

THE CLARIFICATION
of NOBLE CHARACTER



HABIB  UMAR BIN HAFIZ

THE CLARIFICATION OF
NOBLE CHARACTER

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Dar al-Turath al-Islami



The Clarification of Noble Character



Ḥabīb ʿUmar bin Ḥafīz

Contents



PREFACE	9
LESSON ONE: introduction to noble character	11
LESSON TWO: improving one's character	17
LESSON THREE: the greatness of patience	23
LESSON FOUR: putting patience into practice	29
LESSON FIVE: emulating the people of patience	35
LESSON SIX: forbearance	41
LESSON SEVEN: magnanimity	49
LESSON EIGHT: maintaining bonds of kinship	55
LESSON NINE: truthfulness of speech	61
LESSON TEN: truthfulness of action	67
LESSON ELEVEN: truthfulness of intention	73
LESSON TWELVE: mercy	79
LESSON THIRTEEN: making people happy	85

LESSON FOURTEEN: showing kindness to one's parents	91
LESSON FIFTEEN: good treatment of neighbours	97
LESSON SIXTEEN: assisting the oppressed	103
LESSON SEVENTEEN: keeping promises	109
LESSON EIGHTEEN: humility	113
LESSON NINETEEN: abstinence	119
LESSON TWENTY: raising children	125
LESSON TWENTY-ONE: instilling good character in one's wife	131
LESSON TWENTY-TWO: the best response	137
LESSON TWENTY-THREE: lowering one's gaze	143
LESSON TWENTY-FOUR: being trustworthy	149
LESSON TWENTY-FIVE: honouring elders and showing mercy to the young	155
LESSON TWENTY-SIX: brotherhood for Allah's sake	159
LESSON TWENTY-SEVEN: remembrance of Allah	165
LESSON TWENTY-EIGHT: gratitude	173
LESSON TWENTY-NINE: seeking perfection	179
LESSON THIRTY: embracing noble character	185
APPENDIX: excerpts from lectures by Ḥabib ʿUmar	191
PERSONS CITED IN THE TEXT	199
SUPPLICATIONS MENTIONED IN THE TEXT	203

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

Preface



Ḥabīb ‘Umar bin Muḥammad bin Sālīm bin Ḥafīẓ traces his lineage back through a continuous line of scholars to the Prophet Muḥammad ﷺ. He was born in the city of Tarīm, in Yemen’s Ḥaḍramawt Valley in 1383 AH (1963). He first studied at the hands of his father, Ḥabīb Muḥammad bin Sālīm, and the principal scholars of the region. He then sought knowledge in North Yemen and the Hijāz under masters such as Ḥabīb Muḥammad al-Haddār and Ḥabīb ‘Abd al-Qādir al-Saqqāf.

Ḥabīb ‘Umar then returned to his home city and established Dār al-Muṣṭafā, a centre for traditional Islamic learning. Dār al-Muṣṭafā and its branches continue to grow and receive students from all corners of the earth. Ḥabīb ‘Umar travels the world conveying the Prophetic message, reviving the Islamic tradition and calling people to Allah. He has authored several books and makes regular television appearances.

Ḥabīb ‘Umar lends his support to numerous religious and social projects throughout the world. He established al-Ra’fah Charity, which sponsors students of sacred knowledge, teachers, orphans and widows and assists the poor and needy in the Ḥaḍramawt region. He joined the world’s leading Muslim scholars to sign “A Common Word between Us and You”, a document that aims to build bridges between Muslims and Christians. In 2008, he attended the “Common Word”

conference chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury at Cambridge University. He is currently promoting the use of permaculture to revive agriculture in Ḥaḍramawt and elsewhere.

What follows is a series of lessons recorded by Ḥabīb ʿUmar in Shaʿbān 1422 (2001) for the Yemeni Satellite Channel on the subject of noble character. In these lessons, he clarified the meaning of noble Prophetic character, its status in Islam and the need for Muslims to embody it in order to gain the pleasure of their Lord and to gain felicity in this life and in the Hereafter.

These lessons have been transcribed by some brothers sincere in their desire to benefit themselves and others and they later arranged these lessons into a book and published it in Arabic under the title *Isʿāf tālibī riḍā al-Khallāq bi bayān makārim al-akhlāq* or “Assistance for Those Seeking the Creator’s Pleasure Through the Clarification of Noble Character”.

The work in your hands is an English translation of this book, a series of lessons presented as a reminder, a source of insight and a means to obtaining great good through arousing in people the desire to follow the Straight Path.

Allah is the Bestower of enabling grace, so we ask Him to benefit the speaker and the listener, the writer and the reader. We ask Him to make this book of great benefit to mankind, and to be a cause of reviving noble character. In Him we place our trust and from Him we seek assistance, and there is no strength or power save by Allah, the Most High, the Almighty.

LESSON ONE

introduction to noble character

*If Allah wishes to bestow His
grace upon someone, He places in
their soul the desire to travel the
path towards self-purification*

All praise be to Allah, the Lord of the worlds, Who created and originated and ordered and ordained, Our Lord, *the Most High, the One Who created then proportioned, Who pre-ordained, then guided.*¹ We bear witness that He is Allah, the Maker, the Originator, the Knower of the inward and the outward. We bear witness that our Master and Prophet Muhammad is His Servant and Messenger. He was sent to perfect noble character, and he is the Beloved of our Lord, the Creator. To him was revealed: *It is by the mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them. Had you been severe or harsh-hearted, they would have fled from you.*² O Allah, bestow everlasting blessings upon Muhammad, the one whose character You esteemed in Your Book, the Master of the Messengers and the Seal of the Prophets, and upon his pure Family, his elect Companions and those who follow their path. O Allah, bestow upon us the character traits and the etiquettes which he possessed by Your mercy, O Most Merciful!

Amongst the loftiest discourses of Muslim scholars, especially with regards to the purpose of creation and the mission of the Prophets, is the topic of noble character. The attainment of this noble character is obligatory for anyone who believes in Allah and His Messenger ﷺ who has submitted completely to Allah and proclaims the true Testimony.

What is meant by “noble character” is the character that Islam calls every Muslim to attain and the attributes with which to beautify himself. When the body is well proportioned and pleasant, a person’s physical appearance is termed beautiful. Likewise, when a person possesses beautiful attributes and excellent traits, their inner form is termed beautiful and they are described as possessing noble character.³ This inner spiritual form is the object of the gaze of Allah,

1 *Al-‘Alā*, 87:1-3

2 *Al-‘Imrān*, 3:159

3 Man’s outward form is known in Arabic as *khalq*, whereas his inward form or

the Real, exalted is His majesty. On the Day of Judgment, when realities are made manifest, man will be resurrected in this form.

Thus it is clear that the outer physical form is not nearly as significant as the intangible inner form. Therefore, it is incumbent upon intelligent believers to devote their attention to the rectification of their character and the attainment of the attributes that Allah loves. In doing so, they realise the purpose of the Prophetic mission as clarified by the Prophet of Allah ﷺ who said: "I was only sent to perfect noble character."⁴

Awakening the desire of the person to attain Prophetic character helps them to arrive at the perfection of that noble character. However, is it possible for those that are naturally disposed to acquiring blameworthy traits to rid themselves of them? Is it possible for those that lack desirable attributes to attain them?

The answer is that mankind generally, and Muslims specifically, have a natural aptitude to improve and raise themselves.

*Nations abide only as long as moral character endures;
Were moral character to depart, then they too would perish!*⁵

If Allah wishes to bestow His grace upon someone, He places in their heart the desire to travel the path towards self-purification and gives them the ability to rectify the attributes of their soul. He has made the achievement of this purification the basis of success, as He says in the Noble Qur'an: *Truly he who purifies it, succeeds, and he who corrupts it, fails.* He also says: *Truly the one who purifies himself prospers, and remembers the name of his Lord and prays.*

Through the moral teachings and etiquettes of Islam, believers are purified and cleansed and their stations are raised. They are guided to walk the path of uprightness until they are ready for the greatest honour: to be in the company of the Prophet ﷺ, the Chosen One, and in a state fit to be in the proximity of Allah and the best of gatherings, the angelic host. Allah says: *Those who say, "Our Lord is*

his character is *khuluq*, the plural of which is *akhlāq*. Both words share a common linguistic root.

4 Narrated by Mālik, Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī in his *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, al-Bayhaqī and al-Hākim.

5 Verses by Aḥmad Shawqī

Allah,” and then remain upright, the angels descend on them saying, “Fear not, nor grieve, but rejoice in the good news of the Garden that has been promised to you.”⁶

It has been narrated in an authentic hadith that the Prophet ﷺ said: “The most beloved of you to me and those who will be closest to me on the Day of Judgement are the best of you in character.”⁷ He ﷺ also said: “The most beloved of you to me and those who will be closest to me on the Day of Judgement are the best of you in character and the most humble,”⁸ and: “Truly those with the best character are among the best of you.”⁹

We ask Allah to let the light of this Prophetic character enter into the heart of every person who reads this, and, through His grace, to enable them to attain these noble attributes.

O Allah, allow us to realise this purely through Your grace, munificence and bounty, O Most Generous, O Most Merciful!

