

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

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

Summary of Verses 29:45-33:73

Sura Al-Ankabut (The Spider) (Verses 29:45-69)

One purpose and power of prayers is that it *"restrains from shameful and unjust deeds."* It follows, therefore, that *"remembrance of Allah is undoubtedly the greatest thing in life."* (29:45)

The importance of courtesy and respect in dealing with Jews and Christians is emphasized: *"Do not argue with the People of the Book except in the best way, apart from those among them who transgress. Say to them, 'We believe in that which is revealed to us and which was revealed to you. Our God and your God is the same, and to Him we all surrender ourselves.'"* (29:46)

(The openness and courtesy toward Jews and Christians were one of the things that made early Islamic civilizations great. Sadly, this openness and courtesy are often absent in Muslim-majority countries where severe limitations on free expression are often the rule. Today Muslims get misty-eyed waxing eloquent about the "golden age" of Islam from the 8<sup>th</sup> through the 13<sup>th</sup> centuries. We should realize that one of the things that can lift us from our grim present is to become as open-minded and courteous toward the People of the Book as we were in the past. This does not in any way excuse the Islamophobia that defines extremist groups, particularly in the West. However, cordial interfaith relationships, particularly in Muslim-majority countries, can help us live up to the Quranic injunction to "not argue with People of the Book except in the best way." We have every right anywhere to challenge erroneous ideas about Islam but we can welcome this

challenge by quoting the Quran: "*Bring your proof!*" (2:111, 21:24, 27:64) and respond with counterarguments.)

Polytheists of Arabia demanded that the Prophet (s.a.w) perform miracles to support his claims. "*They ask, 'Why has no sign been given to him by his Lord?' Say to them, 'Signs are in the hands of Allah. My mission is only to give clear warning.' Is it not proof enough for them that We have revealed to you the Book to recite to them? Surely in this there is mercy and reminder for those who believe!*" (29:50-51)

The verse makes it clear that the Quran, a source of mercy and reminder, is Prophet Muhammad's (s.a.w) enduring miracle. It links the human with the Divine and its influence and impact on humankind will continue until the end of time.

Who will prosper after we return to our Lord? The Quran makes it clear: "*Every soul shall have a taste of death. In the end you will be brought back to Us. But those who believe and work deeds of righteousness, to them shall We give a Home in Heaven, lofty mansions beneath which flow rivers, to dwell therein forever, an excellent reward for those who do good.*" They are the ones "*who persevere in patience and put their trust in their Lord.*" (29:57-59)

In other words, the path to eternal bliss is open to those who are patient and steadfast in faith and who put their faith into action by being beneficial to Allah's Creation. We are all born into toil and struggle. We must all endure dark nights of the soul. We will all confront crossroads in our lives. Our conscience points to the right path but the tragedy is that we don't take it. Instead, we take the easy path by succumbing to the seductive whisperings of Shaitan. Our faith is tested at every such crossroads. Do we give in to our dark desires, or do we obey Allah's commands by rejecting temporal

pleasures in favor of eternal bliss later? If we do the latter, we will be successful in this life and the Hereafter.

Trust in Allah can manifest in many ways. One of the ways is to know that *"Allah enlarges the sustenance of whichever of His servants He pleases, and He (similarly) grants by strict measures as He pleases, for Allah has full knowledge of everything."* (29:62) (A similar verse can be found in (13:26))

Allah knows what is good for us. He provides for all according to their genuine needs, based on His perfect knowledge and understanding. Sometimes we desperately want something based on our flawed knowledge and desires, but Allah saves us by denying what we wrongly seek. Likewise, He can give us more than what we seek as rewards for our wise choices. We need to do the best we can in any situation by sincerely acting on Allah's guidance. Afterward, we humbly and gratefully accept what He gives us. The effort is from us, the reward is from Allah. This mindset is the source of wisdom.

