinking We would not restrain him. And he called out from within the darkness, 'There is no deity except You; exalted are You.*

Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.' So We responded to him and saved him from distress. And thus do We save the believers." (21:87-88)

Prophet Yunus remembered Allah during good times, but when he was helpless inside the darkness of the whale, he sincerely prayed to Allah for rescue. Allah listened and saved him. The lesson? If we remember Allah in times of prosperity, Allah will remember us during hardships and lift us from the ordeals that come our way.

Other prophets—Isma'il, Idris, Zul-Kifl, Yunus, Zakaria, and Yahya—also endured various trials but never wavered in their faith. Trials and tribulations are meant to test our faith and resilience. Those who patiently persevere and trust only in Allah are the blessed and successful.

Stories of the prophets find their culmination in the life story of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), about whom Allah says, "*We sent you not but as a mercy to the worlds.*" (21:107) Notice the negation followed by affirmation, "not" followed by "but," to emphasize that the Prophet (s.a.w) was a mercy for the entire humanity.

However, Allah also informs the Prophet (s.a.w) that he has only to convey the message and not to fret over the effect of the message on those receiving the message. He tells the prophet to "*Say: 'What has come to me by inspiration is that your God is One God. Will you, therefore, bow to His will?' But if they turn back, say: 'I have proclaimed the Message to you all and in Truth. But I know not whether that which you are promised is near or far.'*" (21:108-109)

Allah is instructing the Prophet to clarify to Muslims that it is Allah alone who determines when the Good News and the Warning of the Day of Judgment will occur.

Allah tells Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) that believers should be grateful that He saves them from the temptations of the fleeting worldly life – wealth, power, pleasure – which the weak of faith and disbelievers often enjoy. *"I know not but that it may be a trial for you, and a grant of worldly livelihood to you for a time. Say, 'O my Lord! Judge You in truth! Our Lord the Most Gracious is the One whose help should be sought against the blasphemies you (the disbelievers) utter!'"* (21:111-112)

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(Sura Hajj is a Madani Sura)
Sura Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage) (Verses 22:1-78)
The Day of Judgment is unavoidable. Anyone questioning resurrection is presented with this logical argument to consider: "*O humankind! If you doubt resurrection, consider that We created you out of dust, then out of sperm, then out of a clot, then from a lump of flesh, developed and not fully developed, so that We may manifest to you Our power …", (22:5),* followed by, "*That is because Allah is the ultimate truth. It is He who resurrects the dead. It is He who has power over all things. The hour of resurrection is sure to come. And God will raise the dead in their graves to life again.*" (22:6-7)

The message is clear: Life is not determined by blind chance. It is suffused with meaning and purpose. Death is not the end but the beginning of eternal life in the Hereafter.

Some people connect their belief in the Creator to what happens to them here on Earth. If they experience prosperity, they believe in Allah, but if they face adversity, they rebel. "*There are among men some who serve Allah half-heartedly. If good befalls them, they are content but if a trial comes to them, they turn on their faces. They lose both this world and the Hereafter. That is a loss for all to see!*" (22:11)

Who are the successful ones? "… *those whose hearts are filled with awe when Allah is mentioned, who show patient perseverance over their afflictions, keep up regular prayer, and spend in charity out of what We have given them.*" (22:35)

The Sura outlines the main rites of Hajj, the pilgrimage to Makkah, and the celebration of *Tawhid* it symbolizes, as taught by Prophet Ibrahim (AS). An important ritual during Hajj is the slaughter of animals on the tenth day. of *Dhul-Hijjah*. But for proper perspective on this ritual, the Quran says, "*It is neither their meat nor their blood that reaches Allah. It is your piety that reaches Him* ..." (22:37)

"*To those against whom war is waged, permission is given to fight because they are wronged, and surely, Allah is Most Powerful in aiding them.*" (22:39) This was the first verse in the Quran that gave permission to Muslims to defend themselves if attacked. It was revealed in the month of *Dhul-Hijjah*, one year after Hijrah. Before that, for 13 years, Muslims were not allowed to defend themselves when attacked. Notice the passive voice implied in the word "*yuqataluna*," (against whom war is waged). Wars must be defensive by nature in Islam.

