بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

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Where Comfort Lies

Surah Taha: 9- 14

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The surah continues and will now mention the story of Musa with God on the Mountain. This conversation has the answer we are seeking. How to find comfort in pain and hardships? It is answered in this passage.

وَهَلْ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰٓ

Did the news of Musa come to you?

إِذْ رَءَا نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ ٱمْكُثُوٓا۟ إِنِّىٓ ءَانَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّىٓ ءَاتِيكُم مِّنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجِدُ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ هُدًى

When he saw a fire, he said to his family "Wait here for I am drawn to a fire. I may bring you a torch from it or find guidance at the fire."

فَلَمَّآ أَتَىٰهَا نُودِىَ يَـٰمُوسَىٰٓ

Then when he finally came to it he was called out - Musa!

إِنِّىٓ أَنَا۠ رَبُّكَ فَٱخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ ۖ إِنَّكَ بِٱلْوَادِ ٱلْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

Indeed I alone am your Master. Remove your sandals for you are in the sanctified valley of Tuwa

وَأَنَا ٱخْتَرْتُكَ فَٱسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَىٰٓ

I have chosen you for the good in you; so listen closely to what is revealed

إِنَّنِىٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَـٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعْبُدْنِى وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِذِكْرِىٓ

*Indeed, I am Me/I am who I am. Allah. So give Ibadah to me and Establish the Salaat for my **Zikr***

وَهَلْ أَتَىٰكَ حَدِيثُ مُوسَىٰٓ

Did the news of Musa come to you?

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To say this in the form of a question is again for the purpose of showing kindness and love. It is like the situation when you are sitting down crying, a person comes and sits beside you, puts his hand over your shoulder, comforts you and then lovingly says, 'did the story of Musa come to you?' It is better than saying 'listen to the story of Musa' because it is a more loving and kind manner of speech.

There is something in the story of Musa which will comfort the grieved and sorrowful.

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إِذْ رَءَا نَارًا فَقَالَ لِأَهْلِهِ ٱمْكُثُوٓا۟ إِنِّىٓ ءَانَسْتُ نَارًا لَّعَلِّىٓ ءَاتِيكُم مِّنْهَا بِقَبَسٍ أَوْ أَجِدُ عَلَى ٱلنَّارِ هُدًى

When he saw a fire, he said to his family "Wait here for I am drawn to a fire. I may bring you a torch from it or find guidance at the fire."

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Musa said that he is drawn to the fire. Most translations translate it as “I have seen a fire’ but this is incorrect. The word used is Uns which is the feeling of comfort and happiness one feels when he is in the company of someone he or she loves. From the same root comes the word Insaan - Human being. Human beings are social creatures who desire love and companionship.

Musa felt comfort from the fire. Sometimes in our lives, when we just think about doing something, we feel good, as if our chest opens up. This is what Musa felt. He sees a fire in the middle of a dark night. One would naturally be afraid of approaching it because the first obvious conclusion is that there is a person by the fire and you would be cautious of approaching strangers in the middle of the night in an unknown valley. But Musa felt comfort emanating from the fire. The thought and idea of him going up to the fire despite the danger involved expanded his chest comfortably. This will come up later so keep this in mind.

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فَلَمَّآ أَتَىٰهَا نُودِيَ يَٰمُوسَىٰٓ

Then when he finally came to it he was called out - Musa!

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Notice the word ‘finally.’ We will cover it later on why it is here.

The verb of calling (نُودِيَ / “he was called”) is constructed in the passive voice to increase suspense and curiosity about the story. The ambiguity of the caller makes the listener eager to know who is speaking. Then, when the verse suddenly reveals in the next verse:

“Indeed, I alone am your Master”

the listener realizes that the one calling is Allah Himself — and this realization deeply impacts the soul.

The use of the passive voice also helps vividly portray the scene, where Musa is called by an unknown voice, which is why the verb is narrated in the passive form.

Through this call, Musa understood that the words were being directly addressed to him by Allah Himself — because the voice was unfamiliar and extraordinary.

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إِنِّيٓ أَنَا۠ رَبُّكَ فَٱخْلَعْ نَعْلَيْكَ ۖ إِنَّكَ بِٱلْوَادِ ٱلْمُقَدَّسِ طُوًى

Indeed I alone am your Master. *Remove your sandals for you are in the sanctified valley of Tuwa*

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There are a couple of interesting things here which I will just briefly mention. First is the sentence. "I alone am your Master." If I were to get very literal about it, I could translate it as "I am Me, Your Master" or also as - " "I am who I am, Your Master."

