

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

2nd Taraweeh Summary, Ramadan 1447 Hijri

Summary of Verses 2:177 – 3:20

Sura Al-Baqara (The Cow) (Verses 2:177-286)

We do not attain righteousness through mindless rituals but from believing *“in Allah and the Last Day, and the Angels, and the Book, and the Messengers, and in spending of your substance out of love for Him, for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and spends in freeing slaves, to be steadfast in prayer and to give zakat, to fulfill the contracts you have made, to be firm and patient in pain and adversity, and throughout all periods of panic. Such are the people of truth, the righteous.”* (2:177)

This long verse specifies the characteristics of Muslims who have *“Taqwa.”* If one were to ask how to attain *“Taqwa,”* this verse would comprehensively and holistically answer it: To believe in Allah and the Last Day, to believe in the Angels and the Quran, to be compassionate toward others out of love for Allah, to back faith with action by helping others, particularly the vulnerable and the marginalized, the kin, the orphans, the needy, the wayfarer, those who ask, to pay the purifying due (*Zakat*), to fulfill contracts, to be firm and patient in adversity, including physical pain, suffering and in all periods of panic such as war, violence, and pandemic outbreaks.

(Note that the verse exhorts believers to give a portion of their wealth and earnings to their near ones, to orphans, to the needy, to the traveler and to those who ask, all out of love for Allah. It also asks believers to pay the

obligatory Zakat. Zakat is mentioned separately from spending out of one's wealth (Sadaqa). Both are mentioned to emphasize the importance of charity. The implication is clear: stinginess and miserliness have no place in the life of a believer.)

Fasting became obligatory on Muslims in the second year of the Hijrah: "O you who believe: Fasting is prescribed for you as it was prescribed for those before you, that you may become conscious of Allah (*tattaqun*)." (2:183)

(The word '*Taqwa*', with its comprehensive explanation in (2:177), along with its derivatives, occurs about 190 times in the Quran and is variously translated as 'shield against wrongdoing', 'mindfulness of Allah', 'piety', 'patience,' 'awareness of Allah', 'fear of Allah', 'conscientious,' 'scrupulous,' 'righteousness', 'prevent and ward off evil,' 'sincere desire to be just and true,' 'turning faith into action,' 'fulfilling obligations and shunning prohibitions,' 'being within halal and away from haram,' and 'self-restraint.' "*Taqwa*" originates from our innate religious and spiritual impulses. It comprises two parts: "Fear of Allah", leading to the avoidance of sin, and "Love of Allah", leading to the pursuit of virtue and performing good deeds. "Fear of Allah", therefore, must be understood in a positive sense. It is the fear of offending someone we love the most, *Allah Subhanahu Wa Ta'ala*, the One to be Praised and Exalted. *Taqwa* teaches us to prepare for and lead a life that pleases Allah by filling our hearts with awe (*Khashyat Allah*) and love of Him (*Hubbullah*) and performing beneficial actions. We may hope to live for an *average* of 70-80 years. A few decades of living is little compared to how long we may remain in the grave, which can stretch to hundreds or thousands of years. Allah may test us through our children, spouse, wealth, poverty, success, or failure. In all cases, only *Taqwa* - faith in Allah and striving for His pleasure - will see us through. We must carefully read all the

verses containing the word '*Taqwa*' and its derivatives to gain a holistic understanding of this fundamental trait of a believer and practice it. Three verses from Sura *Al-Imran* also suggest how we can acquire *Taqwa*:
"Compete in the race for forgiveness from your Lord ... those who spend freely, whether in prosperity or adversity, who restrain anger, and pardon everyone, for Allah loves those who do good. And those who, when they commit an immorality or wrong their souls, earnestly bring Allah to mind and seek forgiveness for their sins - and who can forgive sins except Allah? - and who do not persist knowingly in the wrong they have done." (3:133-135). Hazrat Ali (RA), the fourth Caliph of Islam (600-661 CE), explained *Taqwa* as follows: To fear the punishment of Allah, to act on His commands, to be content with what one has, and to prepare for the Day of Departure from earthly life. Abdullah Ibn Masud (594-653 CE), a companion of the Prophet (s.a.w), interpreted the verse *"Have Taqwa of Allah as He deserves to be shown Taqwa"* (3:102) as: "He (Allah) is to be obeyed and not disobeyed, He is to be remembered and not forgotten, and He is to be shown gratitude and His favors not denied." All these interpretations and explanations can perhaps be summarized thus: "*Taqwa*" is God-Consciousness that matures into God-Awareness that leads the believer to God-Oriented actions on Earth per His commands.)

