

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

All Praises to Allah, The Beneficent, The Merciful

16th Taraweeh, Ramadan 1446 Hijri

Summary of Verses 27:1-29:44

(Sura Naml is a Makki Sura)

Sura An-Naml (The Ants) (Verses 27:1-93)

The Sura opens by explaining the purpose of the Quran and the contrasting fates of believers and disbelievers: *"These are verses of the Quran, a Book that makes things clear, a guide and glad tidings for believers, those who establish regular prayers and give in regular charity, and also have full assurance of the Hereafter. As to those who do not believe in the Hereafter, We have made their deeds pleasing to their eyes, and so they wander about in distraction. For them, a grievous penalty is waiting, and in the Hereafter, they will be the greatest losers."* (27:1-5)

The Quran uses allegories and parables to express universal ethical and spiritual truths. Sometimes the truth manifests itself in binary black and white; at other times truth appears in subtle shades of meaning. In all cases, the Quran reveals these truths explicitly, elliptically, or allegorically, whichever mode best fits the context.

The Sura refers to four episodes involving Musa and Pharaoh, Sulaiman and the queen of Sheba, Thamud, and the people of Lut.

When prophet Musa (AS) perceives a fire in the desert and approaches it, he hears a voice: *"O Musa! Surely, I am Allah, the Exalted in Might, the Wise!"* (27:9) (According to the Quran, Allah spoke directly only to prophet Musa. He did not speak directly to any other prophet.)

When his staff turns into a serpent, he is fearful and tries to run away but Allah assures him, *"... do not be alarmed. Messengers have nothing to fear in*

My presence. As for those who do wrong and then replace evil deeds with good deeds, I am forgiving and merciful ..." (27:10-11)

It is a message of hope not just for prophets but for all believers, however flawed and fallible they may be.

The Sura affirms that Pharaoh and his people had persistently rejected Allah and His signs despite all evidence to the contrary. *"They wrongly and arrogantly denied Our signs although in their hearts they knew them to be true. Look what fate meets those who engage in corruption!"* (27:14)

Allah had endowed Prophet Daud's son Sulaiman (mentioned by name 17 times in the Quran) with the gift of understanding animal communication and communicating with them. *"And Sulaiman was Daud's heir. He said: 'O my people, we have been taught the language of birds, and on us good things have been bestowed. This is indeed grace from Allah.'"* (27:16)

In one incident, Sulaiman hears an ant warning other ants to get out of the way, *"... lest Sulaiman and his warriors unknowingly crush you without knowing it. He smiled at her words and said: 'O my Lord, inspire me so that I may be grateful for Your favors which You have bestowed on me and on my parents, and do good works that will please You, and admit me through Your mercy to Your righteous Servants.'"* (27:18-19)

The verse suggests the intricate and complex communication network used by ants and their ability to look out for the safety of one another. Ants may appear unimpressive and insignificant creatures to us but in relative brain size, they are known to have the largest brains among insects. Ants, like other creatures in the insect and animal kingdoms, reveal the interrelations of different scales of existence that, to observant eyes, evoke wonder and humility. We need to remind ourselves that looking down on any of Allah's creations only reflects our ignorance and arrogance. Also remarkable is

Sulaiman's (AS) response of gratitude and his understanding that pleasing Allah (SWT) is the highest goal of our lives, also emphasized in verse 9:72.

One day, hoopoe, a colorful bird, gives Sulaiman the news of the queen of Sheba and her people. *"I found her and her people worshipping the sun instead of Allah. Shaitan has made their deeds seem pleasing in their eyes and has kept them away from the right path and they have gone astray."* (27:24)

Sulaiman sends a message to the queen: *"In the name of Allah, Most Gracious, Most Merciful. Do not be arrogant and come to me in submission."* (27:30-31)

(Verse 30 contains the sentence fragment *"Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim."* Sura Taubah is the only Sura that does not begin with *"Bismillahir Rahmanir Rahim"* but the total number of this sentence in the Quran is 114 when verse 30 of Sura Naml is included.)

The queen takes time to consider Sulaiman's invitation by consulting with her advisers. She accepts the invitation and is received with honor by Sulaiman at his palace, where she witnesses the miraculous transport of her throne to his court and the power of his faith. She is now convinced that Sulaiman is a messenger of Allah and recognizes the error of worshipping false gods. *"... She said: 'O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, but I now submit with Sulaiman to Allah, Lord of Creation.'"* (27:44)

(Note that when prophet Musa wrongfully killed a man as described in verse (28:16), he uttered almost the same heartfelt words of repentance: *"O my Lord! I have indeed wronged my soul, so forgive me!"*)

What we must not lose sight of is that, at the earthly level, the catalyst for the queen of Sheba's transformation was hoopoe, the bird. Allah's grace extends to all living beings and those that we humans mistakenly or

arrogantly consider insignificant can be catalysts for transcendental transformations.