Obedying Allah's commands strengthens us. *"And as for those who struggled for Us, We will guide them to our Ways. And truly Allah is with those who are doers of good."* (29:69) The Prophet (s.a.w) said: Those who act upon what they know, Allah will grant them the knowledge of what they do not know. (We are reminded in Sura Najm *"... that the fruit of their strivings will soon come in sight."* (53:40))

(Sura Rum is a Makki Sura)

Sura Ar-Rum (The Romans) (Verses 30:1-60)

The Quran foresaw that the defeat of the Romans by the Persians would be short-lived and that within a few years, things would completely change. The prophecy was fulfilled. *"The Roman Empire has been defeated in a land close*

*by but after their defeat, they shall prevail within a few years. Allah has control over things before and after."* (30:2-4)

Allah keeps His promise even though we often fail to see it because of our impatience and heedlessness: *"It is the promise of Allah. Never does Allah depart from His promise but most people do not understand. They know but the outer things in the life of this world but of the end of things they are heedless."* (30:6-7)

Allah is the author of all creation and its repetitions: *"It is Allah Who begins the creation and repeats it. Then shall you be brought back to Him."* (30:11)  
The verse repeats in (30:27) with subtle variations.

Prayers are the most powerful means by which to thank Allah for His blessings. The times of the five daily prayers are again suggested in these verses: *"So extol Allah's glory when you enter upon the evening hours and when you rise in the morning, and since unto Him are due all praise in the heavens and the earth, glorify Him in the late afternoon and when the day begins to decline."* (30:17-18) (The prayers and their times are also suggested in verses (2:238), (11:114) and (17:78))

The Sura then proceeds to its central theme: The wonder of Allah's creation and His ability to *"bring forth the living from the dead and bring out the dead from the living and Who gives life to the earth after it is dead"* (30:19).

To help us lead a life of grace and gratitude, Allah has distributed numerous signs all over the universe as witnesses to His glory and power. The Sura draws our attention to seven of them:

1. *"One of His signs is that He has created you from dust and made you into human beings and has dispersed you everywhere."* (30:20)

2. *"One of His signs is that He has created for you spouses from among yourselves so that you may seek peace and comfort with them. He has placed love and mercy between you and them. In these are signs for people who think."* (30:21) (See also 25:74)
3. *"One of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of languages and colors. In these are signs for those who know."* (30:22)
4. *"One of His signs is that you sleep by night and by day seek His bounty. In these are signs for those who listen."* (30:23)
5. *"One of His signs is that He shows you the lightning, inspiring both fear and hope. He sends water down from the sky to revive the land after it has been lifeless. In these are signs for those who understand."* (30:24)
6. *"One of His signs is that the heavens and the earth exist by His will and command, and whenever He summons you, you shall immediately come forth."* (30:25)
7. *"One of His signs is that He sends winds as bearers of good tidings, to let you have a taste of His mercy, and so that ships may sail by His command, and you may seek of His bounty, so that you may be grateful."* (30:46)

Note the human faculties and qualities evoked and strengthened by reflecting on Allah's blessings and power in verses 21 to 25 of this Sura: *Think, Know, Listen, Understand*. Engaging these faculties will help us rise above worldly and ephemeral things and lead us to the true reality of Allah. There is no better way to become enlightened than to ponder the creativity of our Creator and the coherence of His Creation.

It is hypocritical to call on Allah in crisis but assign partners to Him when the crisis is over: *"When misfortune befalls human beings, they turn in prayers*

*to their Lord, humble and repentant. But when He then gives them a taste of His mercy, some of them takes up other gods besides their Lord!" (30:33)*

Knowingly or unknowingly, many of us are guilty of such lapses. Instead of speculating about others, each one of us should ask, 'Do I fall in this category? If yes, then I need to work on my faith and return to being on good terms with the Almighty.'

A sign of belief in Allah is that we accept His wisdom in enlarging or restricting our provisions: *"See they not that Allah enlarges the provision and restricts it to whomsoever He pleases? Surely in it are signs for those who believe."* (30:37) (This theme is also found in verse (28:82))

How can we hope that Allah will enlarge our provision? The two following verses show the way: *"Give what is due to kindred, the needy and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the countenance of Allah, and it is they who will prosper."* (30:38) In other words, the more we give in charity to the deserving, the more we can expect our provision to increase.

