

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the Name of Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

3rd Taraweeh Summary, Ramadan 1447 Hijri

Sura Al-Imran (The Family of Imran)

Summary of Verses 3:21 – 3:200

The diurnal and seasonal rhythms of nature with their deep symbolic meanings, from the rotation of the earth on its axis to the gradual transition of the winter solstice to the summer solstice and back as the earth revolves around the sun, should inspire us to contemplate Allah's wondrous creation: *"You cause the night to gain on the day, and You cause the day to gain on the night. You bring the living out of the dead, and You bring the dead out of the living; and You give sustenance to whom You please, without measure."* (3:27)

The birth of Maryam (Mary), the only woman mentioned by name in the Quran, *"chosen above women of all nations"* (3:42), and the miraculous birth of her earthly son Isa (Jesus), who will be *"held in honor in this world and the Hereafter and will be in the company of those nearest to Allah"* (3:45) point to Allah's Omnipotence.

Verses depicting the conversation between Zakariya and Maryam contain a deep lesson that we might overlook unless we reflect on them.

Zakariya, commanded by Allah to care for Maryam, was childless. He had begged Allah for a child for many years in vain and had grown old. It was at this late stage in his life that he had taken the responsibility of raising Maryam. *"Every time he entered her chamber, he found her supplied with*

sustenance. He said: 'O Maryam! Who sends these to you?' She said, 'From Allah, for Allah provides sustenance to whom He pleases, without measure.'"
(3:37)

Up to this point, Zakariya was in despair. He had given up any hope of an offspring despite his many supplications to Allah. But while talking with Maryam, he heard something in her tone – a sense of certainty and assurance – that he realized was missing from his supplications. So he made an impassioned dua then and there: *"There did Zakariya pray to his Lord, saying: 'O my Lord! Grant unto me from You a pure progeny, for You are He Who hears supplications!' While he was standing in prayer in the chamber, the angels called unto him: 'Allah gives you glad tidings of Yahya ... He said, 'O my Lord! How shall I have a son, seeing I am very old, and my wife is barren?' The answer was: 'Thus does Allah accomplish what He wills.'"*
(3:39-40) (The story repeats in 19:2-9. The same hope and longing permeate the dua Prophet Ibrahim made to Allah, described in verses 14:37-41)

And so, in due time, Yahya was born to Zakariya. What is the lesson here? That dua is not about getting it answered but about establishing a personal relationship with Allah daily and possessing the certainty in the heart that He will grant our supplication if it is good for us, deny it if it is bad for us, or save the reward for us in the Hereafter, the best of all options. When we have that kind of conviction in our hearts, Allah will listen to our pleas and respond in ways that are best for us.

There is another important lesson. In (3:44) we read: *"This is part of the tidings of the things unseen that We reveal to you (O prophet!) by inspiration. You were not with them when they cast lot with pens as to which*

of them should be charged with the care of Maryam, nor were you with them when they disputed the point (of not wanting to care for Maryam)."

What we learn about Maryam (and about Prophet Yusuf in Surah 12 and about Prophets in other Surahs) is the authentic story Allah revealed to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w). We should disregard accounts of them originating from other traditions. The Quran recounts what happened to them and corrects errors originating in other sources. To give credence to exotic stories from other sources (including some traditional *Tafseers* by past Islamic scholars from centuries ago) that conflict with Quranic verses is misguided and wrong. The message of the Quran – moral guidance for mankind - is timeless, requiring neither embellishment nor exaggeration.

Allah's Omnipotence continues with the story of Prophet Isa (AS). When He says "Be," it simply "Is." (3:47). Prophet Isa is unequivocal about his Creator: *"It is Allah who is my Lord and your Lord. Then worship Him. This is a way that is straight."* (3:51)

Disbelievers may plot and plan but *"the best of planners is Allah"* (3:54). We must never hide the Truth either through half-truths, falsehood, or concealment. *"O people of the Book! Why do you cover Truth with falsehood, and conceal the Truth when you have knowledge of it?"* (3:71)

If believers want to attain high status in the Sight of Allah, they must give freely of what they love. *"By no means shall you attain righteousness unless you give freely of that which you love. And whatever you give, Allah knows it well."* (3:92) Generosity is a hallmark of the believer, particularly in calamitous times such as during wars, earthquakes, pandemics or famines, when others are in dire need, and hopelessness and helplessness are widespread. The test of charity is to give something that we value and love.