The special status of Ramadan, the only month mentioned by name in the Quran, is made clear: *"O you who believe! Fasting is prescribed to you as it was prescribed to those before you, that you may learn self-restraint. (Fasting) for a fixed number of days but if any of you are ill or on a journey, the prescribed number should be made up from days later. For those who can only fast with extreme difficulty, compensation can be made by feeding a needy person for every day not fasted. But whoever volunteers to give more, it is better for them. And to fast is better for you, if only you knew.*

Ramadan is the month in which the Quran was sent down as a guide to mankind, as clear signs for guidance and judgment between right and wrong. So those of you who witness this month must fast in it. But the one who is ill or on a journey should fast as much from other days as he missed. Allah intends to provide ease for you and does not intend to create hardship for you. All this is so that you may complete the number of fasts as prescribed and proclaim the Takbir of Allah for having guided you, so that you may be grateful.” (2:183-185)

Reflect on how comforting the assurance from Allah is that He intends to make life with its inevitable struggles easy for us, not difficult. Verse (2:185) is where the name of the Divine Book, '*al-Quran*,' is first mentioned. Also note that at the end of Ramadan, we are instructed in verse (2:185) to recite Allah's Takbir as a sign of our gratitude to Him for having guided us during the holy month. We are reminded to be both conscious of Allah (*tattaqun*) and grateful to Allah (*tashkurun*) during Ramadan and, by extension, during all months. At the end of Ramadan, it is a common practice to audibly recite, "*Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar. La Ilaha Illallah. Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar, Wa Lillahil Hamd.*"

Sura Baqara was revealed in Madinah. Muslims at the time were fully aware that the Quran was sent down as a guide to mankind. Yet Allah introduced us to the month of Ramadan by referring to the Quran as if it were being revealed for the first time. The implication is clear: no matter how many times we read the Quran, in Ramadan we need to begin our relationship with it anew. We need to study it and reflect on it with hope and purpose as if we were discovering it for the first time. We read and reread it throughout our lives, receiving a powerful monthly impetus in Ramadan until the Quran becomes a lived experience, and its ineffable wonder and power enter our

hearts.

Also consider the verse that immediately follows (2:185): *"And when My servants ask you concerning Me, I am indeed close to them. I respond to the prayer of every supplicant when he calls on me. Let them also, with a will, listen to My call and believe in Me, that they may walk in the right way."*
(2:186)

The first word of this verse is "When," not "If." In other words, Allah's servants will indeed ask about Allah, not *whether* they will ask about Allah. Now note the response: Allah does not say, "Tell my servants, O' Prophet ...". Instead, He addresses the people directly, saying, *"I am indeed close to them."* He assures His servants that He listens and responds to them. He responds to the specific person; that is, He answers the prayer of the specific person. Also, note that there is no precondition for Allah's response. He responds not only to the *Muttaqin* or the *Sabirun* or the *Muhsin*. He responds to everyone, regardless of whether the person is a sinner or virtuous. What this also means is that if we need anything at all, we must ask Allah, and only Allah, for help.

Most Muslims ask Allah for help but ignore the second part of (2:186): *Let them respond to My call and believe in Me, that they may walk the right way.* We ask Allah for help but we must also respond to Allah's call if our prayers are to be answered.

