

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

15th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 24:21-26:227

Sura An-Noor (The Light) (Verses 24:21-64)

To forgive and forget life's slights and insults and take the moral high ground of mercy and forgiveness is the hallmark of a believer. To be deserving of Allah's mercy, we must be merciful toward others. If Allah forgives, who are we to deny forgiveness to others? *"Let not those among you who are endued with grace and amplitude of means resolve by oath against helping their kinsmen, those in want, and those who have left their homes in Allah's cause. Let them forgive and overlook. Do you not wish that Allah should forgive you? For Allah is oft-forgiving, most merciful."* (24:22)

(As Shakespeare wrote: "The quality of mercy is not strained/It drops as the gentle rain from heaven/Upon the place beneath. It is twice blessed:/ It blesses him that gives and him that takes.)

Islam considers marriage a religious obligation and requires Muslims to seek lawful relationships and avoid the breakdown of the family through immoral behavior. Particularly condemned is slander against chaste women: *"Those who defame honorable and innocent believing women shall be cursed in this life and in the Hereafter. For them is a grievous penalty."* (24:23) (This verse reemphasizes what we read in verse (24:15))

Just as preserving decency and preventing promiscuity are necessary for the cohesion of a society, so are maintaining modesty and proper sexual relationship between men and women. *"Say to the believing men that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty. That will make for greater*

purity for them ... and say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty ..." (24:30-31)

The title of the Sura comes from verse 35: *"Allah is the Light of the heavens and the earth. The Parable of His Light is as if there were a niche and within it a lamp. The lamp is enclosed in a glass of star-like brilliance. The lamp is lit by the oil of a blessed olive tree, neither of the East nor of the West, which radiates without being lit by fire! Light upon Light! Allah guides whom He will to His Light ..."* (24:35)

Some scholars interpret this light as the revelation that Allah sent to His prophets which, in turn, is reflected in the 'niche' that is the believer's heart. It is this light that allows believers to distinguish right from wrong and good from evil. No matter how successful, wealthy or powerful we may be, if we have no awareness of Allah, we will be in perpetual spiritual darkness: *"... For any to whom Allah does not give light, there is no light!"* (24:40)

In contrast, those *"whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the remembrance of Allah, nor from regular prayer, nor from practicing regular charity ... Allah may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His grace ..."* (24:37-38)

The possibility of being rewarded "according to the best of their deeds" fills the believer's heart with hope and optimism.

Allah is the Creator of all living beings, with water His chosen medium of creation: *"And Allah has created every animal from water. Of them, some creep on their bellies, some walk on two legs, and some walk on four. Allah creates what He wills, for surely Allah has power over all things."* (24:45)

We are lost without Allah's mercy. How to ensure that we are not lost? *"So establish regular prayer and give regular charity and obey the messenger, that you may receive mercy."* (24:56)

(Sura Al-Furqan is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Furqan (The Criterion) (Verses 25:1-77)

Divine revelations provide humankind with the criteria to distinguish truth from falsehood and right from wrong, and with a core set of moral values binding on the individual and on society: *"Blessed is He who sent down the criterion to His servant to discern the true from the false so that to all the world it might be a warning."* (25:1)

The Sura lists a set of objections raised by the Prophet's (s.a.w) detractors and Allah's refutation of them: *"And they say: 'Tales of the ancients, which he has caused to be written that are dictated before him morning and evening.' Say: The Quran was sent down by Him who knows the mystery of the heavens and the earth. Surely He is much forgiving, most merciful. And they say: How is it that this messenger eats and walks about in the markets? Why has not an angel been sent down to him to give admonition with him?" ... (25:5-7) Allah says of them: "... but they have strayed, so they cannot find a way."* (25:9)

Even though verse (25:20) addresses messengers, it invokes the timeless truth that *"We have made some of you a trial for others. Will you have patience? For Allah is One who sees all things."* In Allah's creation, each one of us serves a purpose. If some are wealthy, the poor should not envy them. It may be that proximity to a wealthy person is a trial of their virtue. (In Sura Al-Qasas (28:76-82) we learn of people around Qarun, the billionaire of his time, who so desperately wanted to be like him until Qarun was swallowed by the earth and the scale fell from their eyes. In Sura Al-Hajj, (22:40), we learn that *"And were it not that Allah checked one set of people*

with another, there would have been demolished monasteries, churches, synagogues, and mosques in which the name of Allah is much mentioned. And Allah will surely support those who support Him. Indeed, Allah is Powerful and Exalted in Might." If some are poor, the wealthy should not despise or look down upon them. It may be that the poor will be a trial for their charity and compassion.)

