

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

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

7<sup>th</sup> Taraweeh Summary, Ramadan 1446 Hijri  
Summary of Verses 7:1 – 7:206

(Sura Al-Araf is a Makki Sura)

Sura Al-Araf (The Heights)

Allah's revelation came to the inhabitants of Arabia, where Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) spread the message of the Quran, sowed the seeds of Islam, and nurtured its growth. The Arabs became the recipients of divine revelation. The Quran remained intact and will remain intact until the end of time. With revelation comes responsibility and accountability: *"Then shall we question those to whom Our message was sent and those by whom We sent it. And surely We shall recount their whole story with knowledge, for We were never absent at any time or place."* (7:6-7) Accountability and judgment will be just and comprehensive: *"On that Day, the truth shall be the criterion. Those whose scale of good will be heavy will prosper. Those whose scale will be light will lose their souls, for that they wrongfully treated Our signs."* (7:8-9)

Arrogance is a deadly vice. *Yastakbiruna*, Arabic for arrogance, occurs about 70 times in the Quran in several variations, underscoring the severity of its sin. Anytime we think that we are superior to others, in intelligence, wealth, power, or any other criterion, we commit the sin of arrogance. Anytime we speak condescendingly, look with disdain at others, or use intimidating or patronizing body language, we are being arrogant. We do not have to verbally state our superiority. Merely thinking that we are superior makes us guilty of arrogance. It is what caused Iblis to refuse to bow down before Prophet Adam (AS) when he told Allah, *"I am better than he. You created me from fire and him from clay."* (7:12)

Iblis not only refused to bow down, he refused to be of those who prostrated. He arrogantly despised the angels who prostrated, jealous of the humans to whom they prostrated and in rebellion against Allah for not obeying His order. Arrogance, jealousy and rebellion were his triple crimes.

Claiming superiority based on birth, race, origin or anything other than virtues such as piety, compassion, gratitude or humility invokes Allah's displeasure. Shaitan is banished but he warns that he will *"lie in wait for them on Your straight Way. Then will I assault them from before them and behind them, from their right and their left. You will not find in most of them gratitude for Your mercies."* (7:16-17).

In other words, failing to thank Allah for His mercy and blessings, that is, being ungrateful, makes one easy prey for Shaitan.

How did Shaitan deceive Adam (AS) and his wife? *"And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser."* (7:21)

Sincere adviser! How often do we fall victim to Shaitan's lures when he whispers into our ears that he is our best well-wisher, our sincerest helper?

*"Thus Shaitan brought about their fall by deceit. And when they tasted the tree, their shame became visible to them, and both began to cover themselves with leaves from the Garden. Then their Lord called out to them: 'Did I not forbid you from that tree, and did I not warn you that Satan is your declared enemy?'"* (7:22)

Their response is one of the most heartfelt and powerful Dua's in the Quran: *"They said: 'Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves. If You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we shall surely be among the losers.'"* (7:23)

Notice the following: Adam (AS) could have blamed Shaitan. He could have said, "Shaitan made me do it." That's the path most of us take. But Adam (AS) took responsibility for his transgression and begged Allah for guidance. That is what we too should do. Instead of blaming others for our sad state, we should take responsibility for our sins and mistakes and strive to correct ourselves while sincerely seeking Allah's guidance.

Notice the word "Taqwa" (righteousness that leads to mindfulness of Allah that leads to beneficial actions) in verse (7:26): *"O children of Adam, We have bestowed upon you clothing to conceal your private parts and as adornment. But the clothing of righteousness, that is best. That is from the signs of Allah that perhaps they will remember."*

"Taqwa" here refers to covering in a spiritual sense, "the clothing of righteousness," which is the best clothing, not the expensive or glittering clothes we wear to indulge in vanity or to impress others. Recall that in verse (2:197) as explained in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Taraweeh summary, "Taqwa" was equated with the best provision that we can carry with us. In that verse, "Taqwa" referred to spiritual nourishment. These two metaphorical meanings of "Taqwa" show how powerful the word is in scope and depth. We can gain a deep understanding of the Quran if we study the subtle nuances of "Taqwa" which occurs about 190 times in the Quran.

Allah reminds humanity at large of the dangers of Shaitan's seductive whisperings: *"O you children of Adam! Let not Shaitan seduce you in the same manner as he got your parents out of the Garden ... for he and his tribe see you from a position where you cannot see them. We made Shaitan friends with those without faith."* (7:27)

Attention to personal hygiene, particularly during prayer, and the importance of not wasting by excess is emphasized: *"O children of Adam, wear your*

*beautiful apparel at every time and place of prayer, eat and drink but waste not by excess, for Allah does not love the wasters.” (7:31) (The sin of waste is also stated in (6:141) that takes on a fierce urgency in the context of the catastrophic effects of climate change.)*

Sometimes we become strident and self-righteous and withhold the gifts Allah has blessed us with. We are to resist such impulses. *“Say, who has forbidden the beautiful gifts of Allah, which he has produced for his servants, and the things, clean and pure ...” (7:32)*

If we think of asceticism as the negation of wholesome beauty and art, Islam attaches no sanctity to such asceticism.