The best charity is when we give our lives for a cause we believe in. Next in rank is when we give of ourselves: our efforts, talents, skills and the fruits of our knowledge. Then come our earnings and possessions. Allah wants generosity and unselfishness from us. Such acts are recorded in our favor, no matter how small and inconsequential they may appear.

If we have faith and confidence in Allah in good times and bad, we will never go astray: *"Whoever holds firmly to Allah will be shown a way that is Straight."* (3:101) As flawed human beings, we are often assailed by bad thoughts from shaitan that agitate us and may even doom us. The way out is to hold firmly to Allah by seeking His help and by reciting *"A'udhu billahi min ash-shaitan ir-rajim* ("I seek refuge in Allah from Satan, the accursed one.") He will rescue us from the temptations of shaitan and place us on the Straight Path. Faith is when the heart rejects what the shaitan whispers. It is also the basis of *Taqwa*. Trying to fight shaitan is to grant him power. The only way to defeat shaitan is to ignore him and remember Allah and seek His protection.

A frequently recited verse during the Friday khutbah is: *"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam."* (3:102)

Who will be the successful ones? *"Let there arise out of you a band of people inviting to all that is good, enjoining what is right, and forbidding what is wrong. They are the ones to attain felicity."* (3:104)

(The exhortation to do what is good and abstain from what is bad is repeated in several verses of the Quran, some of which are: (3:104), (3:110), (7:157), (9:71), (9:112), (22:41), 31:17))

The decisive Battle of Badr (3:123) was the first of several that Muslims were forced to fight to defend their nascent religion. (Historical detail: The battle took place during the second year of Hijri in the month of Ramadan. All 313 Muslims, the total count at the time, took part in this battle, with two exceptions who could not fight for health reasons.) Muslims were vastly outnumbered but their complete reliance on Allah, Who sent down angels to help, enabled them to defeat the Quraish.

In contrast, in the Battle of Uhud (3:121-128) a year later, things went awry. Muslims were on the verge of victory when some of them became covetous of war booty and abandoned their positions, disobeying the specific order of the Prophet (s.a.w). This greed and insubordination led to the defeat of the Muslims. As the Quran states, *"Some of you chose the gains of this world but others chose the rewards of the life to come."* (3:152-153)

The defeat shook Muslims to the core. "How could this have happened?" they asked. The response: *"You have brought it upon yourselves."* But Allah also consoled them in their anguish: *"This happened to others before you ... So do not lose heart nor fall into despair, for you will gain mastery if you are true in faith."* (3:139)

Patient perseverance is the key, however daunting the challenge may be. The verse also makes it clear that for Muslims, to despair is to disbelieve, for it implies a lack of faith in Allah. Those who despair are spiritually disconnected from themselves and their Creator. In contrast, positive thinking is an act of faith, the conviction that so long as we strive to please Allah with good deeds, He will help us achieve our noble goals.

The Battle of Uhud exposed the hypocrites and had a cleansing effect on Muslims. Through this trial by fire, Muslims learned some timeless lessons:

a) defeat often results not from the strength of the enemy but from weaknesses within, b) sincerity of intent must be accompanied by proper execution of duty, c) Allah loves the steadfast, d) success or failure in this worldly life comes to all at varying times, so we must not give up and persevere as we are unable to see the whole of Allah's plan. (3:140, 3:141, 3:146)

The Prophet (s.a.w) and his fledgling Muslim community had several definitive debates with the Jews and the Christians. While debates with the Christians were relatively calm and cordial, it was not so with the Jews who had prosperous settlements within Madinah. Their power and affluence had made them arrogant. They resented that Prophethood had passed from them to a new messenger. The universal lesson is clear: Any people or nation that pursues power and influence in preference to Allah's command will fail. Before pointing fingers at others, each of us must first look into our hearts.

We are reminded of *Taqwa* as the foundation of true success: *"Those who spend freely, whether in prosperity or adversity, who restrain anger and pardon people, for Allah loves those who do good deeds. And those who, having done an act of indecency or wronged their souls, remember Allah and ask for forgiveness for their sins, and who can forgive sins except Allah, and are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in the wrong they have done, for such the reward is forgiveness from their Lord ..."* (3:134-135)

Spending is easy when one is well-off but we are told that we must also be charitable in adversity. The verse defines a successful Muslim imbued with *Taqwa* as one who restrains anger (not only when directly provoked but also when others around are behaving improperly) and forgives people. In these

times of rising Islamophobia, we must keep this verse in mind. Yes, we must always be on guard against those who wish to harm us, physically or otherwise, and take the help of the law when needed, but we must also recognize that confronting Islamophobia with kindness and generosity can be the most effective antidote to bigotry and hate. (The Quran goes even further in verse 41:34, advising us to be magnanimous toward those who are hostile and wish to harm us: *"Good and evil cannot be equal. Repel evil with what is better, and your enemy will become as close as an intimate friend."*)