Verse 25:20 also reminds us to reflect on how we should conduct ourselves in our earthly lives. It answers the question, "How can Allah allow acts of violence, injustice and calamities to occur or continue?" It is our highest goal in life to please Allah by doing what He has commanded us to do and abstaining from what He has forbidden. At the same time, we need to understand that, by the limited free will Allah has granted us, He has given us the freedom to do things that displease Him and make Him angry. If people backbite or are cruel toward others or treat the environment recklessly or even kill others because they are in a position of authority and have the power to do so, they have engaged in acts that displease Allah. They become a trial for the people they have wronged, just as the people who have been wronged become a trial for them. If someone backbites against me, that person has wronged me. But it also matters how I respond to the backbiting. If my response displeases Allah, that person and I become trials for each other. It is easy to seek Allah's help when we are the victims but difficult when others are the victims of our wrongdoings. In His wisdom to make us a trial for one another, Allah has given us the criterion to differentiate right from wrong, mostly by being patient, thereby helping us to be on the Straight Path.

Those who doubt the reality of the Hereafter are warned: *"Those who entertain no hope of meeting Us ask, 'Why have no angels been sent down to us? Why can we not see our Lord?' Indeed, they have an arrogant conceit of themselves and have gone too far in their transgression. On the day when*

they see the angels, the transgressors will not receive glad tidings as the angels tell them, 'There is a barrier forbidden to you altogether.'" (25:21-22)

Those without faith demand to know why the Quran was not revealed all at once. Allah answers them through His prophet: "... *that We may strengthen your heart ... and We have rehearsed it to you in gradual, well-arranged stages.*" (25:32)

Those who take their *nafs* or ego as their master have gone astray: "*Have you seen the one who takes as his god his own desire? Then would you be responsible for him?*" (25:43)

(The other verse in the Quran that warns against taking our egos and desires as our master can be found in (45:23): "*Have you seen he who has taken as his god his own desire, and Allah has sent him astray knowingly and has set a seal upon his hearing and his heart and put over his vision a veil? So, who will guide him after Allah? Then will you not be reminded?*")

The punishment that befell the people of Nuh, 'Ad and Thamud indicate the fate awaiting those who mocked the Prophet's (s.a.w) message. However, even idol-worshippers are invited to use their intellect to discern the truth for themselves, particularly in the wondrous natural phenomena in the heavens and the earth. "*And it is He Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy, and We send down pure water from the sky, that with it We may give life to a dead land, and slake the thirst of things We have created ...*" (25:48-49) Also, "*It is He Who has let free the two bodies of flowing water, one palatable and sweet, and the other salty and bitter, yet has He made a barrier between them, a partition that is forbidden to be passed.*" (25:53)

When the Prophet (s.a.w) preached the message of Islam to Makkans, he asked them to submit to the One Creator, the *Ar-Rahman* (the Merciful).

"And when it is said to them: Prostrate to Ar-Rahman, they say: And what is Ar-Rahman?" (25:60)

The response: "Blessed is He (Ar-Rahman) who has placed constellations in the heavens and placed therein a great lamp and a moon reflecting light. And He it is who has appointed the night and the day in succession, for him who desires that he should remember, or desire thankfulness." (25:61-62)

Ten essential qualities of believers, the *Ibadur-Rahmans*, slaves of the Merciful, are identified in the concluding verses of this Sura:

- 1) *"True servants of the Ar-Rahman are those who walk humbly on earth and who say 'Peace!' when the ignorant address them" (25:63)*
 - 2) *"Those who remember their Sustainer far into the night, prostrating and standing" (25:64)*
 - 3) *"Those who say, 'Our Lord, keep us safe from the punishment of hell, for its punishment is everlasting'" (25:65)*
 - 4) *"Those who are neither extravagant nor miserly but are moderate in their spending" (25:67)*
 - 5) *"Those who invoke no deity other than Allah ..." (25:68)*
 - 6) *"... those who do not call upon any deity other than Allah, nor destroy life, which Allah has forbidden, except for a just cause ..." (25:68)*
 - 7) *"Do not engage in illicit sexual relations" (25:68)*
 - 8) *"Those who do not bear false witness and shun profanity with dignity and grace" (25:72)*
 - 9) *"Those who, when reminded of their Lord's revelations, do not ignore or resist them as the deaf and blind do" (25:73)*
 - 10) *"And those who pray, 'Our Lord, grant unto us spouses and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes and give us the grace to lead the righteous.'" (25:74)*
- We should memorize the stirring Du'a of this verse:
"Wallazina Yaquluna Rabbana Hab Lana Min AzWa'jina WaZurriya'tina Qurrata A'Yuni WazAlna Lil Muttaqina Ima'ma."

"These are the ones who shall be rewarded with the highest place in heaven for their patient endurance in life. And they will be welcomed with greetings and salutations, abiding eternally therein, an excellent abode and resting place." (25:75-76)

(Notice that in verse 25:68, the enormity of the sins of sexual transgressions is underscored by placing these alongside the sins of shirk and the killing of others without just cause.)