What Allah forbids include the following: shameful deeds, open or secret, sins and trespasses against truth or reason, assigning partners to Allah, and saying things about Him due to ignorance, willful or otherwise. *“Say, ‘My Lord has forbidden open and secret indecencies, sinfulness, unjust aggression, associating others with Allah ... and attributing to Allah what you do not know.’” (7:33)*

Some people reject Allah’s Signs with arrogance. *“... no opening will there be of the gates of heaven, nor will they enter the Garden until the camel can pass through the eye of the needle ...” (7:40)*

*“But those who believe and work righteousness, no burden do We place on any soul but that which it can bear. They will be companions of the Garden, therein to dwell forever.” (7:42)*

Note the condition for not being burdened with anything that we cannot bear: Belief and the doing of good deeds. In other words, we must make ourselves worthy of receiving Allah’s blessings.

We get an intriguing and instructive glimpse into a dialogue that takes place in the Hereafter between the believers, the unbelievers, and a third group of people who occupy a place on an elevated wall (*Al-Araf*) separating the other two groups. Those in paradise are portrayed as enjoying eternal peace and happiness and saying, *"Praise be to Allah, who has guided us to this. Never could we have found guidance, had it not been for the guidance of Allah."* Allah assures them: *"This is a paradise you have earned with your good deeds."* (7:43) Once they settle down, they become curious about their former oppressors. *"Those in paradise will call out to those in hellfire: 'We have indeed found the promises of our Lord to be true. Have you also found Your Lord's promises to be true?' They shall say, 'Yes!'"* (7:44)

What about the people sitting on Al-Araf, the Heights? The tone of the verses describing them suggests they are also among the blessed. *"On the heights will be men who would know others by their marks. They will call out to those in paradise, 'Peace on you.' They will not have entered but they will have an assurance thereof. When their eyes shall be turned towards those in hellfire, they will say: 'Our Lord! Do not send us to the company of the wrongdoers.' The men on the heights will call to certain men whom they will know from their marks, saying: 'Of what profit to you were your hoards and your arrogant ways?' Behold! Are these not the men whom you swore that Allah with His Mercy would never bless? Enter paradise: no fear shall be on you, nor shall you grieve."* (7:46-49)

Those who reflect deeply on the verses of the Quran draw lessons from the rise and fall of civilizations through the cycles of history. The Sura speaks at length about the people of Nuh (7:59-64) and Lut (7:80-84) and about ancient Arabian tribes such as 'Ad (7:65-72), Thamud (7:73-79), and Madyan (7:85-93), who arrogantly rejected the prophets and messengers sent to them. Allah punished them and destroyed their homes and towns.

There are details about the mission of Prophet Musa (RA) and his divinely inspired message. Pharaoh, and later, the Israelites of Egypt, rejected him and his message. Like the people of past prophets, destruction was their fate. (7:103-157)

For a composite picture of the trials and tribulations of Prophet Musa (RA) and his ultimate vindication, including his encounters with the Pharaoh and his dramatic meeting with the magicians, see Suras Baqara (2:47-71), Maida (5:20-26), Yunus (10:75-93), Isra (17:4-7, 101-104), Ta Ha (20:60-73), Shuara (26:10-66), Naml (27:7-14), Qasas (28:2-46), Ghafir (40:23-46), and Naziat (79:15-25).

A dramatic scene is presented in the encounter between Musa (RA) and Pharaoh and his band of magicians. Pharaoh was confident of proving his superiority over Musa through the spellbinding magic of his sorcerers. "... *They bewitched the eyes of the people, and struck terror into them ...*" (7:116) But when Musa threw his staff as commanded by Allah, "*it swallowed up all the falsehoods ...*" (7:117)

The magicians at once recognized the eternal Truth preached by Musa. "... *the sorcerers fall down in adoration, saying, 'We believe in the Lord of the Worlds, the Lord of Musa and Harun.'*" (7:120-122)

Undaunted by the Pharaoh's threats to kill them, they spoke truth to power in fearless words: "... *you (Pharaoh) wreak your vengeance on us simply because we believed in the Signs of our Lord when they reached us! Our Lord, pour on us patience and constancy, and take our souls unto You as Muslims!*" (7:126)

The metamorphosis of the magicians is powerful because it shows how minds open to reason and hearts inclined to transcendence can rise above

the lure of wealth, status, and power, a lesson we too must practice as we strive toward the Straight Path through our daily challenges and temptations.