This is followed by another verse on Ramadan regarding the permissible and the impermissible, as well as a precise description of the time before dawn when the fast begins. *"... And seek what Allah has ordained for you. And eat and drink until the white thread of dawn appears to you distinct from its black thread ... Thus does Allah make clear His signs to humankind so that they may learn self-restraint."* (2:187)

For believers, fasting's hunger is the heart's cleanser.

(Why is verse (2:186) placed between the two verses on Ramadan (2:185) and (2:187)? Ultimate knowledge resides with Allah alone, but some scholars suggest it is perhaps to emphasize our need to supplicate to Allah, to ask Him to fulfill our virtuous hopes and dreams. Allah orders us to fast during Ramadan. When we obey Allah's commands, He draws near or nearer to us. There is no better time in the year than Ramadan to ask for Allah's help. The Prophet (s.a.w) instructed us during Ramadan to "raise your hands to Him in supplication during the times of your prayers, for they are the best times during which Almighty Allah looks with mercy to His servants and answers their pleas when they plead with Him." Notice also that when Allah (SWT) instructs the Prophet (s.a.w) in the Quran, the usual mode is "Say", as in, "Say, O Prophet ..." But in verse (2:186), there is no "Say." Allah (SWT) addresses believers directly. Again, some scholars suggest that it underscores the fundamental importance of offering Dua from the heart to Allah (SWT), particularly during Ramadan. Also note the word "*qareeb*" in verse 2:186. It means "near." The superlative form of "*qareeb*" is "*aqrab*," which means "nearer" or "nearest." We gain insight into Quranic verses by holistically reading all verses in which certain words and their superlative forms recur. Verses containing the word "*qareeb*" or "*aqrab*" - telling us Allah's mercy is always near - include (5:8), (7:56), (18:24), (18:57), (50:16) and (50:87). Consider just one: "*And indeed We created humans and We know what his soul whispers to him, and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein.*" (5:16))

Details of Hajj are listed in five verses (2:196-200) in Sura Baqara. "*And complete the Hajj or the Umrah in the service of Allah ...*" (2:196) The verse tells us that a) having once undertaken the pilgrimage, we must complete it, b) we must not do it for worldly ends but as a symbol of our service to, and

worship of, Allah, c) if for any reason we are prevented from completing the rites of Hajj, we should offer a sacrifice where the prevention took place.

"For Hajj are the months well known. If anyone undertakes that duty therein, let there be no obscenity, nor wickedness, nor wrangling in the Hajj. And whatever good you do, Allah knows it, and take a provision with you for the journey but the best of provisions is right conduct. So fear Me, O you who are wise." (2:197) Notice how the essence of Hajj is expressed in simple yet sublime language: *"... And take a provision with you but the best of provisions is right conduct (Taqwa) ..."* While pilgrims must be able to support themselves physically and financially by taking the necessary provisions with them, the best provision for pilgrims is "Taqwa," that is, worshipping Allah and performing beneficial deeds to gain His good pleasure. For a pilgrim, this is what "right conduct" means during Hajj. It includes not giving in to anger even when others around may be behaving badly, avoiding quarreling even under extreme provocations, shunning sensual pleasures, wickedness and heedlessness of any kind, and instead, directing one's heart and soul wholly toward Allah.

"It is no crime if you seek the bounty of your Lord. Then when you pour down from (Mount) Arafat, celebrate the praises of Allah at the sacred monument, and celebrate His praises as He has directed you ..." (2:198)

(The rites of Hajj preceding the visit to Arafat mentioned in verse (2:198) are well-known: a) Wearing of the Ihram b) Tawaf c) Visiting Safa and Marwa d) Listening to the Sermon e) Visiting Mina. On the 9th of Dhul-Hijjah, pilgrims congregate on the plains and hills of Arafat and, from noon to sunset, pray, make supplications, and reflect on the meaning and purpose of life, which is to worship Allah and earn His pleasure by doing good deeds. The Day of Arafat represents the emotional and spiritual climax of Hajj. The "sacred monument" in verse (2:198) refers to Muzdalifa, a place midway

between Arafat and Mina where believers spend the night worshipping Allah. On the 10th Day of Dhul-Hijjah, pilgrims make the sacrifice in the Valley of Mina. More details of the pilgrimage can be found in Sura Hajj, specifically in verses (22:27-33)).