Who are the wronged and the oppressed? "*They are those who have been expelled from their homes in violation of their right, for no reason other than that they say, "Our Lord is Allah." Had not Allah checked one set of people by another, monasteries, churches, synagogues and mosques in which the name of Allah is recited in abundant measure would have been pulled down. Allah will certainly aid those who aid His cause, for surely Allah is full of strength, Exalted in Might.*" (22:40)

Verse (22:40) clearly states that Muslims are required to defend and protect the religious buildings of other faiths, not only their own.

The haughty, powerful, and the sybarites who tend to ascend in life through a mix of cunning, cruelty, arrogance, greed, injustice, and violence should learn from the fate of tyrants, demagogues, and the wealthy before them: "*How many populations have We destroyed who were given to wrong doing? They tumbled down their roofs. And how many wells are lying idle and neglected, and castles lofty and well-built? Do they not travel through the land so that their hearts may thus learn wisdom, and their ears may thus learn to hear? Truly it is not the eyes that are blind but the hearts which are in their breasts.*" (22:45-46)

Successful are "*those who believe and work righteousness. For them is forgiveness and sustenance most generous.*" (22:50)

Allah tests us through our reactions to evil suggestions and temptations from Shaitan. Those with diseases of the heart fall prey to them, but those strong in faith have their faith strengthened even more, inspiring greater determination to follow the Will of Allah. "… *He (Allah) may make the suggestions thrown in by Shaitan a trial for those in whose hearts is a disease and who are hardened of heart. Surely the wrongdoers are in a schism far from the truth.*" (22:53)

We must avoid arguing over details of rites and ceremonies: "*To every people We have appointed rites which they must follow. Let them not dispute with you on the matter* …" (22:67)

Allah is Omniscient. His knowledge is perfect, complete and comprehensive. From Him flows all knowledge, insight and intelligence. "*Know you not that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Indeed, it is all in a record, and that is easy for Allah.*" (22:70) (This truth repeats also in (27:75), (36:12) and (57:22).

(Humankind's limited knowledge is suggested in Shakespeare's Hamlet: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,/Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.)

Sometimes we are so enamored of our science, technology (especially the current fixation with artificial intelligence) and the power of the human mind that we think there is no limit to what we can do: "… *Those on whom, besides Allah, you call, cannot create even a fly, if they all met together for the purpose! And if the fly should snatch away anything from them, they would have no power to release it from the fly. Feeble are those who petition and those whom they petition.*" (22:73)

Our purpose in life is summarized in the Sura's concluding verses: "*Believers, bow down and prostrate yourselves, worship your Lord and do good deeds so that you achieve success. Fight for the cause of Allah with all the striving due to Him. He has chosen you and has imposed no difficulties on you in religion. It is the religion of your father Ibrahim. It is He Who has named you Muslims, both before and in this Revelation, that the Messenger may be a witness for you, and you be witnesses for mankind. So establish regular Prayer, give regular charity and hold fast to Allah. He is your Protector, the best to protect and the best to help.*" (22:77-78)

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(Sura Muminun is a Makki Sura)
Sura Al-Muminun (The Believers) (Verses 23:1-118)
What constitutes success? The Quran clarifies: "*Successful indeed are the believers who humble themselves in their prayers, who avoid vain talk, who are active in deeds of charity, who are mindful of their chastity … who faithfully observe their trusts and pledges, who guard their prayers from all worldly intents … They will inherit the paradise and therein shall they abide.*" (23:1-11)

These verses outline seven qualities of a believer: 1) humility, especially in prayers where the heart is focused on Allah, 2) avoiding vanity, 3) giving charity, 4) practicing purity in intimate relations, 5) maintaining fidelity to trusts, 6) keeping promises, and 7) being motivated by a sincere desire to draw closer to Allah, particularly through prayer.

Notice the emphasis on the quality of prayers, mentioned twice in these verses. Prayers must be kept free from all worldly interests and distractions. How often do our minds wander during prayer, whether alone or in a congregation? Still, this is what we must work toward: to achieve *khushu* (humility) in our prayers. Isn't Ramadan the perfect time to improve the quality of our prayers?

Halfway through the Sura, the same ideas are reiterated with some variations: "*Surely those who live in awe of their Lord, who believe in the Signs of their Lord, who join not in worship partners with their Lord, and who give charity with their hearts in awe of their Lord, knowing that they will return to their Lord. They hasten in every good work, and they will be successful.*" (23:57-61)

The two passages complement each other and provide a full description of the character of believers. Believers are filled with reverence for their Lord and experience a trembling in their hearts, wondering if their charity or purity of heart will be enough for acceptance by Allah. This fluctuation between fear and hope occurs because they are certain of life after death when they will stand before His Judgment. They worry about their worthiness but also hope that Allah will accept their efforts, even if imperfect.