Those blessed by Allah with certain gifts, whether material, intellectual, spiritual or in other areas, must use their gifts to help others for the pleasure of Allah and as a way of expressing their gratitude to Him. Withholding these gifts will doom them. *"And let not those who covetously withhold of the gifts which Allah has given them of His Grace, think that it is good for them ..."* (3:180) (We should read this with verse (4:32) for perspective: *"And do not covet those things in which Allah has bestowed His gifts more freely on some of you than on others. To men is allotted what they earn and to women what they earn ... Ask Allah of His bounty, for Allah has full knowledge of all things."*)

Death is our common destiny: *"Everyone is bound to taste death and you shall receive your full reward on the Day of Resurrection. Then, whoever is spared the Fire and is admitted to Paradise has indeed been successful. The life of this world is merely an illusory enjoyment."* (3:185)

(Physical death is mentioned in several verses of the Quran (4:78, 6:162, 12:101, 21:35, 23:99, 45:26, 56:60, 62:8, 63:10) to encourage us to use our finite time on earth in the best possible ways. Particularly during

Ramadan, we should remind ourselves of the fleeting nature of life and our inevitable demise. Think back to the past year: how many near and dear ones who were with us during the last Ramadan are no longer with us? Around the world, over seven million people have died from COVID-19 in the years since the pandemic began in early 2020. In the United States, the death toll from the pandemic exceeded one million, the most of any country in the world. The Prophet (s.a.w) advised: "Visit the graves, for visiting them becomes the cause of remembering the next world." It may be instructive to consider how others view death and the perspective they bring to the subject. Here is what the late Apple co-founder Steve Jobs said during his Commencement Address to Stanford graduates in 2005: "I have looked in the mirror every morning and asked myself: 'If today were the last day of my life, would I want to do what I am about to do today?' And whenever the answer has been 'No' for too many days in a row, I know I need to change something. Remembering that I will be dead soon is the most important tool I have ever encountered to help me make the big choices in life. Because almost everything - all external expectations, all pride, all fear of embarrassment or failure - these things just fall away in the face of death, leaving only what is truly important. Remembering that you are going to die is the best way I know to avoid the trap of thinking you have something to lose.")

Believers are warned that they will be "*tried and tested in your possessions and yourselves ... but if you patiently persevere and guard against evil,*" (3:186), they will be successful.

Severe chastisement is in store for those who "*love to be praised for what they have not done.*" (3:188) Taking undue credit is a temptation we must resist at all times.

Contemplating the wonders of creation and supplicating to Allah out of gratitude are characteristics of believers: *"People who remember Allah standing, sitting and lying down on their sides, and contemplate the wonder of creation in the heavens and the earth, saying, 'Our Lord, not for nothing have You created all this! Glory to You. Give us salvation from the chastisement of the Fire. Our Lord! Anyone that You admit to the Fire, truly You cover with shame, and never will wrongdoers find any helpers. Our Lord! We have heard the one calling us to faith, 'Believe you in the Lord,' and we have believed. Our Lord! Forgive us our sins, remove from us our misdeeds, and cause us to die with the righteous. Our Lord! Grant us what You promised through Your messengers and save us from shame on the Day of Judgment, for You never break Your promise!"* (3:191-194)

Believers who strive in the cause of Allah, with some making the ultimate sacrifice, are given assurance by their Lord that *"Never will I suffer to be lost the work of any of you, male or female ... I will remove their sins and admit them to gardens with rivers flowing beneath, a reward from Allah, and from Allah is the best of rewards."* (3:195)

"From Allah is the best of rewards." Those hankering after worldly fame and fortune should remember how infinitely superior any reward from Allah is to the adulation, privileges and opportunities people seek from one another. Pleasing Allah through good deeds is the ultimate purpose of our lives.

The Quran tempers its tough lessons with mercy and compassion. In the penultimate verse of the Sura, we are reminded that among the People of the Book are those *"who truly believe in Allah and who humble themselves before Allah. They shall be rewarded by their Lord."* (3:199)

And so believers are told yet again what comprises prosperity: *"O you who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy, strengthen each other, and always remain conscious of Allah so that you may prosper."* (3:200)

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