Seeking only the good things in the evanescent worldly life is short-sighted. Worse, it can deprive us of Allah's bounties in the Hereafter. "... *Our Lord, 'give us the good of this world', but they shall have no share in the Hereafter.*" (2:200) We should seek the good both in this ephemeral world and in the eternal Hereafter when we plead for Allah's help. "*Our Lord, give us the good of this world and good in the Hereafter. And save us from the torment of the fire!*" (2:201)

We tend to recite verse (2:201) in our supplications mechanically, but when we ask Allah for His favors in languages other than Arabic, we only ask for bounties in this life - a promotion here, an opportunity there, good lives for our children, an increase in wealth, and such. No matter in what language we make our Duas, we should plead with Allah to make our Hereafter one of bliss, in addition to a good life on earth.

There is a stark difference between believers and disbelievers. "*The life of this world is alluring to those who reject faith, and they scoff at those who believe. But the believers will be above them on the Day of Resurrection, for Allah bestows His abundance without measure on whom He will.*" (2:212)

The more alluring the world appears to anyone, the weaker the faith becomes and the greater the risk of losing it altogether. The verse also clarifies that receivers of Allah's bounty include the just and the unjust. In His wisdom, He may shower bounties on whomsoever He pleases. There may be a delay in accountability now, but it will be fully restored in the

Hereafter. This verse also answers the question that haunts many of us: Why do good things happen to bad people and bad things to good people in this life? We need to look beyond our flawed and limited understanding of what we perceive as reality and place our faith in Divine Judgment. For a believer, the combination of the Here and the Hereafter offers the ultimate perspective on accountability and redemption.

Our Creator directs our affairs in ways that may be unfathomable to us. In such situations, we must always remind ourselves that Allah knows the manifest, the hidden, and everything in between, whereas we do not.

"... it may well be that you hate a thing that is good for you, and it may well be that you love a thing that is bad for you; Allah knows, whereas you do not know. (2:216)

We must strictly guard our prayers and offer them in a devout frame of mind, free from worldly distractions. This is how we attain *khushu* (humility) in our prayers. *"Be ever mindful of prayers, especially the middle prayer, and stand before God in devout obedience."* (2:238)

(See also 23:1-2 regarding attaining *Khushu* in prayers. Note that the word "salla" comes from the word "alaitisal" which means to connect. Prayer is the most profound way of connecting with our Creator. The best way to protect ourselves is to guard our prayers, that is, offer them regularly and on time, with the focus exclusively on Allah and with the certainty of His mercy and compassion in our hearts. But if we only move our tongue during prayers while our hearts are somewhere else, we are committing shirk! How? When we let the world intrude into our hearts during prayer, we give Allah a partner!)

"... And had not Allah check one set of people with another, the earth would indeed be full of mischief. But Allah is full of bounty to all." (2:251)

This verse should remind us that Allah's plan is universal. He loves and protects all His creatures. His bounties are for all. To protect one, He may check or thwart another, but we must never lose faith that His love is all-embracing.

We are to spend out of the bounties (wealth, power, knowledge) Allah has blessed us with. Spending means giving to charity and doing good deeds that benefit family, neighbors, strangers, and the community. Good deeds transcend death and can be a means of salvation in the Hereafter for the deceased. The intention must be pure; there cannot be base motives such as pride, power, popularity, or playing off one against the other. That is false charity. *"O you who believe! Spend out of the bounties We have provided for you, before the Day comes when no bargaining will work, nor friendship nor intercession ..."* (2:254)

Ayatul Qursi or "Verse of the Seat of Knowledge and Power" (2:255) offers a summary of Allah's attributes, His omniscience and omnipotence. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) identified *Ayatul Qursi* as the most important and powerful verse of the Quran, just as he identified Sura Fatiha as the most important and powerful *Sura* of the Quran. *Ayatul Qursi*, a verse we should memorize and frequently recite, has a sublime 9-part structure:

1. *Allahu la ilaha illa huwaal hayyul qayyoom* – Allah: There is no god but He, the Ever-Living, the Ultimate and Eternal Maintainer. (A central question in biology is: How are things endowed with Life? The Quranic answer: Life proceeds from the One who is Ever-Living. Non-living entities cannot be the source of living beings. Allah is the ultimate source from Whom all life flows.)

