

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

*All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful*

11<sup>th</sup> Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 13:19-16:89

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

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

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

Allah is the Sustainer of all. To some He grants the good things of life in abundance; to others, He gives in strict measures. It is not a sign of randomness that He gives in unequal measures but a reflection of His perfect knowledge and understanding of His creatures. Everything will be fully accounted for and balanced out in the end. *"Allah enlarges, or grants by strict measure, the sustenance which He gives to whomsoever He pleases.*

*The worldly rejoices in the life of this world. But the life of this world is of little comfort compared to the Hereafter."* (13:26) (This verse, with a subtle variation, also appears in (29:62))

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

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

(Sura Ibrahim is a Makki Sura)

Sura Ibrahim (Verses 14:1-52)

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

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

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

(14:19-21)

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

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

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

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

Tawhid is the root of Islam, strong and enduring, while idol-worshipping and falsehood are the bases of rootless lives toppled over by the smallest breeze.

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

According to tradition, we can trace this branch of Prophet Ibrahim's family to Ismail (AS), his son from his second wife Hajar, while the other branch can be traced to Ishaq, his son from his first wife Sarah. His gratitude to Allah knew no bounds. Prayers were his means of expressing gratitude. *"Praise be to Allah who has given me Ismail and Ishaq in my old age. My Lord hears all prayers. O' my Lord, make me and my descendants steadfast in observing prayer and, our Lord, accept my prayer. O' our Lord! Grant Your forgiveness unto me, my parents, and all believers, on the Day on which the last Reckoning will be established."* (14:39-41)

(Sura Hijr is a Makki Sura)

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

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

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

While clay and mud are the physical foundation of humans, Jinns were created from fire. Jinns are a species of living beings and like humans, may

believe or disbelieve, accept, or reject guidance. Scholars are of the opinion that they are not merely a hidden spirit but are beings with a certain amount of free will and thus will be called to account for their actions.

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

The Quran tells us in clear terms how Shaitan works. He has power over us only if we allow him to through evil suggestions and temptations. Those who allow themselves to be misled by him will have no one to blame but themselves for the consequences.

In the encounter between him and his mysterious guests (also included in verses (11:69-73) and (51:24-32)), Prophet Ibrahim (AS) says at one point, *"And who despairs of the mercy of his Lord but such as go astray?"* (15:56) A hallmark of believers is that they never give in to despair even under the most trying of circumstances. Instead, they rely on the infinite mercy of Allah to bring ease with, and after, hardship.

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

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

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

(Sura Nahl is a Makki Sura)

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

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

(Ihab Habib Hassan (1925-2015), an Arab-American literary theorist and writer, eloquently expressed the interconnectedness of nature this way: "Unknowingly, we plow the dust of stars, blown about us by the wind, and drink the universe in a glass of rain.")

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

How forgiving and merciful Allah is that He always gives us chance after chance to be on the right path and rewards us with favors after favors! What

we need to ask ourselves is: Does our gratitude reflect Allah's mercy and blessing?

Believers show gratitude to Allah not only during times of ease but also during times of difficulty. Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) said in a hadith: "The magnitude of Allah's reward is proportional to the magnitude of the affliction, and surely when Allah loves a people, He afflicts them with tribulation. So whoever is content and pleased with Allah will receive Allah's good pleasure but whoever is dissatisfied and angry will receive Allah's anger." In other words, we must be content with the divine decree, no matter how it may appear to us, if we are to be truly grateful.

The arrogant are those who refuse to believe in Tawhid and in life after death. *"Your God is One God. As to those who believe not in the Hereafter, their hearts refuse to know, and they are arrogant."* (16:22) These are people who will not only bear their own burdens but also some of the burdens of those they misled. In verses (6:164), (17:15), (35:18), (39:7) and (53:38), we learn that no one can bear the burden of another. In Islam, there is no doctrine of vicarious atonement. We are all responsible for our sins. However, misleading others is a sin committed by the misleaders themselves who will be held responsible for that as well. This does not relieve the misled of the responsibility for their sins. Those who mislead others *"may bear, on the Day of Judgment, their burdens in full, and also the burdens of those without knowledge, whom they misled. Alas, how grievous the burdens they will bear!"* (16:25)

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

*"To those who leave their homes in the cause of Allah, after suffering oppression, We will assuredly give a goodly home in this world; but truly the*