Particularly compelling is the description of the meeting of Musa (RA) and his Creator: *"When Musa came to the place appointed by Us, and his Lord addressed him. He said, 'O my Lord! Show Yourself to me that I may look upon You.'* Allah said: *'By no means can you see Me (directly). But look upon the peak of the mountain. If it stays in its place, then shall you see Me.'* *When his Lord manifested Himself on the peak, He made it as dust, and Musa fell down in a swoon. When he recovered his senses, he said: 'Glory be to You! To You I turn in repentance, and I am the first to believe.'"* (7: 143) (See also (20:10-14), (27:9-12) and (28:30-35))

Zakat is mentioned in conjunction with Salat in about 30 verses of the Quran, although the word 'salat' in all its derived forms occurs 99 times in the Divine Text. However, zakat, without reference to salat, is mentioned in only two verses of the Quran. One of these is 7:156, (the other being 30:39), in which Allah says, *"... but My mercy extends to all things. That mercy I give to those who practice Taqwa and give zakat, and those who believe in Our signs."*

Notice how the word 'zakat' is placed between Taqwa and belief in Allah's Signs, suggesting perhaps that zakat is the bridge that links the two. Charity and self-purification increase our awareness of the Creator and become a channel for receiving Allah's mercy.

Allah tests us through both prosperity and adversity. *"We dispersed them through the land in groups. Some were righteous, others less so. We tested them with prosperity and adversity, so that they may return to the Right Path."* (7:168)

We will be tried with both prosperity and adversity. Is the appearance of 'prosperity' before 'adversity' in the verse important? Allah knows best but it is something to reflect on, whether prosperity can lead us astray more than adversity can. A saying of Prophet Muhammad (s.a.w) is instructive: "Be mindful of Allah in prosperity and He will be mindful of you in adversity."

Most susceptible to Shaitan are those who have no gratitude for Allah's blessings. Shaitan also gets his way with those weak of faith and those who succumb to temptations. It is a battle that even Adam and Eve (RA) lost. Shaitan is successful with those who listen to him. *"Relate to them the story of the man to whom We sent Our signs, but he passed them by, so Shaitan followed him and he went astray. If it had been Our Will, We could have elevated him with Our signs, but he clung to this life, following his evil desires ... This is the example of those who deny Our signs. So narrate to them the stories of the past, so that they may reflect."* (7:175-176)

Sometimes we arrogantly think that the intellect alone can help us understand the Quran. But the heart ('*Qalb*' in Arabic is mentioned 132 times in the Quran) possesses its own intelligence. The intelligence of the heart cannot be separated from the intelligence of the mind if we aspire to a holistic understanding of the message of the Quran: *"Indeed, We have destined many jinn and humans for Hell. They have hearts they do not understand with, eyes they do not see with, and ears they do not hear with ..."* (7:179)

The intelligence of the heart enables the mind to reflect, understand and act. The Divine Text contains much that is manifest, but it also contains mysteries, silences, and the ineffable that are accessible to the humble, the pious, and those with reflective intelligence even if they are not intellectually gifted. Reason, the life of the mind, reinforces spirituality, the life of the



heart, and vice-versa. It is significant that when the Prophet (s.a.w) began conveying the message of the Oneness of Allah to Makkans, the message first entered the hearts of the lowly and the humble, not the hearts of the intellectuals, the powerful and the wealthy.

The children of Adam are weak and often struggle to resist Shaitan's seductive whisperings. The Quran tells us how to protect ourselves: *"If a suggestion from Shaitan assails your mind, seek refuge with Allah, for He hears and knows all things"* and *"Those who fear Allah, when a thought of evil from Shaitan assaults them, bring Allah to remembrance, when lo, they see right!"* (7:200-201)

The Quran is a shield and the etiquette for listening to it is clear: *"When the Quran is read, listen to it with attention and hold your peace, that you may receive Mercy."* (7:204)

We violate Allah's command – an unfortunate occurrence in many Muslim countries - if we keep audio or video of Quranic recitation playing in the background while engaged in worldly affairs.

The concluding verses of Sura Al-Araf instruct believers to rely on Allah through prayers and celebrate His praises for salvation and redemption: *"Bring your Lord to remembrance in your very soul, with humility, and in reverence, without loudness in words, in the mornings and evenings, and do not be of those who are heedless. Those who are near to Allah never flag in worshipping Him. They celebrate His praises and bow down before Him."* (7:205-206)

A believer should think of prayers not as interrupting the day but as acts of devotion interrupted by everyday needs.

(Notice the word "nafs" as used in (7:205): Remember your Lord in your "soul" or "self." The word appears, for example, in (2:48): "*Guard yourselves against the Day on which no soul will be of help to another*" and in (4:1): "*O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women.*" In the Quran, "nafs" is mentioned a total of 295 times. The Quran uses three adjectives or qualifiers to describe three different types of "nafs." Details can be found in the 10<sup>th</sup> Taraweeh Summary.)

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