However, *"That which you give in usury (riba) through the property of other people will have no increase with Allah. But that which you give for charity, seeking the countenance of Allah, it is these who will get a recompense multiplied."* (30:39) In other words, if we try to increase our wealth by exploiting others using dishonest means, we will fail in the long run. This negative precept of avoiding what is wrong is again followed up by the sublime benefits of charity with the sole goal of pleasing Allah.

A most incisive insight is contained in this verse: *"Corruption has appeared on land and in the sea as an outcome of what men's hand has brought about. And so He will let them taste the evil of some of their doings, so that that may return to the right path."* (30:41)

Over 1400 years ago, the Quran warned us that the destruction of the natural environment follows from the immoral and unethical use of natural resources. Has there been a more precise definition of the existential climate crisis we face in the 21<sup>st</sup> century than this? Allah reminds us in (6:165): *"It is He who has appointed you His khalifa (trustee) on the earth ..."*

Trusteeship requires that we care for the air we breathe, the water we drink, the land we inhabit, that we care for the other beings we share the planet with, the trees, the birds, the animals. For believers, this is not an option but a religious obligation.

Viewed from any angle, the climate crisis, in addition to being an existential crisis, is also a moral and a spiritual crisis. The earth's resources – air, water, land, forests, minerals – are available for our use, but these gifts come from Allah with certain ethical constraints. We may use them to meet our needs, but only in a way that does not upset ecological balance and compromises the ability of future generations to meet their needs. We have been ripping the heart out of the earth with our insatiable greed, our reckless reliance on fossil fuels, deforestation, strip mining, soil erosion, treating the oceans as a waste dump, choking off marine life, turning the ocean acidic, and increasing the frequencies of cyclones, typhoons, hurricanes, droughts and wildfires.

Reflect on wind and how it regulates human affairs via seaways and airways. The trade winds, for instance, are air currents close to Earth's surface that blow from east to west near the equator. These have been used by sailors for centuries to travel from continent to continent. There are also the easterlies, westerlies, and doldrums, each serving a certain purpose.

*"Among His signs is this, that He sends the Winds as heralds of glad tidings, giving you a taste of His mercy, that ships may sail by His command and that you may seek of His bounty so that you may be grateful."* (30:46) Wind

brings the blessings of rain: *"It is Allah who sends the winds, and they raise the clouds. Then does He spread them in the sky as He wills and break them into fragments until you see raindrops issue from them. Then when He has made them reach such of His servants as He wills, behold, they rejoice, even though, before they received the rain, just before this, they were dumb with despair!"* (30:48-49). We desperately seek rain when the land is parched and wildfires ravage forests and habitats. In times of droughts due to global warming and other factors, we should beg Allah for rain as the Prophet (s.a.w) taught us in his prayer for rain, the *Salat al-Istisqa*.

Verses like (30:41), along with about 750 other verses of the Quran's 6236 verses (one-eighth of the Book), exhort believers to reflect on nature, study the relationship between living organisms and their environment, and maintain the balance and proportion Allah has built into His creation. If we fulfill our obligations to the natural environment as Allah has directed us to, we can mitigate the climate crisis. Do we have the vision and the sense of obligation to rise to this challenge? Only our behavior and actions can answer this question.

(Sura Luqman is a Makki Sura)

Sura Luqman (Verses 31:1-34)

The opening verses of this Sura parallel those of Sura Baqara, including the first verse with the abbreviated letters, "Alif, Lam, Mim." These specific abbreviated letters, whose meanings are known to Allah alone, begin Suras 2, 3, 29, 30, 31, and 32, six in all. *"These are verses of the Wise Book, a guide and a mercy to the doers of good, those who establish regular prayer, and give zakat and have sure faith in the Hereafter. They are on true guidance from their Lord, and they are the ones who will prosper."* (31:2-5) (Compare these 4 verses with verses (2:2-5) and a comprehensive picture emerges of the truly successful ones in the Sight of Allah.)