May peace and blessings be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family, Companions and those who follow them with excellence until the Day of Recompense. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

6 *Fuṣṣilat*, 41:30

7 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī and al-Bayhaqī

8 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī

9 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Ahmad

LESSON TWO

improving one's character

*The essence of the intellect is its
ability to restrain a person from
committing shameful acts*

In the last lesson we concluded that noble Prophetic character can be acquired. It is possible for all Muslims to rid themselves of vile attributes and adorn themselves with praiseworthy and beautiful attributes. This is possible if they are sincere and firmly resolve to achieve this. They must then seek to perfect their inner form by paying particular attention to their every word and action as well as to their interaction with others.

We see many people spending money and undergoing great hardship in order to beautify their outward appearance, all of which amounts to nothing in comparison to the perfection of noble character. A believer must recognise this fact. An eminent Yemeni scholar of the sixth century Hijrī (twelfth century CE) said: “Whoever gives the nourishment of his body priority over the nourishment of his soul then let him seek his reward from the fish and worms which devour his body!” This is because such people live in servitude to their bodies. Their efforts are directed towards the nourishment of their bodies to the detriment of the nourishment of their souls and the refinement of their character. They are thereby in servitude of those worms and fish which will eventually eat away at their bodies.

Imām al-Haddād, may Allah be well pleased with him, described the physical form of a human after death who had lived oblivious of his inward state and character. He said:

*There are those graves whose inhabitants have become
decayed bones,
After having been corpulent and obese,
After craving and devouring the good things in life;
Worms proceed to devour them beneath dust and mud
bricks.
Their colour has changed and effaced are
The beauties of the face, the eyes and the cheeks.*

*Loathed are they by all those who formerly displayed fondness
for them,*

Amongst their relatives, spouses and confidantes.

It is thus clear that virtue in this life and the attainment of the optimal reward in the Hereafter revolves around noble character. It is obligatory for Muslims to cultivate noble character traits in themselves, their families and in all those for whom they are responsible. Whatever duties believers perform in their lives should be connected to the divine message and to its bearer ﷺ who was sent to perfect noble character.

Let us look at how Allah praises the character of his Beloved in the Qur'an: When the disbelievers described the Prophet ﷺ as being mad, Allah responded by saying: *Nūn. By the Pen and what they record, you are not, by the favour of your Lord, a madman. You shall have a reward that is unlimited. Yours is indeed a tremendous character.*¹⁰

Allah thus refutes them through pointing to his tremendous character, which the disbelievers witnessed and which everyone acknowledged. Tremendous character pre-supposes great intelligence. Thus, if the Prophet ﷺ really was a madman, it would have been inconceivable for him to possess such a tremendous character. The intellect has been defined as "a faculty that lies in the soul which prevents a person from committing foul acts." Thus, the essence of the intellect is its ability to restrain a person from committing shameful acts. A person of expansive intellect is therefore someone who is able to control their anger and to acquire excellent character traits. The more expansive a person's intellect is, the more they are capable of controlling themselves and the keener they are to guard themselves from falling into that which is inappropriate and unbecoming.

May Allah grant us the ability to rid ourselves of base attributes and to adorn ourselves with noble character traits.

O Allah, instil in our souls fearful awareness of You, and purify our souls, as You are best able to purify them, You are the soul's Guardian and Master! O Allah, guide us to the best of actions and

¹⁰ Al-Qalam, 68:1-4

the best of character, for no-one but You may do so, and rid us of evil actions and character, for no-one but You may do so, by Your mercy, O Most Merciful, and through Your generosity, O Most Generous!

May peace and blessings be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family, Companions and those who follow them with excellence until the Day of Recompense. All praise is due to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON THREE

the greatness of patience

*The foundation upon which
the realities of faith are built*

The attribute of patience (*ṣabr*) is one of the most important character traits which the Prophets nurtured in their disciples. Allah adorned them with patience so that they would be an example to others, and He praises those who are patient. He says in His book, in reference to the Prophet Ayyūb ؑ: *We did indeed find him patient; how excellent a slave! He was ever turning in repentance (to his Lord).*¹¹ He also says: *Truly those who endure with patience will be rewarded without measure*¹² and: *He who is patient and forgiving, that truly is an affair that requires great resolve.*¹³

His Prophet, the Chosen One, Muhammad ﷺ, mentioned the reward of patience when mentioning the virtues of the month of Ramaḍān: “It is the month of patience and Paradise is the reward for patience.”¹⁴ Allah confirmed this in His book, describing the people of Paradise: *The angels enter upon them from every gateway, (saying): “Peace be upon you for what you have borne with patience. How excellent is the final abode!”*¹⁵

Patience can be defined as compelling the lower self to endure hardships and loathsome things. It is also compelling the lower self to forsake things which it holds dear and is accustomed to, which are not in its best interests. These things may lead to its destruction and cause it to miss out on great good. Patience in this sense is one of the forces of the intellect. It causes people to deal justly with one another. They then avoid seeking to uphold their own rights, which is one of the attributes of human perfection. Patience in this sense is a foundation upon which the realities of faith in the Most Merciful and conviction in the message of His Prophet ﷺ may be built.

11 Ṣād, 38:44

12 Al-Zumar, 39:10

13 Al-Shūrā, 42:43

14 Narrated by Ibn Khuzaymah and al-Bayhaqī

15 Al-Raʿd, 13:23

One type of patience is displayed in confronting the hardship of performing duties which are either obligatory or recommended and which contain numerous benefits in this life and the hereafter. It is often termed “patience in obedience”, meaning perfecting and being consistent in performing acts of obedience.

Another type of patience concerns things that the lower self desires but which the intellect perceives as harmful, since it realises that the end result of such things is disgrace and tribulation. The self thus exerts patience in abstaining from these things, even though its cravings may remain. This is known as “patience in the face of disobedience”. Such patience leads a person to abandon many things that are not impermissible and even things that are not deemed offensive by the Sacred Law. This occurs when the intellect judges that indulgence in such a thing would be bereft of any benefit or would prevent the attainment of a lofty rank or some good in this world or the next.

A third type of patience is manifested when believers suffer misfortune. Through it they are able to deal effectively with whatever events confront them. Allah, exalted be His majesty, says: *Give glad tidings to the patient, those who say when calamity afflicts them: “We belong to Allah, and surely to Him we shall return.” Upon such people will be blessings from their Lord and mercy; and such are the rightly guided.*¹⁶ With regards to this verse, Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb said: “What an excellent pair (namely, *blessings from their Lord and mercy*) and what an excellent bonus (guidance).” Blessings, mercy and guidance are all for those who are patient!

Great, therefore, is the station of patience in the sight of Allah and great too is the intelligent person’s need for patience! We observe non-Muslims being patient when confronted with a multitude of difficulties in order to solve problems or to attain worldly objectives but we believers are unable to exert patience as a means of attaining eternal felicity and warding off infinite evil!

May Allah grant us continual patience such that it affords us unlimited reward, for truly He is the Most Generous.

16 *Al-Baqarah*, 2:155-7

May He bestow His blessings upon His Chosen One, the master of the patient, Muhammad and upon all his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON FOUR

putting patience into practice

*Striving to attain patience in acts
of obedience, patience in the face of
disobedience and patience in the
face of trials and tribulations*

In the last chapter we discussed the greatness of patience and its importance in a Muslim's life. We pointed to the fact that patience has benefits in this life and the next. Thus it is obligatory for Muslims to base their affairs upon patience, keeping a watchful eye over themselves from the time they wake up until they sleep. They must be aware of the fact that as long as they remain in this life then they are in dire need of it.

No one can reach Paradise except by showing patience in the face of unpleasant things and by bearing great difficulties. As the Prophet of Allah ﷺ said: "Paradise is surrounded with unpleasant things."¹⁷

It has been related in a hadith that when Allah created Paradise and all the adornment and pleasures that it contains, He sent the angel Jibril to gaze upon it. After seeing it, he returned to his Lord and Allah asked him: "How did you find Paradise?"

He said: "My Lord, I have seen in it what is beyond description. Anyone that hears about it will be eager to enter it."

Allah then surrounded it with unpleasant things and said to Jibril: "Return and gaze upon it."

When he returned, having seen the unpleasant things surrounding it, he said: "My Lord, I fear that no one will enter it."

Then Allah created the Hell-Fire and sent Jibril to gaze upon it. When he returned he said: "Nobody who hears about it will enter it!" What he meant was that such a person would be cautious to avoid all things that lead to entering it and would thus not enter it as long as they were in possession of their intellect.

Then Allah surrounded it with desirable things and said to Jibril: "Return and gaze upon it."

17 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

When he returned he said: “My Lord, I fear that no one will be safe from it.”¹⁸

We thus see that Paradise is surrounded with unpleasant things and the Hell-Fire is surrounded by desirable things. Therefore, you must analyse your state from dawn to dusk. How well established is patience in you? Do you wake up for prayer at a time when sleep is pleasurable? When the caller to prayer proclaims, “Allah is most great! Allah is most great!” the lower self finds sweetness in sleep and prefers to remain in bed, especially when the weather is cold. The caller is saying “Allah is most great!” and reminding you of the two Testimonies of Faith, then he calls you “come to prayer” and “come to success”, and he says, “prayer is better than sleep, prayer is better than sleep!” Are you able to patiently forsake sleep at that time and to swiftly obey the order of Allah? If not, then be sure to train yourself to have patience, at this time of the day, every day, waking up at the time that Allah has legislated for you to wake up. However, if your faith-inspired aspiration is high, then you would desire to be amongst those who wake up before dawn to seek Allah’s forgiveness in the last portion of the night.