This will again be repeated a couple verses down but there it is even more explicit. Now this sentence 'I am Me, your Master' or "I am who I am. Your Master' does not seem to make sense, but in the Hebrew Bible, in Exodus 3:14, in the same incident when God speaks to Musa, this is literally what he calls Himself. He calls Himself *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh - I am who I am.*

This is also the case with the word Tuwa which literally means to fold up or pile. It is a mountain of piled up blessings, blessings on top of blessings. This root meaning has connections to certain Midrashic interpretations of Mount Sinai but also to the incident of the promised land being folded under Jacob in the Torah.

The Quran contains many such instances. Sometimes, the Quran quotes the Torah directly. For example, the unique word the Quran uses for "testing" Ibrahim in Baqarah has the same dual meaning in both Hebrew and Arabic of testing and also blessing. The Quran will many times translate the names of Prophets and certain other people which are of Hebrew origin, such as Ibrahim (where it will quote the passage in Genesis), Dawud (Surah Saad), the mother of Musa (Surah Qasas) among others. In Aal Imran, it will literally, word for word, quote the Talmud to slam the Jews. The Quran knows what it's talking about and it knows the Hebrew Bible very well as well as Jewish theology because some of the Jewish beliefs criticized in the Quran are not disclosed to the public by their religious authorities, even to this very day.

On a side note, I will just mention one point. The lands God promised to Ibrahim in the Torah after the test of slaughtering his child, have never been occupied by the Jews in their entire history for over 2,000 years. These are the lands they call Greater Israel. Yet, the Muslims occupied all the lands promised to Ibrahim within 10 years after the death of our Prophet Muhammad. This is one of the greatest signs of his Prophethood. He

fulfilled the promise of God to Ibrahim. He achieved in 10 years what the Jews could not in 2,000 years. The promise of God has already been fulfilled by the other son of Ibrahim.



وَأَنَا ٱخْتَرْتُكَ فَٱسْتَمِعْ لِمَا يُوحَىٰٓ

I have chosen you for the good in you; so listen closely to what is revealed



Most translations translate it as "I have chosen you' but the word used for choosing in this ayah comes from the root Kha Ya Ra which means softness and goodness. When used in this context, it means God chose Musa because of the good qualities he possessed.. It could also mean that I have chosen you for this good thing or purpose. The latter would be consistent with the theme of the whole passage. I have chosen you for a good purpose, to do a good thing. The Prophet was in pain and suffering and he is being reminded that revelation from God is for a good purpose, not for the purpose of suffering. (recall verse 2)

There is something extremely important to note here.

- The normal structure of this verse is as follows: 'I have chosen you because of the good in you for what is revealed so listen closely.' So the phrase "Listen closely' is brought before its usual place. In Balagha one of the purposes of bringing something before its original place is to create emphasis. The root letters Seen Meem Ein mean to hear but the pattern in which this root occurs here is used to create emphasis by itself. This is why I added the word 'closely' after the word 'listen' to capture the emphasis placed just in the word itself. So just the pattern in which the root letters are used creates emphasis and by bringing this word before its usual place, there is even more emphasis placed. Something very important is about to be said so listen very closely and carefully.



إِنَّنِىٓ أَنَا ٱللَّهُ لَآ إِلَٰهَ إِلَّآ أَنَا۠ فَٱعْبُدْنِى وَأَقِمِ ٱلصَّلَوٰةَ لِذِكْرِىٓ

Indeed, I am Me/ I am who I am. Allah. There is no God but Me. So give Ibadah to me and Establish the Salaat for my ***Zikr***



This is the central ayah of this whole surah. This is the main point and answer that we are looking for. The reason why so much emphasis was placed to listen to this in the last ayah is because this is the answer we are looking for. How to gain strength and how to endure pain in times of difficulties is answered here.

Again the name of God in Exodus 3:14 is repeated here. In terms of Balagha, the second personal pronoun can be used for exclusivity. For centuries and even today, the Jews still dispute the meaning of the name God gives to Himself, there is no definitive way for them to get to the answer either, the vowel markings of the word YHWH have been lost. The Quran answers it for them. When looked at purely from a Balaghi perspective, "I am, Me' or "I am who I am" simply means "I alone am God." or literally "لا إله إلا الله" There is no god but Allah. The word "God" in "There is no God but Allah" has the same root as the word Allah, consistent with the Hebrew.