Belief alone is not enough. Belief must be backed by action which translates to doing good deeds: *"For those who believe and do good deeds, there will be gardens of bliss, to dwell therein. The promise of Allah is true. And He is exalted in Power, Wise."* (31:8-9) (Belief must be backed by good deeds. This exhortation can be found in (2:25), (2:82), (2:277), (4:57), (5:93), (10:4), (10:9), (11:23), (18:30), (18:107), (19:60), (19:96), (32:19), (34:37), (35:7), (98:7), (103:3) and other verses.)

Luqman was a legendary figure from ancient Arabian tradition. He was regarded as a model sage who disdained worldly honors and strove for inner perfection. *"We granted this wisdom unto Luqman: 'Show your gratitude to Allah, for he who is grateful to Him does so to the profit of his own soul. But if any is ungrateful, surely Allah is free of all wants, worthy of all praise.'"* (31:12)

The essence of the Sura is contained in the advice Luqman gives his son:

1. *"O my son, join not in worship others with Allah, for false worship is indeed the highest wrongdoing."* (31:13)
2. *"And Allah says: 'We have enjoined on humankind goodness toward their parents. Their mother bore them in pain after pain, weaning them for two years. Hence, O humankind, be grateful toward Me and toward your parents, and remember that with Me is all journey's end.'"* (31:14)
3. *"But if they want to make you join in worship with Me of things of which you have no knowledge, do not obey them. Even then, bear them company in this life with kindness, and follow the way of those who turn to Me in love. In the end, unto Me must you all return, and then I will tell you the truth and the meaning of all that you did."* (31:15)

4. *"O my son, if there be but the weight of a mustard seed and it were hidden in a rock, or anywhere in the heavens or on earth, Allah will bring it to light, for Allah is subtle and aware."* (31:16)
5. *"O my son, establish regular prayer, enjoin what is just, forbid what is wrong, and bear with patient constancy whatever may befall you, for behold, this constitutes firmness of purpose in the conduct of affairs."* (31:17)
6. *"And swell not your cheek for pride at men, nor walk in insolence on earth, for Allah does not love any arrogant boaster."* (31:18)
7. *"And be moderate in your pace, and lower your voice, for the harshest of sounds, without doubt, is the braying of donkeys."* (31:19)

Luqman's advice can serve Muslim parents well today, tomorrow and forever, particularly those who anguish over what went wrong when they were raising their children. As a Book of guidance, the Quran contains answers to our deepest yearnings. All we need to do is read the Book and reflect on it to discover these answers.

Allah's grace and bounties constantly benefit us, even if we are unaware of it. Sometimes we see them with our senses and sometimes we do not. In Allah's blessings is a transcendence that only a receptive and contemplative heart can experience. *"Do you not see that Allah has subject to your use all things in the heavens and on earth, and has made His bounties flow to you in exceeding measure, both seen and unseen?"* (31:20)

We are told unambiguously that *"whoever submits his whole self to Allah, and is a doer of good, has grasped indeed the firmest handhold, and to Allah shall all things return."* (31:22)

A verse similar to verse (18:109) states the inexhaustible source of Allah's Majesty and Power: *"And if all the trees on earth were pens and the oceans were ink, with seven oceans behind to add to it, yet would not the Words of Allah be exhausted, for Allah is exalted in power, full of wisdom."* (31:27)

Patience and gratitude go together: *"See you not that the ships sail through the ocean by the grace of Allah, that He may show you His signs? Surely in this are Signs for all who constantly practice patience and give thanks."*

(31:31) The word for patience in this verse is "Sabbar," which is an intensive form of "Sabr." The implication is that being in a constant state of patience and gratitude, in good times and bad, will elevate us in the Sight of Allah.