Then you proceed to keep a watchful eye over your movements throughout the day. In relation to your conduct with the members of your household, are you patiently reminding them about what is incumbent upon them, specifically the establishment of the prayer? Are you patiently observing their behaviour? Or is the topic of your conversation with them limited to food, drink, clothing and the maintenance of the household or general news which is probably of no concern to any of you? Meanwhile you never speak to them about their religious duties, although it is your responsibility about which you will be questioned. Why have you not exerted patience in that regard, whilst your Lord has said: *O you who believe! Protect yourselves and your families from the Fire?*¹⁹

If your tongue has become accustomed to backbiting Muslims every day and night, then why not be patient and restrain your tongue from doing so? Such an act brings shame on your religion and lowers your rank with your Lord. Allah the Real addresses you

18 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Nasāʾī
19 *Al-Tahrīm*, 66:6

in the Qur'an: *Do not backbite one another. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Surely you would abhor it.*²⁰

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Backbiting is to mention your brother in a way that he is averse to."

One of the Companions said: "Is that so if what I say about my brother is true?"

He ﷺ replied: "If what you say about him is true then you have indulged in backbiting, and if it is not, you have slandered him!"²¹ Slander is of course far worse than backbiting, so we seek refuge in Allah, blessed and exalted be He. Therefore, be patient in guarding your tongue, until you do not utter any word than can be construed as backbiting.

Likewise, it is possible that you have shown laxity in your dealings with regard to lying. Are you not able to control your own tongue? You should be certain that when someone utters a single lie, the two angelic scribes run a mile due to the stench that emanates from their mouth. Your Lord has said in that regard: *Two scribes, sitting on his right and on his left, are recording (everything). Each word he utters is written down by a vigilant guardian.*²²

Heed the words of your Prophet ﷺ when he was asked whether a believer lies. He said: "No, truly the believer does not lie."²³ He then recited the words of Allah, exalted be He: *It is only those who do not believe in the signs of Allah who invent falsehood.*²⁴

O Allah, enable us to attain true patience in acts of obedience; patience in the face of disobedience and patience in the face of trials and tribulations, until You record for us an immense reward and great goodness. Make our feet firm on the straight path, through Your mercy, O Most Merciful and Most Generous.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon all his Family and Companions and all praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

20 *Al-Hujurat*, 49:12

21 Narrated by Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.

22 *Qāf*, 50:17-18

23 Narrated by Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr

24 *Al-Nahl*, 16:105

LESSON FIVE

emulating the people of patience

*Examples of the
patience of the Prophet ﷺ*

Patience has been mentioned in the previous chapters. It is one of the foundations of noble character, since any person who wishes to attain any praiseworthy character trait and then to make it firm and to continue to live by it, has need of it. It is, however, a very rare attribute. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “Certainty and the resolve to remain patient are amongst the things which you have been given least of, and whoever has been given a portion of these two things need not worry about what he fails to perform of prayer in the night and fasting in the day.”²⁵ In other words, these two qualities make up for any shortcomings in recommended acts of worship and raise a person’s station with Allah. They are only given to a small number of Allah’s servants, those whom He has chosen and those for whom He desires felicity and success. May He make us among them.

An effective way of increasing one’s patience (and any other noble quality) is to remember the reward that Allah has prepared for those who show patience, and likewise to reflect in every situation in which patience is required, upon the end result if one shows patience, and if one does not. A knower of Allah (‘*ārif billāh*) sent his condolences to a man whose relative had died saying: “Know that if you have patience, Allah’s decree has been implemented and you will be rewarded; whereas if you become agitated, Allah’s decree has also been implemented and you will bear the burden of your agitation.”

The believer needs to remind himself of the merits of praiseworthy attributes and to remember the stories of those who have attained these attributes in the past. Upon hearing accounts of people’s patience in the face of suffering and adversity, a believer’s patience is strengthened and made firm, such that he follows their path. In the Qur’an, Allah has narrated to us stories of His Prophets and pious servants who have shown great patience. The Prophetic

25 Mentioned by Imām al-Ghazālī in *Ihyā’ ‘Ulūm al-Dīn*

biography likewise teaches us the patience of the Prophet ﷺ who was a model of patience in his childhood and youth until Allah made him a messenger and a prophet. He displayed the utmost fortitude throughout his life.

One example of his patience and humility is an occasion when people crowded around him to such an extent that he was pushed close to a tree. His cloak became caught in the thorns of the tree and it fell off.

“Give me back my cloak,” he said. “If I had as many camels as there are thorns in this tree I would have divided them between you all. Then you would not have found me miserly, dishonest or cowardly.”²⁶

The people continued to crowd around him until he turned and said: “May Allah have mercy on my brother Mūsā! He suffered worse than this and remained patient.”²⁷

Thus it is said that the best way for the bereaved to find solace is to remember those who have suffered a similar misfortune. This will ease their suffering and help them to be steadfast.

At the Battle of Uhud, when the Prophet’s forehead was split and his tooth was broken, he cupped the blood in his hand and said: “I fear that if a drop of it fell on the ground, Allah would immediately bring down His punishment upon them.”

The Companions asked him: “Will you not supplicate against them for what they have done?”

Instead of doing so, he said: “O Allah, guide my people because truly they know not.”²⁸

Once a Jewish man to whom the Prophet ﷺ was in debt came to him. Even though the debt was not overdue, the man began to pull the Prophet’s ﷺ cloak until his noble neck became red.

“Give me what you owe me!” he demanded. “Banū Hāshim²⁹ are known to be people who delay repaying their debts!”

26 Narrated by al-Bukhārī

27 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Ahmad

28 Narrated by Ibn Hibbān and al-Bayhaqī

29 The clan to which the Prophet ﷺ belonged

‘Umar stood up and said, “Give me permission to kill him, O Messenger of Allah.”

“He and I are in need of other than this behaviour from you,” the Prophet ﷺ replied. “Instruct him to ask for what is his in a good way and instruct me to give him his due in a good way, and know that the time for repayment has not yet come – there are three days left. Go, ‘Umar, and give him what he is owed and give him an extra twenty measures for having frightened him.” So ‘Umar took him and gave him his due, along with an extra twenty measures.

The man said to ‘Umar: “I only acted as I did because I read the description of the Messenger of Allah in the Torah and I found in him all the qualities mentioned except for two: forbearance, and that if he is treated with extreme rudeness he only increases in forbearance. Today I have seen these two qualities in him, and I will now become Muslim. Give this money in charity to the Muslims.” Then he went to the Prophet ﷺ and said, “Let me take your hand and bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship but Allah and that you are the Messenger of Allah.”³⁰

O Allah, make firm in us the attribute of perfect patience, make us firm in following Your magnificent Prophet and make us amongst those that give You Your due, O Benevolent, O Most Compassionate.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions, and all praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

30 Narrated by al-Hākim

LESSON SIX

forbearance

Self-control at times of anger

In the previous chapter on the subject of patience, reference was made to the noble quality of forbearance (*hilm*). Allah created His Prophets and Messengers with this quality and uses it to describe Himself in His book. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said that: “The one who is forbearing is almost a prophet.”³¹ Forbearance is a quality that raises the one who possesses it in status above his peers. It is so great a quality that true knowledge cannot be attained without it being first established.

Forbearance is self-control at times of anger. Once a man sought the advice of the Prophet ﷺ, who said: “Do not get angry.” The man repeated his request for advice, approaching the Prophet from the front and then from both sides and each time the Prophet repeated: “Do not get angry.”³² Then he said: “Woe unto you, do you not understand? I told you not to get angry.” The scholars say that the meaning of “do not get angry” is: “do not act upon your anger; control yourself when anger seizes you and furthermore channel your anger in accordance with the teachings of the Sacred Law.”

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “A strong person is not someone who can outwrestle others, but he is the one who controls himself when he is angry.”³³ In other words, real strength is not displayed in physical prowess, but rather in the ability to control one’s self when angry. The forbearing one, if he becomes angry, controls himself and is able to remain balanced, so that he always behaves in a way that is appropriate.

How many times a day is your anger aroused? If you are quick to react and become agitated, you must learn to refine your behaviour on the basis of the teachings of the Prophet ﷺ. You must

31 Narrated by al-Khaṭīb, al-Daylamī and al-Suyūṭī

32 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and al-Tirmidhī

33 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

learn forbearance until you become used to not responding to bad treatment in kind, but instead respond with grace, overlooking the shortcomings of others. You thus obtain the quality of forbearance which your Lord loves to see in you.

