

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

14th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 21:51-24:20

Sura Ta-Ha (21:51-135)

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

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

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

According to scholars, King Daud had awarded the owner of the field all the straying sheep as compensation for the damage to his field. His son,

Sulaiman, a mere boy of eleven, argued, however, that the owner of the field should not take the sheep unconditionally but keep them long enough to recoup his loss, and then return the sheep to the shepherd. Daud had the wisdom to see the merit in his son's argument and Sulaiman had the wisdom to offer a better judgment, both blessings from Allah.

The moral of the story is that legitimate differences of opinion are healthy and often necessary, and regardless of who is right or wrong, both sides deserve credit for their efforts, as long as they are sincere in their desire for justice and are grateful to Allah for His blessings. Our tendency to treat differences of opinion as a threat and a cause for division in our communities go against the spirit of the Quran.

(Remember the prophet's (s.a.w) saying: The difference of opinion among the learned in my community is a sign of Allah's blessings.)

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

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

We learn from the example of Yunus (RA) that no one can escape accountability, including prophets. We recite the short and powerful Dua (*La Ilaha Illa Anta Subhanaka Inni Kuntu Minaz Za'limeen*) that Yunus (RA) invoked from the belly of the whale to acknowledge our failings and to plead for Allah's mercy. *"And mention the man of the fish when he stormed off*

from his city in a rage, thinking We would not restrain him. And he called out from within the darkness, 'There is no deity except You; exalted are You. Indeed, I have been of the wrongdoers.' So We responded to him and saved him from distress. And thus do We save the believers." (21:87-88)

Prophet Yunus remembered Allah in prosperity but when he was helpless inside the darkness of the whale, he made his heartfelt Dua to Allah to rescue him. Allah listened and brought him to safety. The lesson? If we remember Allah in prosperity, Allah will remember us in adversity and lift us from the calamities that befall us.

Other prophets - Isma'il, Idris, Zul-Kifl, Yunus, Zakaria, and Yahya - also suffered ordeals of various kinds but never wavered in their faith. Trials and tribulations are designed to test our faith and fortitude. Those who patiently persevere and rely on Allah alone are the blessed and successful ones.

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

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

Allah is telling the Prophet to make it clear to those receiving His message (during his time and in later times) that it is Allah alone Who decides when the Good News and the Warning (of the Day of Judgment) will be fulfilled.

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

(Sura Hajj is a Madani Sura)

Sura Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage) (Verses 22:1-78)

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

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

Some people link their belief in the Creator to what befalls them here on earth. If they experience prosperity, they believe in Allah but if they face adversity, they rebel. *"There are among men some who serve Allah half-heartedly. If good befalls them, they are content but if a trial comes to*

them, they turn on their faces. They lose both this world and the Hereafter. That is a loss for all to see!" (22:11)

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

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

To those against whom war is waged, permission is given to fight because they are wronged, and surely, Allah is Most Powerful in aiding them. (22:39)

This was the first verse in the Quran in which permission was given to Muslims to defend themselves if attacked. This was revealed in the month of Dhul-Hijjah, one year after Hijrah. Prior to that, for 13 years, Muslims were not allowed to defend themselves when attacked. Notice the passive voice implied in the word *"yuqataluna,"* (against whom war is waged). Wars must be defensive by nature according to Islamic principles.

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

Verse (22:40) makes it clear that Muslims are obligated to defend and protect the religious institutions of other faiths, not just their own.

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

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

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

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

Allah is Omniscient. His knowledge is perfect, complete and comprehensive. From Him flows all knowledge, insight and intelligence. *"Know you not that Allah knows all that is in heaven and on earth? Indeed, it is all in a record,*

and that is easy for Allah." (22:70) (This truth repeats also in (27:75), (36:12) and (57:22).

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

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

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

(Sura Muminun is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Muminun (The Believers) (Verses 23:1-118)

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

(These verses identify seven attributes of a believer: 1) humility, especially in prayers where the heart is focused completely on Allah 2) shuns vanity 3) gives charity 4) practices purity in intimate relation 5) maintains fidelity to trusts 6) keeps promises, and 7) animated by an earnest desire to come closer to Allah, particularly through prayers.

Notice the emphasis on the quality of prayers, referenced not once but twice in these verses! Prayers must be protected from all worldly interests and distractions. How often do our minds wander when we are praying, either on our own or behind an Imam? Yet this is what we must strive for, to achieve *khushu* (humility) in our prayers. Isn't Ramadan the perfect time for improving the quality of our prayers?)

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

The two passages are complementary and give a complete description of the character of believers. Believers are full of reverence for their Lord and feel a tremor in their hearts that perhaps their charity or the purity of their hearts may not be good enough for acceptance by Allah. This oscillation between fear and hope occurs because they have the certainty of life after death when they will stand before His Judgment. They fear for their worthiness but hope that Allah will accept their efforts, even if flawed.

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

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

When life's tribulations threaten to overwhelm us and we incline to despair, we are again reminded that *"On no soul do We place a burden greater than it can bear. Before Us is a record which speaks the truth. They will never be wronged."* (23:62) (The assurance that no soul will be burdened with more than what it can bear occurs six times in the Quran for emphasis: 2:233, 2:286, 6:152, 7:42, 23:62 and 65:7. Also, the record shows clearly and precisely what each soul has done and what is due to it in justice. The worst will receive full justice but as a Sign of Allah's infinite mercy, the best will receive far more than their due, a theme also repeated in 28:84)

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

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

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

On the former: *"When the moment of death arrives for a wrongdoer, he will say, 'Lord, let me go back, that I may do good back there!' By no means!*

These are just words he utters. Before them is a Partition till the Day they are raised up." (23:99-100)

(Scholars suggest that the partition refers to *Barzakh*, a place or state in which people will be after death and before Judgment. Sinners pleading with Allah to go back to undo their wrongdoings, which is denied, is repeated ten times in the Quran.)

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

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

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

(This is the proper mindset of a believer: O Allah, I know I am deficient. In the core of my heart, I know what I need to do to please You. Since I am not there yet, my striving to please You will continue for as long as I live.)

(Sura Nur is a Madani Sura)

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

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

The aim of these social and personal rules and injunctions is to maintain the integrity and decency of the social life of Muslims and to protect society from corruption and debasement.

An incident regarding Hadhrat Ayesha (RA) illustrates the universal principles of probity and purity of the tongue. The principles are a) If others speak an evil word, we must not be tempted to repeat or give credence to it. That would constitute defiling of the tongue. b) If we suspect something not based on certain knowledge, we must not give currency to it by giving it expression. c) Others may think it a small matter to cast aspersion on someone's character or reputation, especially that of a pious woman, but to Allah, it is a most serious matter. *"Behold, you received it on your tongues and said out of your mouths things of which you had no knowledge, and you thought it to be a light matter, while it was most serious in the sight of Allah."* (24:15)

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

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