The Sura ends with an exhortation to do our duty to our Lord, and to recognize that none but Allah knows the time and place of our death: *"O mankind! Do your duty to your Lord and be conscious of a Day when no parent can avail anything for their children, nor any children for their parent. Surely the promise of Allah is true. Let not then this present life deceive you, nor let the chief deceiver (Shaitan) deceive you about Allah. Surely the knowledge of the Hour is with Allah alone. It is He Who knows what is in the wombs, nor does anyone know what he will earn for the morrow. Nor does anyone know what land he is to die in. Surely with Allah is full knowledge and He is acquainted with all things."* (31:33-34)

(Sura Sajdah is a Makki Sura)

Sura As-Sajdah (Prostration) (Verses 32:1-30)

The mystery of time is suggested in the verse: *"He directs the affairs from the heavens to the earth. Then it ascends unto Him, on a Day the measure of which is a thousand years of your reckoning."* (32:5)

Humans have godly qualities in them but are prone to ingratitude. "... He

*fashioned him in due proportion and breathed into him His spirit. And He gave you the faculties of hearing and sight and understanding. Little thanks do you give!" (32:9)*

The Quran defines the successful ones as those *"who believe in Our messages and who, when they are recited to them, fall down in adoration, and celebrate the praises of their Lord, and who are never filled with pride."* (32:15) Successful are also those *"who forsake their beds of sleep to pray to their Lord in awe and hope. They spend in charity out of the sustenance We have bestowed on them."* (32:16) For such believers, *"no human can imagine what blissful delights, as yet hidden, await them in the life to come as a reward for all their good deeds."* (32:17) Again, *"For those who believe and do righteous deeds, are gardens as inviting homes ..."* (32:19)

(The Quran reminds us that the bounties and pleasures of paradise are beyond human comprehension (32:17) Words such as rivers, gardens, form mental images of the ineffable nature and reality of paradise.)

The faculties of hearing and seeing mentioned in (32:9) should remind the astray of Allah's generosity so that they can find the right path: *"Does it not teach them a lesson, how many generations We destroyed before them, in whose dwellings they now go to and fro? Surely in that are signs. Do they not then listen? And do they not see that We drive rain to parched soil and produce therewith crops, providing food for their cattle and themselves? Have they not the vision?"* (32:26-27)

(Notice how the sense of hearing in verse (32:26) is followed by the sense of sight in verse (32:27). "Hearing" and "Seeing" include both physical and spiritual aspects, as we elevate ourselves, for example, from listening with the ears to listening with the heart and from sight to insight.)

(Sura Ahzab is a Madani Sura)

Sura Al-Ahzab (The Confederates) (Verses 33:1-73)

The Sura contains references to the Battle of the Trenches that Muslims in Madinah, under the leadership of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w), fought against hostile tribes in the surrounding regions. The battle was fought in the 5<sup>th</sup> Hijri. (Note that the Battle of Badr and the Battle of Uhud took place in the 2<sup>nd</sup> and the 3<sup>rd</sup> year of Hijri, respectively.)

The Sura addresses Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) on five occasions (33:1-3, 33:28, 33:45-46, 33:50, 33:59) in his capacity as guide and leader of the young Muslim nation, giving him specific instructions on issues related to his personal conduct as well as to the overall organization of the community. The particulars of the Sura are understood in context, but the message is universal: Allah's help is always near for believers whose trust in Allah is total. The *Ahzab*, or the Confederates, which included the pagan Quraish and various tribes in and around Makkah and Madinah, surrounded Madinah and tried to annihilate Madinah's fledgling Muslim community. When believers put their unconditional trust in Allah, He will dispose of their affairs most beneficially for them: *"And put your trust in Allah, and enough is Allah as a Disposer of affairs."* (33:3). (This assurance can also be found in (33:48) and 65:3).