The Thamud were a people given to arrogance and stubbornness, as were the people of Lut. Of the Thamud, the Quran says, "... *We destroyed them and all their people. Their dwellings are desolate ruins because of their transgressions ...*" (27:52) while a shower of brimstone rained down on the people of Lut. (27:58)

The difference between Allah and the false gods that pagans worship is made clear through the enumeration of Allah's divine qualities: "*Who is better? Allah or the false gods they associate with Him? One Who has created the heavens and the earth and Who sends down rain from the sky? ... with it, We cause to grow orchards full of beauty and delight. It is not in your power to cause the growth of the trees in them ... or, Who has made the earth firm to live in, made rivers in its midst, set thereon mountains immovable and made a separating bar between the seas ... or, Who listens to the distressed when he calls on Him, and Who relieves his suffering ... or, Who guides you through the depths of darkness on land and sea, and Who sends the winds as heralds of glad tidings, going before His mercy ... or, Who originated creation, then repeats it, and Who gives you sustenance from heaven and earth ...?*" (27:59-64)

What profound verses these are that summarize the creativity and the compassion of our Creator, reflected in the natural wonders around us and in the innumerable blessings that sustain us through periods of anguish and adversity!

One characteristic of disbelievers is their rejection of life after death. "... *When we and our fathers are turned to dust, shall we be raised to life? We were promised this before and so were our fathers. It is nothing but a myth*

of the ancients! Say to them, 'Look around you in the world and see what the end was for the wrongdoers.'" (27:67-69)

Belief in the Hereafter is a requirement of faith. Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w) mission was to guide people to their Lord by the light of the Quran: *"For me, I have been commanded to serve the Lord of this City (Makkah), which Allah has made sacred. All things belong to Him alone. I am instructed to surrender to Him and proclaim the Quran. If any accept guidance, they do it for the good of their own souls, and if any stray, say: 'I am only a Warner.'"* (27:91-92)

(Sura Qasas is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Qasas (The Story) (Verses 28:1-88)

About one-half of the Sura concerns the story of Musa (AS) with emphasis on his human impulses, contradictions and errors. It makes clear that Allah's messengers were not superhuman beings with semi-divine qualities but subject to the same desires, conflicts, and challenges afflicting ordinary mortals.

We are presented with new details about Prophet Musa: his birth and his being picked up from the river by Pharaoh's household, and the wife of Pharaoh saying *"... This child may bring joy to me and you. Do not kill him. He may be of use to us, or we may adopt him as our son."* (28:9)

Allah's plan transcends human plans and defeats the plans and plots of despots and tyrants, as we witness time and again throughout history.

Musa (AS) is forced to flee Egypt after realizing that Pharaoh's people are out to kill him. In Madyan, he makes a fervent supplication to Allah after helping two women water their flocks of sheep: *"... O My Lord! Indeed, I am in dire need of any help that you may send me!"* (28:24)

(Believers often invoke this profound du'a, particularly during difficult times:
Rabbi Inni Lima Anzalta Ilayya Min Khairin Faqeer.)

The rest of Prophet Musa's story is well-known. He returned to Egypt and prevailed over Pharaoh who, along with his followers, drowned in the Red Sea.

No one is more astray than those who follow their lusts: "*And who is more astray than one who follows his own lusts, devoid of guidance from Allah?*" (28:50) The cycle feeds on itself: If we follow our lusts and desires, we will deprive ourselves of Allah's guidance. When we deprive ourselves of Allah's guidance, we will submit ourselves even more to our lusts and desires.

Those who embrace Allah's words – Jews and Christians, the people of the Book – will be doubly rewarded: "*And when it (the Book) is recited to them, they say, 'We believe therein, for it is the Truth from our Lord. Indeed, we have been Muslims before this. Twice will they be given their reward, for that they have persevered, that they avert evil with good and spend in charity out of what we have given them. And when they hear vain talk, they turn away therefrom and say, 'To us our deeds, and to you yours. Peace be to you, we seek not the ignorant.'*" (28:53-55)

Those who bow to Allah's Will regardless of the faith they were born into are the successful ones in the Sight of Allah.

While some of us may be blessed with wealth and properties in abundance, we must always remember that what is with Allah (our repentance, faith, and good deeds) is more enduring than our earthly possessions. "*The material things which you are given are but the convenience of this life and the glitter thereof. But that which is with Allah is better and more enduring. Will you not then be wise?*" (28:60)

Allah's mercy is always available even when we make mistakes large and small, provided we do our part: "... *anyone who repented, believed and performed good deeds will be among the successful.*" (28:67) Notice that while many Quranic verses combine faith and good deeds as the hallmark of believers, in this verse we see a third – repentance – which only amplifies Allah's encompassing mercy toward us.

Allah's bounty is evident in what we often take for granted, such as the alternation of night and day: "... *If Allah were to make the night perpetual over you till the Day of Judgment, what god is there other than Allah who can give you light? Will you not then heed? ... If Allah were to make the day perpetual over you till the Day of Judgment, what god is there other than Allah who can give you a night in which you can rest? Will you not then see? It is out of His mercy that He has made for you night and day, that you may rest therein and that you may seek of His grace, and that you may be grateful?*" (28:71-73)

The story of Qarun, a contemporary of prophet Musa and the billionaire of his time, is of special interest. He grew arrogant because of his enormous wealth. "... *such were the treasures We had bestowed on him that their very keys would have been a burden to a body of strong men. His people said to him: Exult not, for Allah does not love those who exult. Using what Allah has given you, seek success in the Hereafter but do not neglect to do your share of work in this world. Be good to others as God has been good to you and do not perpetrate evil in the land. God does not love those who do mischief.*" (28:76-77)

(Note the advice the humble and righteous people gave Qarun about not neglecting "your share of the work in this world." When wealthy people obsess over their wealth, exploiting the weak and the vulnerable to amass their fortune and preferring to hoard rather than share, they become misers.