2. *La takhuzuhu sinatun wala nawm* - No slumber can seize Him nor sleep. (Allah does not rest. His creativity is unceasing.)
3. *Lahu ma feessama wati wama feel ard* – To Him belongs everything in the heavens and on earth. (Allah’s dominion encompasses the living and the non-living.)
4. *Man zallazee yashfaau indahu illa bi-iznihi* - Who is there who can intercede in His presence except as He permits? (It is understood that only the Prophet (s.a.w) can intercede on behalf of his Ummah, but only with permission granted by Allah, and that also with restrictions.)
5. *Yaalamu ma bayna aydeehim wama khalfahum* - He knows what is before them or what is after them. (Allah’s knowledge encircles us. It includes not just what we do but what thoughts cross our minds, which will be made known to us on the Day of Judgment. He is the All-Knowing, the Omniscient.)
6. *Wala yuheetoona bishayim min ilmihi illa bima sha’a* - Nor shall they compass anything of His knowledge except as He wills. (Whatever knowledge we acquire is made possible only by Allah’s permission. The prophet (s.a.w) advised that we only seek beneficial knowledge that can help the individual, the family, the community, and the society at large. This includes both religious knowledge and knowledge of how the world works. The prophet (s.a.w) also made supplications to Allah to not acquire knowledge that leads to harm.)
7. *Wasiya kursiyyuhus samawati waalarda* - His Knowledge and Power (which gives the verse its hallowed name) extends over the heavens and the earth. (Allah’s dominion and knowledge are limitless, beyond human comprehension. Once we realize this, we get a perspective on how small and helpless we are and how utterly dependent we are on Allah’s mercy.)

8. *Wala yauuduhu hifzuhuma* - And He feels no fatigue in guarding and preserving them. (Understanding this means that we gain only a limited sense of Allah's transcendent nature, for human knowledge is finite and fleeting.)
9. *Wahuwal aaliyyul azeem* - And He is the Highest, the Supreme. (The verse ends with the reminder of Allah's Omnipotence.)

La Ikraha Fiddin - There can be no compulsion in religion (2:256).

(Extremists attempt to force people into embracing Islam. The Quranic verse, however, is clear: Do not force anyone to become Muslim, for doing so violates a fundamental tenet of the faith. It also implies that religious chauvinism has no sanctity in Islam.)

Those who spend according to Allah's command will see a manifold increase in their wealth. The parables of charity include a grain of corn that leads to hundreds of corn and fertile gardens that return plentiful harvests. Charity followed by reminders of generosity negates its virtue. "*Kind words and covering of faults are better than charity followed by injury.*" (2:261-265)

(Parable or similitude – "*masalun*" – appears 87 times in the Quran. Parables make us understand Quranic verses vividly. Examples of verses containing parables include (2:26), (2:261), (2:264), (10:24), (14:24), (14:26), (17:89), (22:73 and (24:35))

Charity will never lead to poverty, as Shaitan whispers, and is to be given for the pleasure of Allah alone, not for personal vanity. "*Shaitan threatens you with poverty and bids you to commit indecency, while Allah promises you His forgiveness and bounties. And Allah cares for all and He knows all things.*" (2:268)

(Wealth will not last forever, as the Quran reminds us in verse (104:2-3). When we contribute generously from our wealth to gain the pleasure of Allah, our wealth will multiply while also increasing our provisions in the Hereafter. It is delusional to be obsessed with gaining or losing wealth as we pursue our goals in life.)