And so it happened that when the Confederates tried to destroy the Muslims, in the 5<sup>th</sup> year Hijri, Allah's Light vanquished the forces of darkness, as it will until the end of time. *"O you who believe! Remember the Grace of Allah on you when there came down on you hosts to overwhelm you. But we sent against them a hurricane and forces that you saw not. But Allah sees clearly all that you do. Behold, they came on you from above and below you, and behold, the eyes swerved, and the hearts reached up to the throats, and you*

*imagined various thoughts about Allah. In that situation, the believers were tried. They were shaken as by a tremendous shaking."* (33:9-11)

The reference is to the battle known as the Battle of the Trenches (*khandaq*). Muslims dug a trench around Madinah by the Prophet's order and under the supervision of Salman the Persian. The trench, a defensive novelty in warfare at the time, took the enemy by surprise. Still, the presence of a numerically superior Confederate force, estimated at between ten to twelve thousand, an unprecedented army at the time, exposed the hypocrisy of some in Madinah who were covetous, hesitant, opportunistic, and more fearful of death than of Allah. *"And behold! The hypocrites and those in whose hearts is a disease say: 'Allah and His messenger promised us nothing but delusions!'"* (33:12) In contrast, *"When the believers sat the Confederate forces, they said: 'This is what Allah and His messenger had promised us, and Allah and His messenger told us what was true.' And it only added to their faith and their zeal in obedience."* (33:22)

(The Divine promise of help and success is contingent on our striving and doing good deeds in the service of Islam. It does not come to the fearful, the idler, or the kismet-blamers. As the Quran makes clear in numerous verses, conflict with evil is inevitable in life which believers must meet with courage and fortitude.)

In the end, the Truth prevailed as Allah promised the believers, and His help (piercingly cold wind, sandstorms, and heavy rain forced the Confederates to retreat after about two weeks) saw the faithful, aided by invisible angels, achieve victory in the Battle of the Trenches and many more victories in the years to come. *"And He made you heirs to their lands, their homes, and their goods, and of a land which you have not frequented before. And Allah has power over all things."* (33:27)

There are details about the special status given to the Prophet's wives. An understanding of these details requires close reading of the relevant verses. However, a summary is given in a verse that underscores the fundamental equality of genders by listing ten attributes of believers, irrespective of gender: Submission to Allah, Believe, Devout, Keeping promises, Patient, Humble, Charitable, Fast, Chaste, and Praise Allah.

*"For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for men and women who are true to their word, for men and women who are patient and constant in adversity, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast and deny themselves, for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."* (33:35)

Believers achieve true success when they *"... remember Allah with much remembrance and glorify Him morning and evening."* (33:41-42)

Allah explains the prophetic mission of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w): *"O Prophet! We have sent you as a witness, and a deliverer of good news, and a warner, and a caller to the Way of Allah by His command, and a beacon of light."* (33:45-46)

In two verses, Allah clarifies the five aspects that comprise the Prophet's (s.a.w) job description: Witness, Good News Bearer, Warner, Caller to the Way of Allah, and a Beacon of Light for humanity.

We are curious about when life on earth will permanently end to face the Day of Reckoning. That knowledge belongs to Allah alone: *"People ask you (O Prophet) about the Hour. Say, 'That knowledge is only with Allah. You never know, perhaps the Hour is near.'"* (33:63) (We read of the Final Hour

also in verses 7:187 and 21:108-109. That it will arrive is certain but only Allah knows when.)

When speaking, we must not only speak the truth but also speak to the point and be concise and clear. (The opposite is to ramble, a sin that unfortunately afflicts many of us who need to heed the wisdom contained in this verse.) *"O you who believe! Be conscious of Allah and make your utterance straightforward."* (33:70)

(This verse is frequently quoted during the Friday Jumu'ah khutbah to emphasize the importance of speaking concisely, truthfully, and to the point. Note that rules for good speaking habits hold for good writing as well.)

The combination of awareness of the Creator and speaking to the point leads to enormous benefits for the believer: *"He will bless your deeds for you, and forgive your sins. And whoever obeys Allah and His Messenger, has truly achieved a great triumph."* (33:71) Not only will Allah cure our flaws in knowledge and character but He will also forgive our sins if we remain conscious of Him at all times and speak the truth and to the point. This is how we become successful in the Sight of Allah.

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