Forbearance, by its nature, saves people from many pitfalls. On the other hand, a mere word spoken in anger or an anger-provoked reaction can be the cause of much evil and much damage. Thus a wise man once said, “When you become angry, remember the anger of Allah.” Control yourself by fearing the wrath of the One who possesses awesome power and force. Remember Allah’s power over you if you become angry and are able to get the better of your antagonist. You may respond to your antagonist in kind but a higher level is reflected in the Qur’anic verse: *If a person forgives and makes reconciliation, his reward is due directly from Allah.*³⁴

It is narrated in a hadith that when Allah makes His servants stand before Him on the Day of Judgement, it will be said: “Arise, those whose reward is due directly from Allah, and enter Paradise.”

It will be asked: “Who are those whose reward is due directly from Allah?”

“Those that forgave others,” will be the response.

Then many thousands of people will arise and enter Paradise without any recompense.³⁵

Forgiveness and forbearance are only manifested by a person in a position of strength. Someone may affect forbearance because he is unable to act upon his anger and do what he wishes with his antagonist. This is not forbearance. Forbearance is having the ability to harm the one who has harmed you, but refraining from doing so out of good etiquette, seeking the pleasure of Allah. This is praiseworthy forbearance in the sight of Allah, which raises a person’s rank.

In the previous lesson there was an example of the Prophet’s ﷺ forbearance in his treatment of the Jewish man who came to him to claim what he was owed before repayment was due. The Prophet’s ﷺ

34 *Al-Shūrā*, 42:40

35 Narrated by Ibn Abi Dunyā

patience was tested but he responded with perfect forbearance. This disbeliever was so impressed by what he saw of the Chosen One's ﷺ forbearance that he became Muslim.

On another occasion, the Prophet ﷺ stopped to rest in a valley with his Companions while returning from an expedition against the tribe of Banū al-Muṣṭaliq. The Prophet ﷺ hung his sword in the branches of a tree and lay down to sleep. The Companions left the tree to the Prophet ﷺ due to its breadth and shade and dispersed to sleep under other trees. A Bedouin saw the Prophet sleeping from his vantage point on the hillside and made his way past the Companions to where he was. He seized the Prophet's ﷺ sword and the Prophet awoke. The Bedouin pointed the sword at him and said: "Who will protect you from me, O Muhammad?"

Our Prophet ﷺ replied: "Allah." When he pronounced this word the man's heart trembled and the sword fell from his hand. The Prophet ﷺ picked up the sword, stood up and said: "Who will protect you from me now?"

"No one," he replied. "You are free to do as you wish, but treat me well."

"I forgive you," said the Prophet ﷺ, and he sheathed the sword and returned it to its place. Then he called to wake his Companions. They came and gathered around him and saw the Bedouin.

The Prophet said to them: "This man came, seized my sword and said, 'Who will protect you from me?' I said to him, 'Allah' and the sword fell from his hand, so I took it and said, 'Who will protect you from me?' 'No one,' he said. So I forgave him."

The man returned to his people and said: "By Allah, this behaviour could only be that of a prophet." He then became Muslim and called his people to Islam due to the character of the Prophet ﷺ.³⁶

Believers must train themselves to have forbearance. It is related in a hadith: "Knowledge is only acquired by learning and forbearance is only acquired through effort. The one who strives for goodness will be given it and the one who strives to protect himself

36 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

from evil will be protected from it.”³⁷ By learning, a person becomes knowledgeable after having been ignorant, and likewise the one who is prone to anger can attain forbearance by struggling against their lower self, by containing their anger and not acting upon it. Allah describes His pious slaves as being: *Those who restrain their anger and pardon all people*.³⁸

Once one of the slave-girls of Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn, the son of Imām al-Ḥusayn, dropped a water pitcher on his son, who died immediately. He looked at her and she said: “*Those who restrain their anger.*”

“I have restrained my anger,” he said.

“*And those who pardon all people,*” she said.

“I have pardoned you.”

“*For Allah loves those who do good.*”

“I have set you free, for the sake of Allah.”

She thus gained her freedom by reminding him of the verses of the Book of Allah.

It has thus been related in a hadith that: “There is no gulp greater in reward in Allah’s sight than the gulp of the one swallowing his anger for the sake of Allah,”³⁹ and: “If someone contains their anger when they are able to vent it, Allah fills their heart with peace and faith.”⁴⁰

Muslims should ask themselves what their state is when they are angered. Anger should be channelled for the sake of Allah. The Prophet did not become angry when someone wronged him, but if someone transgressed against Allah, no one could stand up to his anger. He only became angry for Allah’s sake and never became angry for his own sake.⁴¹

The benefit and purpose of anger is to motivate the believer to defend the Sacred Law. Without the existence of this anger, the

37 Narrated by al-Haythamī, al-Daraqutnī and al-Ṭabarānī

38 *Āl ʿImrān*, 3:135

39 Narrated by Ibn Mājah, al-Ṭabarānī, Aḥmad and al-Suyūṭī.

40 Narrated by Ibn Abī Dunyā and al-Suyūṭī.

41 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in the *Shamāʿil*

religion could not be defended. Anger is present in human nature for a purpose known to Allah. The Sacred Law channels anger in the direction which Allah loves so that the religion of Allah is protected. Believers should ask themselves what makes them angry. If their anger is aroused by a change in their worldly affairs or by someone insulting them, but it is not aroused by hearing that someone has left performing the prayer, committed an act of disobedience or by someone oppressing the Muslims, then they need to rectify their situation before Allah teaches them a lesson. Their anger should not be aroused by a loss in wealth, if lunch is late, if dinner is not well cooked or the bed is not made. Rather, their anger should be aroused by someone in the family failing to perform the prayer, saying something that is not pleasing to Allah, or spending time with someone who has a bad influence upon them. A person's anger should be aroused if one of the women of the household goes out immodestly dressed or goes to meet strange men. If anger is channelled according to the criteria of Islam, then its benefit will be experienced.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught that if someone gets angry, they should change their position: if they are standing, they should sit down and if they are sitting, they should lie down.⁴² These actions assuage a person's anger until they are able to control themselves. We have also been taught to perform ablution when we become angry, as is mentioned in the hadith: "Truly anger is from the Devil. The Devil is created from fire and water extinguishes fire so if one of you becomes angry they should perform ablution."⁴³ This is how anger should be dealt with if it arises suddenly. It has also been related that the Devil says: "I whisper in a man's heart and if he becomes angry, I fly up to his head and play with it as a child plays with a ball."

O Allah, bless us with forbearance and fill our hearts with the light of knowledge. Make us amongst the guided ones who guide others and give us the ability to do what You love and what gives You pleasure.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon all his Family and Companions and all praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

42 Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Abī Dunyā and al-Suyūṭī.

43 Narrated by Aḥmad, Abū Dāwūd, Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Suyūṭī.

LESSON SEVEN

magnanimity

*To realise the underlying truth that the
universe runs according to a will other
than yours, by a decree other than yours
and by a plan other than yours*

Magnanimity (*samāḥah*) is related to forbearance, which was discussed previously. It is one of the character traits that the Prophet ﷺ perfected and called people to attain. He ﷺ said: “May Allah have mercy upon a man who is magnanimous when he sells, magnanimous when he buys, magnanimous when he pays back a debt, magnanimous when he collects a debt.”⁴⁴ This is because magnanimous people do their utmost to avoid stirring up anger in others and by their nature assuage the anger of those with whom they interact. Magnanimous people have a mild disposition, interact well with others, and are not harsh in their words and actions. The way they speak and approach people is magnanimous and so too are their buying and selling. When they give others what is due to them and when they request what is due to them from others, they do so with magnanimity. They thus attain the mercy of Allah by means of the supplication of the Prophet of Allah ﷺ.

Magnanimity is a noble attribute that Allah places in the hearts of noble people. People could be naturally disposed towards this attribute as they may be towards other attributes and thus find it easy to make it firmly rooted within themselves and to act upon it. It could be, however, as is often the case, that people are by nature hasty, impatient, and harsh in their dealings. They cling to their own opinion and want things to run in accordance with their desires. It is difficult for such people to be magnanimous when they interact with people or when they want something. They are harsh in their transactions with others because they are always striving to achieve what they want in any way possible. The root of this is the obstinacy of their lower selves and the dominance of their lower selves over them, which weakens their intellectual power and their ability to think clearly and analyse.

44 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Ibn Mājah

People must realise the underlying truth that the universe runs according to a will other than theirs, by a decree other than theirs and by a plan other than theirs. Instead, it runs according to the decree of Allah. If they understand this, believe it and actualise it, it becomes firmly planted within them that whenever something happens it is from the decree of Allah, and nothing will be, except what He wills. It has been related in an authenticated hadith: “What Allah wills comes to pass, and what He does not will, does not come to pass.”⁴⁵ This realisation makes it easier for people to accept that unpleasant and unexpected events may occur at any moment.

Man is a slave, not a lord. Indeed nothing will be except as He wills, Allah, the One. Therefore, what is the benefit of being aggressive and attempting to force things to happen? We have been given one of the treasures of Paradise, which is to say: “There is no power nor strength save through Allah.”⁴⁶ The Prophet ﷺ taught us that: “Saying ‘there is no power nor strength save through Allah’ is one of the treasures of righteousness,”⁴⁷ meaning, one of the treasures of Paradise. If it becomes firm in the hearts of believers that they are slaves, owned and created by Allah and that everything takes place according to the will of the Planner, the Determiner, Allah Most High, they will be magnanimous in everything they do.