They ignore the needs of the poor, and when they spend, they spend lavishly on themselves like the self-worshipping sybarites they are. Qarun had all these vices, as do modern-day versions of Qarun. On the other hand, those who use their wealth to do good for humanity are assured of their reward from Allah.)

Haughty Qarun replied: *"This wealth has been given to me by virtue of the knowledge I have ..."* (28:78)

Those driven by worldly success envied Qarun and his riches. *"... O' that we had the like of what Qarun has! For he is truly the lord of a fabulous fortune."* (28:79) But those with true knowledge said, *"The reward of Allah in the Hereafter is best for those who believe and do what is right but only those with patience in adversity can ever achieve this blessing."* (28:80)

(Observe in our times the worship of money and how so many are blinded by the opulent lifestyles of the rich and famous and want to be like them!)

Qarun's fate? *"Then We caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling. He had nothing and no one to help him against Allah nor could he defend himself."* (28:81)

The lesson opened the eyes of those envious of Qarun's wealth: *"And those who had envied his position the day before began to say on the morrow, 'Ah! It is indeed Allah Who enlarges the provision, or restricts it, to any of His servants as He pleases!'"* (28:82)

(A good deed has its certain reward with Allah. That reward will be better than the merit of the doer. Allah may forgive us if we repent after committing an evil deed but in any case, He will not punish us with a more severe penalty than justice demands. *"If any does good, the reward to her*

or him is better than her or his deed. But if any does evil, the doers of evil are only punished to the extent of their deeds.” (48:84))

That Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) was relating the details of Musa’s life and the history of the Israelites should have convinced Arabs that what he was telling them had come from a Higher Power. Yet the unbelievers persisted in rejecting the Truth and were among the lost. The believers among them, however, opened their hearts to the Quran and, with Allah’s help, changed the course of history.

(Sura Ankabut is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Ankabut (The Spider) (Verses 29:1-44)

We will all be tested regardless of what we may claim: *“Do men think they will be left alone, saying ‘We believe,’ and that they will not be tested? We did test those before them, and Allah will certainly know those who are true from those who are false.” (29:2-3)*

We are again reminded of what constitutes success in Allah’s Sight: *“Those who believe and work righteous deeds. From them, we shall blot out all misdeeds that they have committed. And We shall reward them according to the best of their deeds. We have enjoined on man kindness to parents ... and those who believe and work righteous deeds, We shall admit them to the company of the righteous.” (29:7-9)*

(Notice again Allah’s promise to reward us according to the *best* of our deeds, a promise that fills the heart of believers with hope and confidence. It should also remind us that reading the Quran should fill us with joy.

Unfortunately, the grim and pseudo-solemn way many of us are taught the Quran turns communities into tombs! It is one of the reasons why young Muslims are repelled by the grim and admonishing tones of many

psychologically and cognitively clueless Islamic teachers in our mosques and Islamic schools.)

The empty promises of unbelievers are laid bare: *"And the unbelievers say to those who believe: 'Follow our path, and we will bear the consequences of your faults.' Never in the least will they bear their faults: in fact, they are liars. They will bear their own burdens and other burdens, along with their own."* (29:12-13)

The Quran makes it clear in multiple verses that "no bearer of burden can bear the burden of another." To understand verse (29:13) - of disbelievers bearing other burdens – requires that we understand its context. 'Other burdens' in this context include the burden of deluding others with falsehoods. Both sins belong to the disbelievers, the sin of disbelief and the sin of deluding others. In other words, the sins of the disbelievers who mislead others will be multiplied.

Those who deny the existence of a Creator are challenged to use their faculties: *"See they not how Allah originates Creation, then repeats it? Truly that is easy for Allah. Say: 'Travel through the earth and see how Allah originated Creation. So will Allah produce a later Creation, for Allah has power over all things.'"* (29:19-20)

Who despairs of the mercy of Allah? *"Those who reject the Signs of Allah and the meeting with Him in the Hereafter, it is they who despair of My mercy ..."* (29:23)

Belief is easy. It is belief backed by action that differentiates strong believers from weak believers and hypocrites. False beliefs and values are blown away by the strong and steady wind of truth: *"The parable of those who take protectors other than Allah is that of the spider, who builds a house for*

itself. But truly the frailest of houses is the spider's house if they but knew!"
(29:41)

Those who seek knowledge acquire it by Allah's grace. The desire to enlarge our insight and understanding must come from within. When that desire and yearning are there, at the confluence of which we can experience the Divine, Allah will help us gain what we seek. *"And such are the parables We set forth for mankind. But only those understand them who have knowledge."*
(29:43)

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