

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

Tonight marks the 21st night of Ramadan, 1446H. It could be the Night of Power: "*Lailatul Qadr is better than a thousand months*" (97:3). Scholars agree that *Lailatul Qadr* most likely occurs during the last 10 nights of Ramadan, with the odd nights being more probable (21, 23, 25, 27, 29). We are certain to find *Lailatul Qadr* if we dedicate the last 10 nights to intense prayer, supplication, and Quran recitation. In the seeking lies the blessing. When Aisha (RA) asked the Prophet (s.a.w) what to recite if one finds *Lailatul Qadr*, he said: "Say as often as you can, '*Allahumma Innaka 'Afuwwun Tuhibbul 'Afa'wa Fa'fu 'Anni.*'" (O Allah, surely You are forgiving, You love to forgive, so forgive me.)

21st Taraweeh, Ramadan 1447 Hijri
Summary of Verses 44:1-49:18

(Sura Dukhan is a Makki Sura)

Sura Ad-Dukhan (Smoke) (Verses 44:1-59)

The Sura opens with Allah testifying that the Quran is "*the clear Book sent down on a blessed night.*" (44:3) Scholars agree that the blessed night refers to the "Night of Power" (*Lailatul Qadr*) in the month of Ramadan.

It is helpful to look at the revelation of the Quran from a broad perspective by examining relevant verses in multiple Suras, including (44:3). The revelation occurred over about 23 years, with 13 years in Makkah and 10 years in Madinah afterward. It began on the night of *Lailatul Qadr* in 610 CE with the first five verses from Sura Al-Alaq (96:1-5), when the Prophet (s.a.w) was 40, and continued until his death in Madinah in 632 CE at age 62. "*Indeed, We sent it down (the Quran) in the Night of Power.*" (97:1)
"*The month of Ramadan is that in which was revealed the Quran, a guidance*

for the people and clear proofs of guidance and criterion ..." (2:185) The original revelation is with Allah: *"And indeed it is, in the Mother of the Book with Us, exalted and full of wisdom."* (43:4) *"Indeed, this Quran is glorious, in a Book well-guarded."* (56:77-78) *"... This is a glorious Quran, in a tablet well-guarded."* (85:21-22) *"... and with Us is a Book, preserved."* (50:4)

Allah assigned the angel Jibrail (*Ruhul Qudus* or Holy Spirit) to deliver the verses of the Quran to Prophet Muhammad. (s.a.w): *"Say, 'The holy spirit has brought it down from your Lord with the truth to reassure the believers, and as a guide and good news for those who submit to Allah."* (16:102) *"This is certainly a revelation from the Lord of all worlds, which the trustworthy spirit brought down into your heart O Prophet, so that you may be one of the warners."* (26:192- 194)

Allah affirms that the Book is from Him: *"The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Almighty, the All-Wise."* (39:1) The Quran was sent down in stages: *"It is a Quran We have revealed in stages so that you may recite it to people at intervals. And We have sent it down in successive revelations."* (17:106) Allah promises to safeguard the Quran: *"It is certainly upon Us to make you memorize and recite it. So once We have recited a revelation, follow its recitation closely. Then it is surely upon Us to make it clear to you."* (75:17-19) Allah brings out His servants from darkness to light by the Quran: *"He is the One Who sends down clear revelations to His servant to bring you out of darkness and into light. For indeed Allah is Ever Gracious and Most Merciful to you."* (57:9)

The Quran was sent by Allah to humanity both as a warning and as mercy. It emphasizes the balance between fearing Divine Justice and trusting in Divine Mercy. Some scholars compare hope and fear to the two wings that give birds strength, balance, and direction during flight.

People throughout history have mocked the idea of life after death. They are no different from the Quraish who said, *"There is nothing beyond our first death, and we shall not be raised again. Bring back our forefathers if what you say is true!"* (44:35-36)

Allah will resurrect all people from death at a time of His choosing. Death is the gateway to the Hereafter, marking the transition from the finite to the infinite. The Sura affirms: *"We did not create the heavens and the earth and all that lies between for idle sport. We created them in truth though most do not know. The Day of Judgment is a time appointed for all ..."* (44:39-40)

For believers blessed with paradise in the Hereafter, however, *"Nor will they taste death there, except the first death, and He will preserve them from the chastisement of the blazing fire. As a bounty from your Lord, that will be the supreme achievement"* (44:56-57)

We cannot hope to achieve ultimate salvation through our efforts alone. While our striving is essential, it is Allah's mercy that always guides us, keeping us flawed human beings on the Straight Path. Allah's mercy is the foundation upon which eternal joy is built.