A knower of Allah was once asked: “How did you come to know your Lord?”

He replied: “Through the failure of my plans. I prepare for something, focus my energy and attention upon it and then it is not decreed and does not happen. Meanwhile there are other things that never cross my mind, and without me realising they occur and become reality. Through this I understood that there is planning other than our planning, and power other than our power.”

A person plans a particular thing and makes definite arrangements,

*And then the divine decree diverts him from it
So that man will know the affair is not in his hands
And above our planning is the decree of Allah*

45 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd

46 See section on Supplications Mentioned in the Text

47 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

Believers must thus gain magnanimity and certainty from their faith and have proper etiquette with Allah. When they desire something, they must be aware of their transaction with Allah and proceed in a manner which Allah loves. Thus they will only become angry for the sake of Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He. When they try to do something, they do so seeking the assistance of their Lord, trusting in Him and displaying proper etiquette with Him. They do not do it stubbornly insisting that it turn out the way they want it to turn out. Rather, their resolution is focused on what Allah wants from them, not on the affairs which Allah decrees as He wills. Look to what Allah has requested of you, and resolve to implement this. As far as that which is related to His will, do not allow your opinion or intellect to have any say, and be, along with this, magnanimous in your interaction with people. This is the principle that the Prophet of Allah ﷺ taught us.

O Allah forgive us for our sins and pardon us, and instil in us the qualities of magnanimity, forgiveness, and forbearance, O Lord of the worlds.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions, and all praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON EIGHT

maintaining bonds of kinship

*To rise in rank through
honouring the bonds of kinship*

Allah and His Messenger have called upon us to maintain the ties of kinship. Maintenance of the bonds of kinship has a lofty place in the teaching and example of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and in the guidance of Allah in His Qur'an. Allah severely threatens those who neglect this noble character trait and informs them that they will be cursed, blinded and deafened by Him if they do so. Allah, Mighty and Majestic is He, says: *Is it not likely if you turn away (from the religion) that you would work corruption in the land and sever your ties of kinship? Those are they whom Allah curses and makes deaf and blind.*⁴⁸ Any believers on the face of the earth who recite this verse, and then persist in severing the ties of kinship are being deceived by the Devil, who is trying to come between them and the mercy of Allah. Even if their family members took all of their money; in fact, even if they owned the world and everything in it and this was taken from them, true believers would be unable to persist in severing the bonds of kinship after reciting this verse from the Book of Allah.

It has been narrated in a hadith: "The womb clung to the pillars of the Throne and said: 'O Allah, this is the station of the one seeking refuge in You from being cut off.' Allah said: 'Will it not please you that whoever maintains relations with you, I will maintain relations with him, and whoever cuts you off, I will cut him off. You are the womb and I am the Most Compassionate, I derived your name from Mine.'"⁴⁹

Allah says in the Qur'an: *Those who break the pact of Allah after accepting it and who sever what Allah has commanded to be joined, and work corruption in the land, for them is a curse and theirs will be*

48 *Muhammad*, 47:22-23

49 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and al-Tirmidhī. In Arabic the term for maintaining the ties of kinship translates literally as 'maintaining the ties of the womb.' The root meaning of the word for womb in Arabic, 'rahīm' is mercy, from which is derived Allah's name 'the Most Compassionate' (*al-Rahmān*)

*an evil abode.*⁵⁰ The Prophet ﷺ said: “Peoples’ works are displayed to Allah every Monday and Thursday, and He does not accept the works of someone who severs the bonds of kinship.”⁵¹ So say to those whose lower selves have deceived them and caused them to persist in severing the ties of kinship: “Are you content to have all of your prayers and righteous works rejected? What do you gain by severing these ties? Does what you gain make up for the loss of the reward of praising Allah⁵² just once, let alone the loss of the reward of all of your good works?”

Just as those who sever the bonds of kinship are deprived of forgiveness on Mondays and Thursdays, they are also deprived of forgiveness in the blessed month of Ramaḍān. Therefore it is imperative that all Muslims avoid this evil action and save themselves from this immense calamity. Maintain your bonds of kinship and rise in rank through honouring these bonds. Your Prophet ﷺ said: “The one who maintains the bonds of kinship is not one who returns a favour,” meaning he treats his family members as they treat him. “Rather, the one who maintains the bonds of kinship is one who restores the bonds of kinship when severed,”⁵³ meaning if they harm him, he does good to them. This is one of the noble character traits of prophethood, about which the Prophet ﷺ said: “My Lord enjoined upon me nine things: to be sincere in private and in public, to be just when content and when angry, to be frugal whether rich or poor, to pardon whoever wrongs me, to maintain relations with those who sever them, to give to those who withhold from giving to me, that my silence be reflection, my speech be remembrance, and my gaze be a means of taking admonition.”⁵⁴ These nine are indeed great attributes that the Possessor of Majesty enjoined upon His Prophet Muhammad ﷺ, the Chosen One, the manifestation of beauty and perfection!

Make us, O Allah, among those who maintain the ties of kinship and grant us a connection to You. Protect us from cutting these ties and do not dash our hopes. Make us among those who are guided who guide others, through Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

50 *Al-Ra’d*, 13:25

51 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī and al-Suyūṭī

52 Literally saying, “*subḥānallāh*,” or “transcendent is Allah” once

53 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd

54 Narrated by Ibn al-Athīr and al-Qurṭubī

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions, and all praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON NINE

truthfulness of speech

*Telling the truth is one of the
foundations of a Muslim's character*

Truthfulness (*ṣidq*) is one of the greatest Islamic character traits that the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, the Best of Creation, was sent to perfect. Allah will ensure that those who are truthful in speech, action and intention will benefit from their works on the Day of Judgment. Allah says: *This is a day on which the truthful benefit from their truthfulness.*⁵⁵

Let us first look at truthfulness in speech, since it is the foundation of truthfulness and is closely linked to truthfulness in action and intention. Truthfulness in speech stems from the realisation that Allah Most High sees one at all times, and is a type of self-control that is an indication of a person's faith. A knower of Allah said: "Whenever I see a person who fears Allah concerning what he says, I see the impact of that on his whole body and on his state."

It has been related in a hadith: "Every morning that comes upon the son of Adam, his limbs call out to his tongue. They say: 'Fear Allah regarding us, for we do as you do. If you remain upright, we remain upright, and if you deviate, we deviate.'"⁵⁶ The tongue has a great impact upon the Scales, upon which our actions will be weighed. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ said to Mu'ādh: "May your mother mourn over you, O Mu'ādh! Is there anything that causes people to be thrown into the Fire on their faces, other than the harvest of their tongues?"⁵⁷

Lying is one of the greatest sins of the tongue. It is wrong and sinful in everyday speech, but if it causes harm to a Muslim, it is more serious, and the sin and punishment are multiplied. If someone bears false testimony, he deserves the wrath and anger of Allah Most High,

55 *Al-Mā'idah*, 5:119

56 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad and al-Suyūṭī

57 Narrated by Aḥmad, al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mājah and al-Tirmidhī

and he deserves to be rejected and banished. It has been authentically related that: “If someone who gives testimony adds to his testimony one word that is not true, he will receive the wrath of Allah before he can even raise his foot.”⁵⁸

Truthfulness in speech and the avoidance of lying at all times has a strong impact in purifying and enlightening one’s heart and rectifying one’s state. Thus it is incumbent upon believers to monitor their speech, to speak only the truth and to avoid lying absolutely. The Prophet of Allah ﷺ was asked: “Does the believer lie?” He said: “No.” Then he recited the words of Allah: *It is only those who do not believe in the signs of Allah who invent falsehood.*⁵⁹ This is why the Companions did not accuse anyone of lying except someone known as a hypocrite.⁶⁰ They did not think it possible that believers could lie. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The believer may be naturally disposed to any character trait except lying and treachery.”⁶¹ It is conceivable that believers may possess blameworthy characteristics and it is their duty to cure themselves of these characteristics. However, they will never be naturally disposed to lying and treachery while they are believers and these attributes will not become firm within them. This is only the case with hypocrites.

Telling the truth is one of the foundations of a Muslim's character and is one of the foundations of following the Prophet ﷺ. A Muslim must tell the truth in order to be safe from the vice of hypocrisy and to be safe from being disgraced and cursed. Allah commanded the Prophet ﷺ to say: “*Then let us earnestly pray and invoke the curse of Allah upon those who lie.*”⁶²

Truthfulness is a trait of the sincere believers, those who have faith in the religion with which the Trustworthy Prophet ﷺ was sent. He was known as the Truthful and Trustworthy even before becoming a prophet, and was never known to lie in his entire life. When Allah commanded him to declare openly what he had been commanded to convey, He revealed to him: *So declare openly what*

58 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī

59 *Al-Nahl*, 16:105. The hadith is narrated by Ibn ʿAsākir and Ibn ʿAbd al-Barr

60 Meaning someone who outwardly professes belief while concealing his disbelief

61 Narrated by Ibn Abī Shaybah, Ibn Abī Dunyā and Ibn ʿAdī

62 *Āl ʿImrān*, 3:61

*you have been commanded and turn away from the polytheists.*⁶³

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ then said to his people: "If I told you that behind this mountain is an army about to attack you in the morning or the evening would you believe me?"