The materialist mindset that denies the Hereafter is identified: "*There is nothing but our life in this world! We shall die and we live, but we shall never be raised up again*." (23:37) (This theme is repeated in 45:24.) The

implication is clear: We cannot seek spiritual goals through material means and ends.

When life's tribulations threaten to overwhelm us and we begin to despair, we are again reminded that "*On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear. Before Us is a record which speaks the truth. They will never be wronged.*" (23:62)

The assurance that no soul will be burdened with more than it can bear appears six times in the Quran for emphasis: 2:233, 2:286, 6:152, 7:42, 23:62, and 65:7. The record also shows what each soul has done and what is owed to it in justice. The worst will receive complete justice, but as a sign of Allah's infinite mercy, the best will receive far more than their due, a theme also repeated in verse 28:84.

In our tendency to overlook the gifts Allah has blessed us with, we become ungrateful, something we must avoid. We should thank Allah for every breath we take. "*It is He Who has created for you the faculties of hearing, sight, feeling and understanding. Little thanks it is you give!*" (23:78)

Of the five senses - hearing, sight, touch, smell, and taste - only two, hearing and sight, are mentioned here. But when we include feeling and understanding, which encompass both the heart and the mind, they not only cover all five senses but go beyond them.

Believers are also exhorted to "*repel evil with that which is best*." (23:96) As fallible human beings, we may give in to revenge when wronged, but Allah's command is clear: *Repel the bad with the good*. This command is considered so important for the well-being of our soul and society at large that it is reiterated with subtle variations in verses (28:54), (39:18), (39:55) and (41:34)

Two scenes involving wrongdoers are shown in the Sura: one at the moment of death and the other on Judgment Day.

On the former: "*When the moment of death arrives for a wrongdoer, he will say, 'Lord, let me go back, that I may do good back there!' By no means! These are just words he utters. Before them is a Partition till the Day they are raised up.*" (23:99-100)

Scholars suggest that the partition refers to *Barzakh*, a place or state where people exist after death and before Judgment. The repeated scene of sinners pleading with Allah to go back and undo their wrongdoings, which is denied, appears ten times in the Quran.

Once resurrection begins, "… *those whose balance of good deeds is heavy, they will be successful. But those whose balance is light, they will be those who have lost their souls* …" (23:102-103)

On the latter: "*Were not My revelations recited to you, and did you not deny them? They would say: 'Our Lord, we were betrayed by our misfortune; we had gone astray. Lord, deliver us from hell. If we return to our bad ways, we shall indeed be transgressors.'*" (23:105-107)

Believers never tire of asking Allah for forgiveness: "*So say: 'O my Lord! Grant us Your forgiveness and mercy, for You are the best of those Who show mercy!'*" (23:118)

This is the correct mindset of a believer: O Allah, I recognize my shortcomings. Deep down, I know what I need to do to please You. Since I haven't achieved it yet, I will continue striving to please You for as long as I live.

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(Sura Nur is a Madani Sura)

Sura An-Nur (The Light): (Verses 24:1-20)

The solemn opening verse underscores the seriousness of injunctions regarding the relationship between the sexes (stated in the verses that follow the opening verse): "*This is a Sura which We have bestowed from on high, and which We have laid down in plain terms, and in it, We have bestowed messages that are clear, so that you may take heed.*" (24:1)

The goal of these social and personal rules and commandments is to preserve the integrity and decency of Muslims' social life and to safeguard society from corruption and degradation.

An incident involving Hadhrat Ayesha (RA) demonstrates universal principles of the tongue's honesty and purity. These principles are: a) If others say something evil, we should not be tempted to repeat it or believe it. Doing so would shame the tongue. b) If we suspect something without certain knowledge, we should not spread or express it. c) Others may think it's a small matter to accuse someone falsely, especially a pious woman, but to Allah, it is a serious issue. "*Behold, you received it on your tongues and said out of your mouths things of which you had no knowledge, and you thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of Allah.*" (24:15)

It thus follows that backbiting, spreading rumors, and scandalous tales undermine the foundation of a healthy society, and the punishment, consequently, will be severe: "*Those who enjoy seeing scandals circulate among believers will have a grievous chastisement in this life and in the Hereafter. Allah knows, and you know not.*" (24:19)

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