*

(Sura Jathiya is a Makki Sura)

Sura al-Jathiya (Kneeling Down) (Verses 45:1-37)

The signs and wonders of the natural world speak to the power and wisdom of Allah. *"The revelation of the Book is from Allah, the Almighty, the Wise. Surely in the heavens and the earth, there are signs for believers. And in your own creation and in the beasts that are scattered far and near, there are signs for those endowed with inner certainty. And in the alternation of night and day, and in the sustenance that Allah sends down from the sky*

with which He revives the earth after its death, and in the change of winds, there are signs for those who understand.” (45:2-5)

We often take the earth's day and night cycles for granted, but those with discerning vision can see Allah's glory within them. The phrase “*alternation of night and day*” and its variations appear in these Quranic verses: 2:164, 3:27, 3:190, 7:54, 10:6, 10:67, 13:3, 16:12, 17:12, 22:61, 23:80, 24:44, 25:62, 27:86, 31:29, 35:13, 39:5, 40:61, 41:37, and 45:5. The Quran encourages believers to deepen their faith by carefully observing the heavens and the natural world. When we read the Quran, its verses should resonate in our hearts. Once they do, our spiritual and physical horizons expand, enabling us to see and experience the Signs of Allah's creativity in the universe around us. This is unlikely to happen if we are addicted to the small screens of our so-called smart devices and waste time in frivolous pursuits of meaningless information and entertainment.

Even after people reject His signs, Allah delays punishment to give them more time to reflect and reconsider to redeem themselves. “*Tell the believers to forgive those who do not believe in Allah's punishment. It is for Him to reward people according to what they have earned. Those who do what is right do so for their own good, and those who do wrong do so at their own peril, and to your Lord shall you all return.*” (45:14-15)

The Arabic word “*Sharia*”, which means “the Way,” occurs just once in the Quran: “*Now We have set you (O Prophet) on a sharia (the Way). So follow it, and do not follow the desires of those who do not know the truth.*” (45:18). The term also has a cognate (the same linguistic derivation of “*sharia*”) in “*shir'atan*” in (5:48) where Allah tells Jews, Christians and Muslims that “*We have assigned a shir'atan and a path to each of you.*”

The objectives of *Sharia* are to protect human rights related to religion, life, property, lineage, intellect, and freedom. They are not about protecting the state, security, ruler, authority, or perpetuity—concepts that, unfortunately, are often valued more than human rights in many parts of the world today, including the Muslim world. When we casually talk about ‘following’ or ‘implementing’ the *Sharia*, what we really mean is *Fiqh* (jurisprudence), which is the human interpretation of *Sharia*. The two are different.

The disbelievers and the oppressors protect one another but Allah is the Protector of those who put their trust in Allah. “... *it is only the wrongdoers that stand as protectors, one to another. But Allah is the Protector of those who put their trust in Him.*” (45:19)

Those who commit evil acts will never attain the status of those who believe and perform good deeds. If the wicked prosper in this life, they will face their consequences in the Hereafter. If the righteous suffer here, they will find comfort and solace in the Hereafter. The physical death of the righteous will lead them to eternal bliss, while the death of the wicked will result in a life of misery. “*What! Do those who do evil deeds think that We shall make them as equal to those who believe and do righteous deeds, that equal will be their life and death? Bad is the judgment they make!*” (45:21)

What will happen to the wicked and the arrogant, those who boasted about the exclusive groups they belonged to in this life and the unjust power they wielded and exercised? They will be forced to submit and bow before the truth. “... *You will see every nation kneeling down. Every nation will be called to its record ...*” (45:28)

Those who believed and did good deeds will be rewarded beyond measure. “*Then, as to those who believed and did good deeds, their Lord will admit them to His mercy. That will be the manifest triumph.*” (45: 30) In contrast,

"... as to those who rejected Allah, to them will be said, 'Were not Our signs rehearsed to you? But you were arrogant, and were a people given to sin.'" (45:31) "Then will appear to them the evil of what they did, and they will be completely encircled by what they used to mock at." (45:33)

What should believers recite as a continuous reminder of Allah's mercy and blessings? *"And praise be to Allah, Lord of the heaven and Lord of the earth, Lord and Cherisher of all the worlds! And unto Him alone belongs the majesty in the heaven and the earth, and He is exalted in power, full of wisdom." (45:36-37)*

*

(Sura Ahqaf is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Ahqaf (The Dunes) (Verses 46:1-35)

Allah's creation is imbued with Truth and Purpose: *"We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between in Truth and for a purpose ..."* (46:3). *"Haqq"* i- respecting and honoring this sacred right that Allah's creation has over us - is an essential part of *Tawhid*. Extending this right to others - whether a spouse, a child, someone who doesn't share our beliefs, any sentient being, or objects like rivers and mountains embodies the core of *Tawhid*. When we fulfill the rights others have on us, we affirm the Oneness of Allah through our words and actions.