They all said: "We have never known you to lie. We would believe you."

Then the Prophet ﷺ said: "I am warning you of a terrible punishment. By Allah, you will die just as you sleep, and you will be resurrected just as you awaken, and then it is either Paradise for eternity or Hell for eternity."⁶⁴

It is incumbent upon people to realise the enormity of lying, to always be truthful, and to teach this to their family and children. Suppose that a father taught his children about truthfulness, encouraged them to be truthful and warned them against lying. Then one day someone came to the door and asked for the father and the father said to one of his children, "Say: he is not here," or, "He is not in the house," or, "He left," or other lies. This would destroy everything he was teaching and building in the hearts and minds of those children. This is because his actions contradicted his words and thus negated their effect.

Believers should be attentive to being truthful in speech. We should train ourselves to do so, and teach our children to do so through our actions so that it becomes ingrained in them that lying is one of the most heinous of all things.

Furthermore we should teach them that if they believe they can save themselves by lying, that in reality it will seal their destruction and that if someone lies to save himself from difficulty, it will quickly lead to problems greater than the difficulty which they were in. This is why it is incumbent upon the believer to take care to tell the truth, for indeed Allah Most High saves the truthful. Even if someone suffers or is criticised in the short term, Allah will offset that by rectifying their affairs.

May Allah grant us truthfulness and make us firm in it. May

63 *Al-Hijr*, 15:94

64 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

He cleanse our tongues from lying, which causes people to be thrown head-first into the Fire, and from anything which does not please Him. O Allah, make us people who embody truthfulness.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his family and Companions and all those that follow them in excellence until the Day of Recompense. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON TEN

truthfulness of action

*To perform an action with excellence
solely for the sake of one's Lord*

The previous chapter dealt with truthfulness in speech and its importance in the life of the Muslim. When Muslims are truthful in speech, the effect of this will continue to manifest itself on the remainder of their limbs and in all of their interactions until they become truthful in action. Thus they will rise in rank until they are truthful in action and intention till they reach the ranks of the people of immense truthfulness.⁶⁵ The authenticated hadith of the Prophet ﷺ testifies to this: “A man will continue to be truthful and strive to be so until he is recorded by Allah as being someone of immense truthfulness.”⁶⁶ Thus truthfulness of action is a product of truthfulness of speech.

Truthfulness of action means to perform an action with excellence solely for the sake of one’s Lord, and to be completely focused on it while performing it, expending upon it all of one’s effort. Let us look at truthfulness in fasting and prayer. If someone fasting looks at something impermissible, looks with desire, or looks at a Muslim with contempt, then they have not been truthful in their fasting. Likewise they must guard their tongue or else they will be among those the Chosen One ﷺ mentioned in his saying: “Whoever does not refrain from lying and acting upon it, then Allah has no need for him to refrain from eating or drinking.”⁶⁷

For someone to be truthful in their prayer they must first perfect their ablution. If they are in a state of minor ritual purity they perform the ablution properly, making sure that not a spot on any part of their face remains that water fails to reach. They are sure to make water reach the spots that are difficult to reach and generally neglected.⁶⁸ Also they are sure not to leave any spot unwashed from

65 The Arabic word used is “*ṣiddīq*”

66 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī

67 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Ibn Mājah and al-Tirmidhī

68 Such as the edges of the forehead, the area between the nose and the eye and the area under the nose

the fingertips to the elbows, and if there is any dirt under their fingernails, they remove it. They are careful to completely wash their feet. Once on an expedition the Prophet ﷺ saw that water had not reached one of the Companion's heels while he was performing his ablution, and he called out in a loud voice: "Woe to the heels from the Fire."⁶⁹

After perfecting their ablution, they must perform the prayer in its prescribed time. They are keen to perform its recommended elements, to observe its etiquettes and to pray in congregation. They force themselves to have presence of mind from the beginning of the prayer to the end. They prepare for their entry into the prayer so that when they say: "Allah is most great,"⁷⁰ they are absolutely certain that there is nothing great except Allah. In witnessing the greatness of the Most High, the Magnificent, before Whom they are standing, they forget every small and insignificant thing. When they say: "I turn myself to He Who created the heavens and the earth, a pure monotheist, in submission, and I am not of those who associate others with Him,"⁷¹ they do so while truly turning with their hearts to Allah, so that they are not untruthful when they say this.

Then they continue to be truthful throughout their prayer. When they bow, they do so with excellence, remaining still, and when they arise, they stand up straight and remain still. When they prostrate, they do so with excellence, putting the seven body parts on the ground in accordance with what the Prophet ﷺ said: "I was commanded to prostrate on seven bones."⁷² However, their hearts should precede their limbs when prostrating to Allah Most High and lowering themselves before His majesty. They should continue to pray, not allowing themselves to be distracted, for to allow oneself to be distracted is to allow the Devil to steal from one's prayer. There is a narration that states: "When a man stands to pray, Allah turns toward him with His countenance. If he (the man) then turns away,

69 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Ibn Mājah

70 *Allāhu akbar*

71 This is the supplication the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would make upon entering the prayer. The Arabic can be found on p.203

72 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Nasā'ī and Ibn Mājah. The seven bones mentioned are: the forehead, the palms of the two hands, the two knees and the toes of the two feet.

He (Allah) says to him: “O son of Adam, to whom are you turning? To someone better than Me? Face Me.” If he turns away a second time, Allah says the same thing, but if he turns away a third time, Allah turns His countenance away from him.”⁷³

Above all, the slave of Allah should be humbled to Him in his prayer. Allah says: *Successful indeed are the believers who are humble in their prayers.*⁷⁴

This is an example of truthfulness in prayer. Truthfulness should accompany all of your actions, whether you be buying and selling, giving and taking or interacting with your family. Being truthful in them is to perform them excellently and properly, acting sincerely for the sake of Allah Most High.

May Allah bless us with truthfulness in our speech, actions and intentions until He makes us amongst the people of immense truthfulness.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions and all those that follow them in excellence until the Day of Recompense. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

73 Narrated by al-Bazzār.

74 *Al-Mu'minūn*, 23:1-2

LESSON ELEVEN

truthfulness of intention

*Truthfulness in intention will permeate
your speech and actions, thus rectifying
and perfecting them*

It was mentioned previously that truthfulness of speech is the foundation upon which truthfulness is built and from here it is extended to truthfulness in action and intentions. Truthfulness of action is displayed when a believer performs an action properly, according to the pure Sacred Law, expending all his efforts to perform it with excellence. We also mentioned that when an action is performed solely for the sake of Allah, then this is the result of the truthfulness of intention. So, truthfulness in speech followed by truthfulness in action leads to the attainment of truthfulness of intention. Only those whom Allah chooses possess this, and He praises them in His book and raises their rank. Their status is such that He orders the believers to be with the truthful ones: *O you who believe! Fear Allah and be with the truthful ones.*⁷⁵

Truthfulness of intention means that a person's intention is made sincerely for Allah's sake. If a person has a sincere intention this will be reflected in the truthfulness of their words and actions. If, however, their intention is insincere, the truthfulness of their words and actions will be of no benefit. Someone may, for example, praise a believer who is worthy of praise, but in reality he may conceal hatred in his heart for him, and the only thing that drove him to praise him was some type of self-interest. This person's speech was true, but his intention was corrupt and insincere. Likewise people may outwardly show respect to those around them while inwardly despising them. Believers are required to ensure that they are truthful in every state, until Allah raises them to the ranks of the people of immense truthfulness. The Prophet ﷺ said: "A man will continue to be truthful and strive to be so until he is recorded by Allah as being someone of immense truthfulness."⁷⁶

75 *Al-Tawbah*, 9:119

76 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī

This is why when one of the knowers of Allah wished to make his children happy by bringing them toys or gifts, he would not say: “I will bring you that,” but rather he would say: “How would you feel if I brought you that?” He would do this out of fear of saying that he would bring something and then not bringing it, so that he would not be truthful in his intention, speech and action. For this reason he was cautious, fearing Allah Most High and being scrupulous about what he said to his young children and the members of his household, not to mention others. This is a manifestation of truthfulness.

If believers are truthful in their intention, this truthfulness will permeate their speech and actions, thus rectifying and perfecting them. Likewise, truthfulness of speech naturally leads to truthfulness of action, and truthfulness of action leads to truthfulness of intention.

The Prophet ﷺ was asked about a man who fought in order to be called courageous, about a man who fought out of tribal loyalty and about a man who fought to manifest his rank. Which one of these, they asked, was fighting for the sake of Allah? The Prophet informed them that it was only the one who had a sincere intention: “Whoever fights in order for the Word of Allah to be transcendent, his struggle is for the sake of Allah.”⁷⁷ Therefore, every believer should seek to make truthfulness a reality in their speech, actions and states. Someone who allows life to pass them by, not caring whether lies creep into their speech and then dishonesty into their actions is someone heedless of their Lord, someone who does not care about the rectification of their heart and someone who is not preparing for the afterlife. A believer should rise above this wretched state.