We may disclose charitable acts but it is best to conceal them. We should make the extra effort to reach those truly in need, especially those whose sense of dignity prevents them from asking. Who are the legitimate recipients of charity? *"Those in need, those who, in Allah's cause, are restricted from travel and cannot move about freely in the land seeking trade or work ..."* (2:273) Allah promises those who give charity by night and by day that *"on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve."* (2:274)

(The phrase, "on them shall be no fear, nor shall they grieve" – *"wala khawfun aalayhim wala hum yahzagoon"* - occurs 12 times in the Quran.)

Again, we are reminded of the criteria for success: *"Those who believe and do deeds of righteousness, and establish regular prayers and give zakat, will have their reward with their Lord. On them shall be no fear nor shall they grieve."* (2:277) Notice that in this Sura revealed in Madinah, Allah instructs believers for the first time to "establish regular prayers." Until this Sura was revealed, Muslims could pray at home. There was no formal procedure for offering prayers. But the command given to the Prophet's nascent community in Madinah makes it clear that Muslims should build mosques and offer prayers in congregation whenever possible. That is what is implied by the words "establish prayers." Allah knows best.

There are detailed discussions in Sura Baqara about family affairs, including taking oaths, bearing children and divorce. However, family legislation can be enduring only if founded on piety, morality, love, kindness, and justice. (Note that about two-thirds of the Quran had already been revealed before Sura Baqara. For a comprehensive understanding of the Quranic perspective on family legislation, we also need to study Suras Nahl (16), Rum (30), and Ghafir (40)).

Usury, as opposed to charity, is associated with evil and madness. Allah permits trade but forbids usury. If debtors are in difficulty, they should be given time until it is easy for them to repay. However, *"If you remit it by way of charity, it is best for you if only you knew."* (2:280)

Some scholars hold the view that verse (2:281) was the last verse of the Quran revealed chronologically to Prophet Muhammad (saw): *"Be mindful of the Day when you will all be returned to Allah, then every soul will be paid in full for what it has done, and none will be wronged."* However, other scholars are of the view that the last verse of the Quran revealed chronologically was (5:3). It is meaningless to quibble over such issues. Instead, we should focus on living our lives based on Allah's commands in the Quran.

Any transaction or debt involving future obligations, with all its attendant details, should be reduced to writing (2:282) to keep both parties responsible and accountable. If barter or on-the-spot exchanges are taking place, writing can be waived. (2:282) is the longest verse in the Quran. We should not break it into separate parts but consider it in its entirety.

"O believers! When you contract a loan for a fixed period, commit it to writing. Let the scribe maintain justice between the parties. The scribe

should not refuse to write as Allah has taught them to write. They will write what the debtor dictates, bearing Allah in mind and not defrauding the debt. If the debtor is incompetent, weak, or unable to dictate, let their guardian dictate for them with justice. Call upon two of your men to witness. If two men cannot be found, then one man and two women of your choice will witness, so if one of the women forgets, the other may remind her. The witnesses must not refuse when they are summoned. You must not be against writing contracts for a fixed period, whether the sum is small or great. This is more just for you in the sight of Allah, and more convenient to establish evidence and remove doubts. However, if you conduct an immediate transaction among yourselves, then there is no need for you to record it, but call upon witnesses when a deal is finalized. Let no harm come to the scribe or witnesses. If you do, then you have gravely exceeded your limits. Be mindful of Allah, for Allah is the One Who teaches you. And Allah has perfect knowledge of all things.” (2:282)

The concluding verse of Sura Baqara contains an assurance by the Creator that fills believers with hope and confidence: *“On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear.”* This assurance occurs six times in the Quran for emphasis: 2:233, 2:286, 6:152, 7:42, 23:62, and 65:7. Some scholars suggest that the verse refers to Allah’s gift of prayers to the Prophet Muhammad for his *ummah*. Just as prayers are not beyond our capacity, neither are life’s struggles and calamities we face daily or unexpectedly.