"We created the heavens and the earth and everything in between in Truth and for a purpose ..." occurs 10 times in the Quran with small but profound variations.

The Quran is the direct revelation from Allah, the Lord of all creations. The disbelievers claimed otherwise. The Quran clarifies: *"Or do they say that he (Muhammad) has conceived it? Say: 'If I had invented it, then there is*

nothing you can do to protect me from Allah. He knows best what you say. He is sufficient witness between me and you ..." (46:8)

Allah further instructs the Prophet (s.a.w) to *"Say: 'I am not the first messenger, nor do I know what will be done with me or with you. I only follow what is being revealed to me, and my only task is to give clear warnings.'"* (46:9)

Kindness to parents is a fundamental aspect of Islam. *"We have enjoined on man kindness to his parents. In pain did his mother bear him, and in pain did she give him birth. The carrying of the child to his weaning is a period of thirty months."* (46:15)

On reaching adulthood, the child makes a heartfelt prayer: *"At length, when he reaches the age of full strength and attains forty years, he says, 'O my Lord! Grant me that I may be grateful for Your favor which You have bestowed upon me, and upon both my parents and that I may do good work that will please You. Bless my offspring as I turn to You and surrender myself.'"* (46:15)

The Quran emphasizes kindness to parents in verses 17:23-24, 19:14, 19:32, and 31:14. Clearly, both genders are included when mentioning a child. If one or both of our parents are still alive by the grace of Allah, Ramadan should be the month we commit to supporting and caring for them in any way we can. If one or both of our parents have passed away, we make supplications for them and ask Allah to forgive them and grant them *Jannatul Firdous*.

Allah says of these believers: *"Such are they from whom We shall accept the best of their deeds and pass by their ill deeds ..."* (46:16)

Reflect for a moment on this profound promise: If we are sincere in our words and actions, Allah will judge us based on our best efforts while overlooking our shortcomings. Can anything be more reassuring for the believer?

Unless we use our gifts of hearing, seeing, heart, and intellect for good purposes and show gratitude to the Creator, who blessed us with these gifts, they will be useless. The people of 'Ad and their successors, the Thamud, prospered in art, architecture, culture, and observational and experimental sciences, but they misused their gifts through ingratitude to Allah and were reduced to dust. *"And We had firmly established them (the 'Ad and the Thamud) in prosperity and power ... and We had endowed them with the faculties of hearing, seeing, heart, and intellect. But of no profit to them were the faculties of hearing, sight, heart, and intellect when they kept rejecting the Signs of Allah ..."* (46:26)

The etiquette of listening to the Quran when it is recited is made clear through the example of a group of jinns: *"Behold, We turned toward you a company of jinns quietly listening to the Quran. When they stood in the presence thereof, they said, 'Listen in silence!' When the reading was finished, they returned to their people, to warn them. They said, 'O our people! We have heard a Book revealed after Musa, confirming what came before it. It guides to the Truth and the Straight Path.'"* (46:29-30) (Note that this event is narrated in more detail in Sura Jinn (72:1-19))

The clear message is: When the Quran is recited, we should listen to it quietly and respectfully. Playing Quranic recitations on various devices in the background during everyday activities contradicts this etiquette.

*

(Sura Muhammad is a Madani Sura)

Sura Muhammad (Verses 47:1-38)

The Sura dates from around the first year of Hijrah, when the small Muslim community faced a grave threat from pagan invasions originating from Makkah. A message of hope is meant to uplift the hearts of believers: *"... those who believe and perform deeds of righteousness and believe in the revelation sent down to Muhammad – for it is the Truth from their Lord – He will remove from them their afflictions and improve their condition."* (47:2)

(Note that Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is mentioned by the name "Muhammad" 4 times in the Quran: (3:144), (33:40), (47:2), and (48:29). Another variation of his name, "Ahmad," is mentioned once in verse 61:6).

The Quran asks: *"Is then one who is on a clear path from his Lord no better than one to whom the evil of his conduct seems pleasing, and such as follow their own lusts?"* (47:14)

The answer: Believers who have proven themselves with words and deeds will relax in gardens of eternal delight and enjoy *"forgiveness from their Lord"* (47:15), which will remove all that was wanting in their earthly lives.