Truthfulness of action and speech are manifested in the Qur’an when Allah describes those who emigrated with our Prophet ﷺ: as being: *The poor emigrants who have been driven out from their homes and (have lost) their belongings.* Their emigration and their sacrifice reflect truthfulness of action. Then Allah says that they are those who: *Seek bounty from Allah and His good pleasure and aid Allah and His Messenger.* This refers to truthfulness of intention. Allah Most High then testifies to their truthfulness, may He be pleased with them: *They are the truthful.*⁷⁸ As previously mentioned, we have

⁷⁷ Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

⁷⁸ All references from *al-Hashr*, 59:8

been commanded to be with the truthful people. This represents a command to the Muslim community to respect the noble Companions, the Emigrants and the Helpers⁷⁹ who honoured their pledge with Allah, as Allah has stated in His book. He commanded us to be with the truthful, as clarified in the verse: *Allah has turned with favour to the Prophet and the Emigrants and the Helpers who followed him in the hour of hardship.*⁸⁰ Allah also says: *As for the foremost, the first of the Emigrants and the Helpers, and those who followed them with excellence, Allah is pleased with them and they, too, are pleased with Him.*⁸¹ Here Allah clarifies the necessity of following the Emigrants and the Helpers along with the Prophet ﷺ.

Believers should wake up and set out to attain complete truthfulness in their speech, actions and intentions so that they enter into the ranks of the truthful, those whom the Lord of the Worlds has raised.

O Allah, make truthfulness firm in our hearts and in the hearts of our families and make it firm in our houses and our gatherings, so that it is manifest in us in the way You love it to be, O Most Merciful!

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

79 The “Emigrants” (*al-Muhājirūn*) were those emigrated from Makkah to al-Madīnah. The “Helpers” (*al-Anṣār*) were the people of al-Madīnah who welcomed and assisted the Emigrants.

80 *Al-Tawbah*, 9:117

81 *Al-Tawbah*, 9:100

LESSON TWELVE

mercy

*The one who shows mercy to
Allah's servants for His sake
will be shown mercy by Allah*

The previous lessons have dealt with some of the Prophetic character traits to which Allah's religion calls us on the tongue of the Chosen One, Muhammad ﷺ. These character traits are all interconnected. One trait may strengthen or make firm another trait, and the existence of one may bring about the existence of another. The previous lessons covered the various meanings of truthfulness and its effects. One of the manifestations of truthfulness is for a person's heart to be filled with mercy (*rahmah*).

When mercy enters a person's heart it will manifest itself in their actions: they become gentle and kind in their speech and their dealings. They feel compassion for their fellow Muslims: the problems which trouble the Muslims trouble them, that which gives joy to the Muslims gives them joy, and that which saddens the Muslims, saddens them. They become eager to benefit and serve the Muslims, to fulfil their rights and to strive to look after their interests, preferring the interests of the Muslims over their own. Their share of Allah's mercy will thus be plentiful since the Prophet ﷺ said: "The Compassionate (exalted is He) shows mercy to those who show mercy to others."⁸² Thus the one who shows mercy to Allah's servants for His sake will be shown mercy by Allah. Believers must ask themselves how merciful they are and how consistent they are in showing mercy to the old, the young and especially to the weak, the poor, the ill and disabled and those Muslims who have suffered misfortune. A hadith states: "A person who does these three things has been saved from avarice: he pays his *zakat*, shows hospitality to his guest and gives in charity at a time of calamity."⁸³ The mercy they possess in their hearts causes them to give charity at times of

82 Narrated by Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, al-Tirmidhī and Abū Dāwūd

83 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī and al-Haythamī

calamity, to help and console the victims and to try to lighten their burdens. The Prophet ﷺ taught us the true meaning of showing mercy.

Mercy is a quality which Allah uses to describe His Prophet ﷺ in His Book: *There has come to you a Messenger from among yourselves, grievous to whom is your burden, concerned (is he) for you; for the believers (he is) full of compassion, merciful.*⁸⁴ He says concerning the mission of the Prophet ﷺ: *We have only sent you as a mercy for all the worlds.*⁸⁵ Allah also describes the Prophet's Companions as being merciful: *Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah. Those who are with him are firm against the disbelievers and merciful to each other.*⁸⁶ Having attributed to them the quality of mercy, He praises them for having reached a state in which they prefer others over themselves: *Those who had settled in the City*⁸⁷ *before them and embraced the faith love those who have sought refuge with them; they entertain no desire in their hearts for what the latter are given, but rather prefer them over themselves, even though poverty became their lot. Whoever saves himself from his own avarice will surely prosper.*⁸⁸ This is an awesome testimony from Allah regarding our masters the Helpers, the two Yemeni tribes who had migrated to al-Madinah, settled there and then received the Messenger of Allah ﷺ, by whom the city became *Taybah*, or good and pure. They were spontaneous in their belief in him and took it upon themselves to support him. In the previous verse Allah testifies to their prosperity, meaning their victory in this world and the Hereafter. He praises them and mentions their preference of others over themselves which was a result of the great mercy that was firmly established in their hearts, may Allah be well pleased with them.

We see mercy manifesting itself throughout the teachings of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. This mercy was extended to all people, young and old, and even to animals. This can be seen in the story narrated in the collections of al-Bukhārī and Muslim, about a Jewish prostitute. This woman was extremely thirsty one day. She came to

84 *Al-Tawbah*, 9:128

85 *Al-Anbiyā'*, 21:107

86 *Al-Fath*, 48:29

87 The "City" referred to is al-Madinah

88 *Al-Hashr*, 59:9

a well but found there was no bucket or rope, so she climbed into the well and drank from it. When she came out of the well she found a dog panting from thirst, licking the stones around the well in the hope of finding some moisture. She said to herself, “By Allah, this dog is suffering from thirst just as I was suffering,” so she climbed back into the well, took off her shoe, filled it with water and put it in her mouth and kept hold of it until she reached the top of the well. Then she allowed the dog to drink and as a result Allah forgave her.⁸⁹ The mercy in her heart expressed itself in an action in which she was so sincere that Allah had mercy upon her, forgave her and gave her the chance to make good her repentance.

It has been narrated that once the Prophet ﷺ saw a cat in his house. The cat saw some water in a dish and wished to drink from it. The water was far away from it, so the Prophet came and put the water close to its mouth for it to drink. When one of his Companions saw this he asked: “Why are you doing this for a cat?”

“It is not impure,” the Prophet ﷺ replied, “it is a cat which goes around amongst you.”⁹⁰ In other words, it performs some service in the house. How awesome was his mercy and compassion!

When al-Aqra^c ibn Ḥābis saw him kissing some children he said: “O Messenger of Allah, I have ten children and I have never kissed any of them.”

The Prophet ﷺ said, “What can I do for you if Allah has removed mercy from your heart?”⁹¹ In reality mercy is only taken away from a wretched person.

May Allah bless the one who was sent with mercy, and may He bestow mercy upon us and make abundant our share of it. O Allah, adorn us with these character traits and help us to make them a reality in our lives by Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

89 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

90 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Ḥākim and al-Bayhaqī

91 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

LESSON THIRTEEN

making people happy

*If mercy is established in the hearts
of the believers it arouses in them a
desire to make other people happy*

The previous chapter covered some of the meanings of mercy, and although a book of this size and nature cannot do justice to the topic, the intention was to underline the greatness of this quality. It is sufficient for believers to do their utmost to embody such qualities and to aspire to them, for then they will be honoured with the reward which Allah reserves for those who strive to draw near to Him.

If mercy is established in the hearts of the believers it arouses in them a desire to make other people happy. Believers are, in their various states, keen to make those around them happy and to compete in this with their fellow believers, hoping that their Creator will give them joy in his life, at their death and after their death. The Prophet ﷺ said: "If someone meets his brother Muslim with that which Allah loves in order to please him, Allah will give him joy on the Day of Judgement."⁹²

It has been narrated that: "Whenever a believer brings joy to another believer, Allah creates from that joy an angel who worships Allah, glorifies Him and proclaims His oneness, and when that believer is in his grave the joy which he brought comes to him and says: 'Do you not know me?'

'Who are you?' he asks.

'I am the joy which you brought to so-and-so. I will now be a comfort to you in your loneliness, I will dictate to you the answers to the questions of the angels,⁹³ I will make you firm with the Word of Steadfastness, I will bear witness for you on the Day of Judgement, I will intercede with Allah for you and I will show you your station in Paradise.'⁹⁴

92 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī

93 In the grave

94 Narrated by Ibn Abī Dunyā

The Chosen One ﷺ emphasised the importance of striving to please, console and bring joy to the Muslims, and he himself set the highest example in this regard. Whoever sat in his company would think themselves to be the most noble of people⁹⁵ in his sight due to his kindness, geniality and the way he would make those around him happy. He showed noble character in his dealings with the members of his household and in all his social relations. For this reason the Prophet ﷺ said: “The best of you are those of you who treat your wives best, and I treat my wives better than all of you.”⁹⁶ He was ready to adjust to any situation and accommodate whomever he met and talked to. Because of the great light which emanated from him, whoever met him for the first time would be in awe of him, but whoever spent time with him would love him. The life of the Prophet ﷺ is filled with accounts of this kindness and geniality, and he taught his Companions how to bring joy to the believers’ hearts. He once said to his Companion Abū Hurayrah: “It is better for you to fulfil a Muslim’s need than to seclude yourself in this mosque of mine for ten years.”⁹⁷ Thus the reward for making a Muslim happy by striving to fulfil their needs is greater than the reward of undertaking spiritual retreat in the Prophet’s Mosque in al-Madinah for ten years!