*reward of the Hereafter will be greater if they only realized it! They are the ones who have patiently endured, and in their Lord they put their trust.”* (16:41-42) (This idea also permeates verse (9:100): *“And the first to lead the way, of the Muhajirin (migrants from Makkah to Madinah) and the Ansars (helpers in Madinah of the migrants), and those who followed them in goodness - Allah is well pleased with them and they are well pleased with Him, and He has made ready for them Gardens beneath which rivers flow, wherein they will abide forever. That is the supreme triumph”* and verse (29:56): *“O My believing servants! My earth is truly spacious, so worship Me alone.”*)

(Historical background: When Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) began inviting Makkans to accept the Monotheistic and Universal Message of Islam, the ruling Quraish tribe felt threatened that their polytheistic belief would be swept away. They began subjecting those who heeded the Prophet’s call to social isolation, economic boycott, persecution and torture. In the summer of 621 CE, an entourage came to Makkah from Yathrib (subsequently renamed Madinah al-Munawwarah – the Radiant City), an oasis community 200 miles to the north. They pretended to be making a pilgrimage to Makkah’s pagan shrines but had actually come to meet with Muhammad (s.a.w) and profess themselves as Muslims. In 622 CE, a larger group of converts from Madinah came to Makkah and took an oath to Muhammad to defend him as their own kin. The Prophet immediately encouraged his Makkan followers to make their way to Madinah in small groups. When the Quraish leaders learned that the Muslims had begun an exodus, they plotted to assassinate the Prophet (s.a.w). Made aware of the plot, the Prophet (s.a.w) slipped away unnoticed with his protégé Abu Bakr al-Siddiq, later to become the first Khalifah. During this perilous eight-day journey, they were forced to hide for three days in a cave, narrowly avoiding capture, finally arriving in Madinah and completing their *Hijrah* in September 622 CE. The history of Islam had



begun. In 638 CE, the second Khalifah, Umar Ibn al-Khattab al-Faruq, considered the *Hijrah* so important that he established 622 CE as the beginning of the Islamic, or *Hijri*, calendar. Note that while the Gregorian (or Julian) Calendar is solar, with 365 days to a year and an additional day for leap years, the Islamic Calendar is lunar, averaging 354 days per year. This means that Ramadan rotates slowly through the Western calendar, beginning 11 days earlier every successive year.)

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

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

These two verses give us insight into the wondrous world of bees and their complex community and sophisticated social structure. Allah grants them the ability to choose where to build their hives and where to find flowering fields for pollen and nectar. Bees collaborate selflessly for the convenience of the colony as they perform their hive tasks, a near-perfect symphony of duties and responsibilities. The hexagonal shape of the cells of the bees'

honeycomb is a beauty to behold. Although there is a division of labor in the hive, specialists can become generalists and vice-versa if and when the well-being of the hive requires it. They “follow the ways your Lord has made easy for you.” This is how honey is made, the result of taking the ways Allah has taught the bees, which is the fulfillment of their destiny. While Allah gives bees the freedom to sip nectar from any flower, bees are also endowed with the ability to search for flowers that produce more nutrient-rich nectars to produce higher-quality honey. In this miraculous substance redolent of sunlight and wildflowers, Allah has placed *shifa*, or medicinal healing, giving us yet another reason to be in awe of, and grateful to, Him.

The lures of worldly comfort and pleasures make us oblivious to the reality of the Hereafter. That is why the Quran repeatedly reminds us that the Hour of Reckoning is not a distant possibility but can come at any moment. The wisest course for us is to be spiritually alert and steer clear of all forms of sin. *“To Allah belongs the Unseen of the heavens and the earth, and the matter of the Hour of Judgment is as the twinkling of an eye, or even quicker, for Allah has power over all things.”* (17:77) (This theme is also repeated in 10:45 and 30:55)

We must always thank Allah for the bounties He has blessed us with. He tells us in four verses of the Quran, with some subtle differences, to be grateful for the combination of hearing, sight, heart, and intellect.

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

(The other three verses are: *“And it is He who produced for you hearing and sight and hearts; little are you grateful.”* (23:78) *“Then He proportioned him and breathed into him from His created soul and made for you hearing and*

*sight and hearts; little are you grateful.” (32:9) “Say, ‘It is He who has created you and made for you hearing and vision and hearts; little are you grateful.’” (67:23))*

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