Spiritual progress makes further spiritual progress easier and makes 'Taqwa' that much more attainable. *"But those who receive guidance, He increases their guidance and bestows on them their piety and restraint."* (47:17)

The guided ones seek Allah's forgiveness for their frailty and achieve consistency between how they conduct themselves at home and outside of the home: *"Know, therefore, that there is no god but Allah and ask forgiveness for your fault, and for the men and women who believe, Allah knows how you move about and how you dwell in your homes."* (47:19)

The command to understand that there is no God but Allah reminds us that we cannot simply rely on the words of others about this fundamental truth. We must use our own intellect and senses as best as we can to make this conviction resonate in our hearts. Derived knowledge will not work or last.

The Surah highlights that Allah will assess the strength of our faith throughout our lives. Words alone are not sufficient. It must be demonstrated, especially during times of hardship and through our daily challenges: *"And we shall try you until We test those among you who strive their utmost and persevere in patience, and We shall try your reported mettle."* (47:31)

It also emphasizes the importance of courage among believers in the fight against those who hinder people from following the path of Allah. Believers are encouraged to spend for the cause: *"Behold, you are invited to spend of your substance in the Way of Allah. But among you some are miserly. Those who are miserly are so at the expense of their own souls. Allah is free of all wants, and it is you that are needy. If you turn back from the path, He will substitute you with other people and they will not be like you!"* (47:38)

A remarkable aspect of this Sura is that, of its 38 verses, all but two end with *"lahum, hum, kum, makum, Rahun, nahum, lakum, rakum, and nakum."* The significance of the alliteration and the cadence is known only to Allah, but a believer's heart resonates with the spirituality and the awe that the verses convey when reciting the Divine words.

*

Sura Fath is a Madani Sura. Sura Al-Fath (The Victory) (Verses 48:1-29) (Context: Toward the end of the 6th year of Hijrah, in the month of Dhul-Qadh, one of the four sacred months during which fighting was prohibited—

especially around the holy city of Makkah—the Prophet (s.a.w) and about 1400 to 1500 of his followers from Madinah marched toward Makkah to perform *Umrah*, the Lesser Pilgrimage. They were unarmed and dressed in *ihram*, the pilgrim’s garb. The Quraish decided to prevent the pilgrims from performing the Umrah, violating the ancient Arabian tradition. A 200-strong detachment was sent to intercept the Prophet, while armed men took positions around Makkah. The Prophet and his followers camped on the plain of Hdaybiyah, on the western edge of Makkah, where they stayed for several days. Fighting was not an option; the Muslims had come not to fight, but they pledged their allegiance to the Prophet (s.a.w) to defend themselves if attacked. The pledge was made under an acacia tree, referred to in the Quran as ‘*the tree*’ (48:18). The Makkans agreed to a truce. A treaty known as the Treaty of Hdaybiyah was signed, though its terms favored the Makkans and many Muslims were upset. Still, the Prophet (s.a.w) agreed to honor the treaty, especially because one of its conditions was that he and his followers would be allowed to perform *Umrah* the following year. This was one of the Prophet’s most farsighted decisions: He sacrificed short-term gains for what later became a long-term victory, demonstrating he was not just a tactician but a master strategist. Within two years, under his leadership, Muslims marched into Makkah with almost no resistance, removing the idols from the Ka’aba. The moral victory at Hdaybiyah set the stage for the Muslims’ eventual conquest of the Arabian Peninsula. Scholars believe that Sura al-Fath was revealed to the Prophet (s.a.w) during his return march from Hdaybiyah to Madinah.

On the way back to Madinah after the Treaty, many Muslims were nursing deep disappointment for not conquering Makkah. But Allah revealed this Sura to His prophet, full of hope and promise: “*We have given you a glorious victory, so that Allah may forgive you your past and future sins and*

complete His blessings upon you and lead you unto a straight path, and so that He may grant you a decisive victory.” (48:1-3)

The Prophet’s genius in withdrawing from Hdaybiyah marked the beginning of a major victory for Muslims. In the 8th year of the Hijrah, Makkah fell to Muslims. The Quran says, *“Allah has fulfilled His messenger’s vision. You shall enter the sacred mosque, if Allah wills, with minds secure, heads shaved or cropped, and without any fear. Allah knew what you did not know, and He granted you a speedy victory.” (48:27)*

The closing verse of the Sura describes the qualities of a successful Muslim society: *“Muhammad is the messenger of Allah, and those who are with him are strong against unbelievers but kind toward each other. You will see them bow and prostrate themselves in prayer, seeking Grace from Allah and His good pleasure. On their faces are their marks, the traces of their prostration. This is their similitude in the Taurat and in the Gospel: Like a seed which sends forth its blade, then makes it strong, then becomes thick and stands on its own stem, filling the sowers with wonder and delight ...” (48:29)*

Given the ongoing sectarian and ideological conflicts among themselves, Muslims are certainly not being kind toward one another these days. How Muslims can become deserving of Allah’s mercy and blessings by seeking His good pleasure is the critical question to ask and answer in this dangerous period in human history. But the larger lesson of Hdaybiyah is clear: Sometimes we must sacrifice tactical gains for strategic success.