Note also the importance of walking suggested in verse (25:63). When we walk on earth, we should walk with humility. What does it mean? It means to walk with purpose, to be mindful of our neighbors, our surroundings, of the natural world with its beauty and bounty of flora and fauna reflecting the majesty of Allah's creation. Walking teaches us to live in the moment, to be aware, to care, and to be in tune with the natural world. That was why walking was a favorite pastime of the Prophet (s.a.w). There is no 'rush' in mindful walking. It is not putting on earplugs to listen to music or podcasts while being heedless of the beauty of the earth along our path. It is to listen to birdsongs filling the dawn sky, to trace the edge of a delicate fern, to delight in the sprawling shadow of an oak, to marvel at the dew glistening on a spider's web in the morning light. It is to be aware of the many things we find beautiful in our neighborhoods. The physical and spiritual benefits of walking are many. A long walk can chase away the blues and lift us out of depression, give us insight into the sacred, and make us truly see, for it is sight that leads to insight. Walking is good for our joints and muscles, increases our health and happiness and is a boon to creativity. Our senses come alive, and so does the world around us, because any place comes to life from the compassionate attention we give it. We hear, see, smell and feel more. While we can get much out of walking, it is also important to realize that walking can get even more out of us. Walking wakes us up and inspires us to become observant. These qualities can help us when we pray.

Too many of us are heedless in our prayers as we merely go through the motions. To connect to our Creator during prayers, the ultimate purpose of praying, is to live in the moment and to be conscious of Allah. It is the believer's personal Mi'raj. Walking can help bring purpose to our prayers by summoning those qualities that allow us to focus on our relationship with Allah. The Quran also teaches that if others were to insult or mock us as we walk humbly on the earth, we should not retaliate or seek revenge but leave honorably by saying "Peace" to them. Mindful walking can change our lives. Once we learn to pay attention, the natural world, and life, become miraculous, and the seemingly ordinary turns transcendent. As Thoreau said: "I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees.")

To summarize the virtues of the *Ibadur-Rahmans*: 1) They are humble and patient 2) They are mindful of Allah at all times with a keen awareness of the Judgment of the Hereafter 4) They are moderate in all things 5) They shun disobedience to Allah and are kind to all sentient beings 6) They avoid falsehood and frivolity 7) They are attentive in mind and manner to the Signs of Allah and 8) Their main goal in life is to please Allah that include bringing up their families in righteousness, abide by the truth and all that is good in life.

(Sura Shuara is a Makki Sura)

Sura As-Shuara (The Poets) (Verses 26:1-227)

The Sura points to man's propensity for self-deception, to the reasons why so many people through the ages so readily reject the truth, both the truth of Allah's revelations and the truth of self-evident moral values. The result? Worship of power, wealth, celebrity, fame, and glory that we see all around us. *"Do they not look at the earth, how many noble things of all kinds We have produced therein? Surely, in this is a Sign, but most of them do not believe."* (26:7-8)

In the story of Prophet Musa, Pharaoh and the magicians, we again see the contrast between arrogance and power on the one hand and humility and submission on the other. *"Then did the sorcerers fall down and prostrate in adoration, saying: 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa and Harun.'"* (26:46-48) When Pharaoh threatened them with violent death, *"They said: 'No matter for us, we shall but return to our Lord. Our only desire is that our Lord will forgive us our faults since we are the first to believe.'"* (26:50-51)

We should memorize the heartfelt supplication of Ibrahim (AS) to Allah (SWT) that captures the gratitude and longing of believers across the ages and for all time: *"... the Lord and the Cherisher of the worlds, Who created me, and it is He Who guides me, Who gives me food and drink, and when I am ill, it is He Who cures me, Who will cause me to die and then to live again, and Who, I hope, will forgive me my faults on the Day of Judgment. O my Lord, bestow wisdom on me and join me with the righteous. Grant me honorable mention on the tongue of truth among later generations. Make me one of the inheritors of the Garden of Bliss. Forgive my father, for he is among those astray. And let me not be in disgrace on the Day when we will be raised up, the Day when neither wealth nor sons will avail, but only those will prosper who will bring to Allah a sound heart."* (26:83-89)

As a reminder, the Quran again narrates the stories of prophets (AS) Nuh, Hud, and the people of 'Ad, Salih, and the people of Thamud, Lut, Shuaib, and the companions of the Wood, each prophet revealing something new about the human condition. The 'Ad people, in their pride and arrogance for their material civilization, for example, rejected Hud, their messenger. *"Do you build a landmark on every high place to amuse yourselves? And do you get for yourselves fine buildings in the hope of living therein forever? And when you strike, you strike like tyrants!"* (26:128-130) But prophet Hud's warnings fell on deaf ears and the 'Ad, with their monuments and palaces,

were destroyed. Their fate echoed the fate of the ancient king and tyrant Ozymandias, evoked in the poem by P. B. Shelly: "I am Ozymandias, King of Kings! Look on my works, ye mighty and despair! ... Boundless and bare the lonely and level sands stretch far away!"

Addiction to worldly power and possessions and the pursuit of hedonism lead to moral and spiritual decay, so we are warned: "*And follow not the bidding of those who are extravagant.*" (26:151)

Angel Jibreel (*Ruh-ul-Amin*) is mentioned as the one who brought revelations to Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w): "*Surely this is a Revelation from the Lord of the Worlds. With it came down the Truthful Spirit (Ruh-ul-Amin).*" (26:192-193)

The wicked who stray and say what they do not practice will get their just dues. But for "... *those who believe, work righteousness, engage much in the remembrance of Allah and defend themselves after they are unjustly attacked ...*" (26:227), they will experience the ultimate salvation.

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