(The two verses – 2:233 (*“No soul shall have a burden laid on it greater than it can bear”*) and 2:286 (*“On no soul does Allah place a burden greater than it can bear”*)) - refer to “burden” of two different types, according to scholars, as may be understood in context. In (2:233), it is a burden of

material wealth or lack of it. In (2:286), the burden relates to spiritual obligations. Allah knows best.)

In the words following the verse quoted above in (2:286): "*Laha ma kasabt wa ilaiha mak tasabat,*" (*It - the soul - will bear the fruit of every good it has earned, and the fruit of every evil it has earned*), we find the transcendent confluence of our limited free will, our accountability and Allah's infinite mercy.

The rest of the concluding verse (2:286) contains one of the most stirring supplications in the Quran: "*Our Lord, do not take us to task if we forget or make mistakes. Our Lord, do not place on us a burden such as You had placed on those before us. Our Lord, do not burden us with more than we can bear. Forgive us, forgive our sins, and have mercy upon us. You are our Protector. Grant us victory over the unbelievers.*"

(Notice that even though Allah promises that He will not lay on us a burden greater than we can bear, we must still supplicate to Him for it to be so, as a sign of our humility and dependence on Him.)

Believers are encouraged to recite the last two verses of Sura Baqara (2:285-286) before sleep every night to gain Allah's protection.

*

Sura Al-Imran is a Madani Sura

Sura Al-Imran (The family of Imran) (Verses 3:1-20)

This Sura reminds us that Allah sent down the Quran in truth to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) in stages, confirming the Torah sent to Prophet Musa (AS) and the Gospel to Prophet Isa (AS) before the Quran. He sent the

Quran as a guide to humankind and gave us the criteria by which to distinguish right from wrong. *"It is He Who sent down to you (step by step), in truth, the Book, confirming what went before it; and He sent down the Law (of Musa) and the Gospel (of Isa) before this, as a guide to mankind, and He sent down the criterion of judgment between right and wrong. (3:3)*

The Quran contains basic verses with clear meanings. They constitute the foundations of the Book. Intermingled with these are verses that are allegorical or metaphorical, whose meanings are known only to Allah. Speculating on their meaning is futile and can lead to doubt and discord. Only those with impure hearts engage in such practices. Believers unequivocally affirm: *"He it is who sent down to you (the prophet) the Book. In it are verses fundamental, clear in meaning. They are the foundations of the Book. Others are not entirely clear. But those in whose hearts is perversity follow the part that is not entirely clear, seeking discord and searching for its interpretation. But no one knows its true meaning, except Allah. And those who are firmly grounded in knowledge say, 'We believe in the Book. The whole of it is from our Lord.' And none will grasp the Message except people of understanding."* (3:7)

Worldly possessions are no indicators of success, be they heaped-up gold, silver, horses, cattle, or land (and their modern equivalents), whereas *"with Allah is the best of goals."* (3:14)

Sometimes we may wonder what the main purpose of life is. Here is the answer: Seeking the good pleasure of Allah through unshakable faith and good deeds. This profound truth is mentioned in verses (2:165), (4:114), (9:72) and (11:88), and continues with the definition of success and the characteristics of the true servants of Allah in verses (3:16-17): *"Those who say 'our Lord! We have indeed believed. Forgive us, then, our sins and save*

us from the agony of the fire', those who show patience, who are true in word and deed, who worship devoutly, spend in the Way of Allah, and who pray for forgiveness in the early hours of the morning."

Verses 3:16 and 3:17 remind us that successful believers are those who have faith, humility and hope, who have patience, steadfastness, self-restraint and all that goes under the full definition of *sabr*, who keep the promises they make by being true in words and deeds, whose worship of Allah is deep and sincere which, in turn, reflect their love for all sentient beings, human and non-human, who are generous in charity, and who are awake in the early hours of the morning to seek the forgiveness from their Lord. (The last point underscores the innumerable blessings available to believers through the *Tahajjud* prayers, especially during Ramadan.)

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