*

(Sura Hujurat is a Madani Sura)

Sura Al-Hujurat (The Chambers) (Verses 49:1-18)

This short but impactful Sura establishes the foundation for a believer’s

moral and ethical conduct. It provides a blueprint for our behavior and character, both individually and collectively, for the benefit of the community and society. It is known as the Sura of Manners. *"O you who believe! If a wicked person comes to you with any news, ascertain its truth, lest you harm people unwittingly and afterward become full of repentance for what you have done."* (49:6)

Mocking or looking down on others are glaring vices. The Quran warns: *"O you who believe! Let no man laugh at another man. It may be that the latter is better than the former. And let no woman laugh at another woman. It may be that the latter is better than the former. Nor defame nor be sarcastic to each other, nor call each other by offensive nicknames ... those who do not desist and repent are indeed doing wrong."* (49:11)

Suspicion and spying damage individuals, communities, and societies. Even more harmful are slander and backbiting (slander is a false or unsupported malicious statement, spoken or published, that harms a person's reputation, while backbiting is speaking ill of someone behind their back), mainly because these vices are so prevalent! When we speak ill of others, our words spread like an arrow shot from a bow that cannot be taken back. Wherever the arrow lands, it can tear apart the fabric of society. *"O you who believe! Avoid suspicion as much as possible, for suspicion in some cases is a sin. And do not spy on one another, nor speak ill of each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? No, you would abhor it. Be conscious of Allah, for Allah is the Acceptor of repentance, Most Merciful."* (49:12)

Notice the reference to the heinous act of eating the flesh of a deceased brother or sister. A person doesn't have to be physically dead to be targeted by a backbiter. Those who are absent from a gathering are considered "dead" in the sense that they cannot defend themselves against verbal

attacks. Therefore, when someone backbites, maligns, or slanders, it is like consuming the flesh of a living person, which equates to cannibalism. Would anyone want to engage in cannibalism? Yet, that is what we do when we backbite and slander. The Quran uses strong language to highlight how easily and casually we commit the sin of the tongue.

The universality of the human family is emphasized: *"O mankind! We created you from a single pair of a male and a female and made you into nations and communities, so that you may know each other. Surely the noblest of you in the sight of Allah is the one most deeply conscious of Him. And Allah is All-knowing, All-aware."* (49:13)

The message of this verse, which we often quote but struggle to live by, is straightforward: Differences among people and nations are part of Allah's plan. (For reference, also read verse (5:48): *"For each among you, We appointed a Divine Law and a Clear Way. If Allah had willed, He would have made you one community, but His Will is to test you with what He has given each of you. So compete with one another in doing good. To Allah you will all return. He will then inform you of the truth regarding your differences."*)

He designed diversity into His creation so that we may value one another and coexist peacefully and justly. Observe the true measure of nobility among us: awareness of Allah. Nobility ignores race, status, wealth, power, or any other worldly standard used to judge others. The sole criterion for nobility in Allah's eyes is how aware we are of Him and how dedicated we are to performing good deeds that seek His pleasure. Sadly, for many of us, our default tendency is to judge others. Instead, we should practice compassion, because to "know one another" means to see the humanity in those who are different from us. Reflect on this: how many times have we looked down upon others based on our flawed ideas of status and privilege, our tendency to discriminate against those we see as 'the other'? On the

other hand, how often do we cater to the powerful and wealthy even when we know they are deception and deception? The English word 'snob'—from the Latin word meaning 'without nobility'—describes someone who has an exaggerated respect for high social standing or wealth, seeks to associate with social superiors, and looks down on people he perceives as belonging to the 'lower class.' Would anyone want to be called a snob? Can anyone deny that arrogance and self-conceit are heart diseases?

Sura Hujurat reminds us to set our attitudes and priorities right, develop sound manners and keep our values and aspirations aligned with Allah's commands.

© Evergreen Islamic Center, San Jose, CA 95148. Prepared by Hasan Zillur Rahim.