Allah commands Musa two things. Ibadah and to establish the Salaat (the five daily prayer)

Ibadah is usually translated as worship but it is deeper than that. This word comes from the root Ein Ba Daal which was used for a fragrant plant the camels used to eat. This plant would produce more milk in them but it also made them very thirsty immediately after. So to produce more milk in them, they have to endure the thirst that comes with it. Ibadah does not simply mean worship. It carries within itself the meaning of patience and endurance. Obeying Allah will come at a cost. Just as the camels had to endure the thirst that comes with eating that plant, so will you have to endure the difficulties that come with obeying Allah. But these difficulties are temporary. Thirst goes away by drinking water. Similarly the hardships will be temporary and go away. Obedience to Allah will come with temporary hardships and pain that will eventually go away. This is the concept of worship in Islam. This tests the mettle of the believer. One who truly loves Allah will endure and carry on while the hypocrite will turn away. It is a test. Endure the pain and pass this test to prove that you truly love Allah. This test is different for all people. The Prophet said:

سُئِلَ النَّبِيُّ ﷺ: أَيُّ النَّاسِ أَشَدُّ بَلَاءً؟

قَالَ: الْأَنْبِيَاءُ، ثُمَّ الْأَمْثَلُ فَالْأَمْثَلُ، يُبْتَلَى الرَّجُلُ عَلَى حَسَبِ دِينِهِ، فَإِنْ كَانَ فِي دِينِهِ صَلَابَةٌ زِيدَ فِي بَلَائِهِ، وَإِنْ كَانَ فِي دِينِهِ رِقَّةٌ، خُفِّفَ عَنْهُ، وَمَا يَزَالُ الْبَلَاءُ بِالْعَبْدِ حَتَّى يَمْشِيَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ وَمَا عَلَيْهِ خَطِيئَةٌ

The Prophet was asked: "Which people are most severely tested? He replied: The Prophets, then the next best, then the next best.A person is tested according to the strength of his religion. If his religion is strong, his trial is increased. But if there is weakness in his religion, the trial is lightened for him. Trials will continue to afflict a servant until he walks the earth having no sin left upon him. (Tirmidhi 2398)

The second command Allah gives Musa is to establish the Salaat, the five daily prayers. The word Salaat is quite interesting. It comes from the root Saad Laam Alif which was used for heating and softening a bent metal stick so that it could be straightened. First you heat the bent metal rod to make it soft, then you can bend it back to its original position and then make it firm again. This is the original usage of this root.

The Quran uses this root for the five daily prayers. It is a usage unique to the Quran as with many other words. Just as the metal rod was straightened, so do the five daily prayers set us straight and right. They get rid of the crookedness in us first, and then set us upright.

The Quran says to Establish the Salaat not to simply pray them. In the next paper, before going further in this Surah, I will discuss what this means and also Quranic instructions on how to pray. There are many people who do not benefit from the Salaat, rather it is only a burden on them. The Quran has the answer to why that is. We will cover this in the next paper In sha Allah.

To truly understand what the word Zikr means in this Surah, you need to first get rid of the notion of Zikr that we normally have of Zikr. We normally think Zikr is saying Subhan Allah, Alhamdulillah, or Allah Akbar etc. We normally associate Zikr to the tongue but this is absolutely false.

Notice what Allah says next. Establish the Salaat for my Zikr. I said previously that Zikr is the main point of this Surah and this word will come up again and again. Establish the five daily prayers for my Zikr. As a reminder, Zikr has two meanings; Strength and effective reminder of something

1. Musa was on the mountain with God. He actually talked to God Himself. Do you think he would ever forget this? It is by far the greatest thing any human being can experience. There is no way he is forgetting this. But Allah says to Musa, If you really want to remember Me and this meeting, Establish the five daily prayers. *The Salaat are greater than meeting and talking to him on the mountain. This is what Allah is saying. We all have five opportunities everyday to experience*

something greater than what Musa experienced on the Mountain with God.

2. *The second root meaning of Zikr was strength. Establish the five daily prayers for My Zikr - for my strength. If you want to be strengthened and comforted by Me, establish the five daily prayers. This is the answer to our pain. When you are in pain, pray to God and you will be comforted, You will find strength and comfort in God. This is the central point of this whole Surah. This is the answer God gives to the one in sorrow.*

This will be repeated many times in the Surah, and in the final passage of this Surah, it will be stated explicitly. The Surah consistently carries the theme forward by using the word Zikr repeatedly and then in verse 130, in the final passage of this Surah, it will explicitly mention in clear words that comfort lies in the five daily prayers. It's quite incredible as normally we would think that if the thing that causes us pain goes away we will gain comfort; or if the people who cause us pain would just go away; or if only our enemies would be punished or destroyed, our pain will be over. But Allah says none of that will give you the comfort that lies in the Salaat. The Salaat are your ultimate weapon against pain and your enemies. They are your best comfort in pain.