By acting on hadiths such as this and sincerely seeking to fulfil the needs of their brothers and thus make them happy, the elect of the Muslims in different times attained a level of proximity to Allah. When they spoke with their brothers they did their utmost to please them. Their hearts were filled with sincerity and their intentions were better than their actions, in confirmation of the hadith: “A believer’s intention is better than his action.”⁹⁸ Hypocrites may perform good actions while their intention in performing those actions is evil. If their action is evil, their intention is even worse. However, believers’ intentions are better than their actions even if their actions are good, because they do what they are able but wish they could do more. This is a sign of their sincerity in showing compassion, one of the fruits of which is a desire to make those they sit and talk with happy.

95 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī in *al-Shamā’il*

96 Narrated by Ibn Mājah, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Hibbān

97 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī and al-Ḥākim

98 Narrated by al-Bayhaqī and al-Ṭabarānī

Believers must be keen to make people happy, especially the weak, the aged and the ill because this is amongst the greatest of works in the sight of Allah, and carries a great reward. Let them not miss out on attaining this great attribute which their Prophet called them to attain.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON FOURTEEN

showing kindness to one's parents

*Those who venerate Allah know
that Allah has ordered them
to venerate their parents*

The light which emanates from Islam's moral teachings, being ultimately the awesome light of Allah, fills the hearts of upright Muslims and illuminates the various domains of their lives, until their minds become tranquil and they find stability in their affairs. One of these teachings is showing kindness to one's parents (*birr al-wālidayn*). The Sacred Law greatly emphasises its importance, the Qur'an elevates its status and Allah Himself has clarified it. It is an affair upon which life rests, life as it should properly be led, and its existence is the sign of a healthy society with its values intact. Many people in non-Muslim societies do not give their parents their due rights when they become old and frail. It is common for people in these societies to put their mother and father in a care home. Parents may also be harsh in their dealings with their children. Some may even say when their children grow up: "You can either start paying rent on the room you are living in, or you can leave so I can rent out the room to someone else."

Although some Muslims may be taken in by the empty show of non-Muslim society, this situation would be unimaginable even in the Muslim countries which are described as being "progressive." The reality of progress is in the teachings of Allah, the One who has the power to bring people forward and put people back, the One who knows best the interests of His servants, and knows best that which elevates them. Although the people of many cultures have, through their nature and instinct, a respect for the rights of parents, it is only Allah's Sacred Law that truly upholds those rights. When the issue is linked to a person's fundamental beliefs, it is elevated and given its proper place, in accordance with the upright state in which man was originally created. When the realities of faith are lost and children are not raised well, they become disobedient and do not treat their parents with kindness. This only happens when people's faith is deficient and when true veneration for Allah has not been

established in their hearts. Those who do not venerate Allah will not venerate their parents, whereas those who venerate Allah know that Allah has ordered them to venerate their mother and father and treat them with the utmost kindness.

Allah deals with this issue in the Qurʾan in the form of a decree: *Your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you show kindness to your parents.* He then specifically draws attention to the issue of old age, which is grossly neglected in non-Muslim societies and by Muslims who have gone astray: *If either or both of them attain old age and you are present, do not even say "fie" to them.* In other words, do not pronounce a single word which expresses impatience or annoyance.

Your parents may be old; they may have difficulty in walking or standing, or they may not be able to stand; they may need help going to the toilet and cleaning themselves; they may need to be fed by hand, but do not say "fie" to them. How many years did they clean you of your filth and take care of you to the extent where if you became ill, it was as if they were ill and not you? If you could not sleep, it was they who deprived themselves of sleep for your sake. Say: *"Lord, be merciful to them both, as they did care for me when I was small."* Allah says: *Do not even say "fie" to them, nor rebuke them, but speak kind words to them.* If in their state of weakness they say to you, "I am sorry to trouble you," then speak kind words to them: "It is a pleasure and honour to serve you, Dad," or "Mum, Paradise is in the dust beneath your feet. However much I lower myself to you, it is a source of honour for me, and Paradise is my reward."

Let them hear from you nothing but kind words: *Speak kind words to them.* Furthermore, Allah says: *Lower unto them the wing of humility out of mercy and say, "Lord, be merciful to them both, as they did care for me when I was small."*⁹⁹ You should not be content with merely showing them good character, but in addition to that you should turn to Allah and ask Him to reward them for raising you.

The Companion Ibn ʿUmar once met a Yemeni pilgrim who had carried his mother on his back all the way from Yemen to Makkah. When he arrived he went around the Kaʿbah with her on his back

99 All references from *Al-Isrāʾ*, 17:23-4

and took her to stand on the Plain of ʿArafāt. He cleaned her, washed her, performed for her the ablutions necessary for prayer and took care of all her needs. He met Ibn ʿUmar when he was going round the Kaʿbah with her and he said to him, “O Ibn ʿUmar, this is how I have treated my mother. Do you think I have performed my duty to her?”

Ibn ʿUmar replied, “None of what you have done is equal to even one groan which she let out when giving birth to you!”¹⁰⁰

As we have seen, the Sacred Law sanctifies the rights of parents and through this we see the way in which Islam organises society. An Islamic community is not based merely on mutual responsibility, but rather it is more complete than that. The members of an Islamic community work together for the good of each other in a spirit of justice, harmony and respect. There are moral teachings which show adults how to raise children; there are teachings for the youth in respect to those older and younger than them. Islam reserves special respect and honour for those who have reached old age, for they have spent their lives trying to benefit society. We do not honour old people for their sake alone, but rather for the sake of Allah, since to have reverence for an old person is to have reverence for Allah. The Prophet ﷺ said: “To honour the one whose hair has gone grey in Islam is to exalt Allah.”¹⁰¹ Imām al-Ḥaddād says:

*Your parents have rights which are (only) fulfilled by
Those who fear Allah, and likewise your relatives*

Only Allah and His Messenger have greater rights over you than your parents. For this reason gratitude to parents is linked in the Qurʾān to gratitude to Allah: *Show gratitude to Me and to your parents. To Me is your final goal.*¹⁰²

Those who show kindness to their parents can be considered to be honouring the ties of kinship and can thus expect to receive the reward for this in this life. Allah will extend their lifespan and will give them children who will treat them righteously when they become old. Likewise, those who disobey their parents, cut family

100 Narrated by al-Bazzār

101 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Suyūṭī

102 *Luqmān*, 31:14

ties, fornicate or commit other abominations and intrude into the private affairs of others will receive punishment in the short term. Those who poke into the affairs of others will find their houses, families and children being watched. People receive the reward for righteousness and the punishment for disobedience in the short term.

A young man used to annoy his father until he became angry. When this happened he would drag his father out of the house and leave him on the step outside. Time passed and he grew older. His children were very harsh in their dealings with him and would likewise drag him until they reached the step of the house, at which point he would say: “Stop! I only used to drag your grandfather to this point.”

They would reply: “That was the capital and what is beyond that it is profit so we are giving you more,”¹⁰³ and they would drag him further than he used to drag his father. A person is rewarded in kind, according to the action. It is fitting that the punishment for crimes such as cutting the ties of kinship and injustice is meted out by Allah in the short term.

O Allah, help us to be righteous, and to travel along the path of the righteous, to be among the ones who are guided and who also guide others and make our children good, righteous and honourable, by Your mercy. O Allah, bless our children and do not harm them and give us and them the ability to obey You and help them to respect us.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

103 Meaning, “We are giving you more than you gave your father.”

LESSON FIFTEEN

good treatment of neighbours

*Those who honour their
neighbours' rights prepare
themselves for the best
neighbourhood*

The Sacred Law teaches Muslims the importance of treating their neighbours well and has made it compulsory for all Muslims to respect the rights of their neighbours, even if they are non-Muslim. If the neighbour is a Muslim he has extra rights, and if he is a relative he is due the rights of Islam, the rights of a being a neighbour, and the rights of kinship. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Jibrīl would continuously remind me of the rights of the neighbour until I thought that he would make him amongst the inheritors.”¹⁰⁴ In other words, the Prophet thought that a person’s neighbour would be given a share of his inheritance.

The rights of a neighbour are so great that the Prophet ﷺ said that the one whose neighbour is not safe from his harm has no faith. If people’s neighbours are not safe from them deceiving them, from harming them or their children or from them watching them, then those people are not believers by the testimony and oath of the Prophet. “By Allah, he is not a believer,” he said and then repeated it: “By Allah, he is not a believer,” and then repeated it a third time.

“Who is not a believer?” his Companions asked, “Wretched is such a person!”

“The one whose neighbour is not safe from his harm.”¹⁰⁵

The Prophet ﷺ said on the topic of a person concerning himself with his neighbour’s welfare: “By Allah, the one who goes through the month of Sha‘bān in the knowledge that his neighbour is hungry and does nothing to help him is not a believer.”¹⁰⁶ It is therefore compulsory for a Muslim to make sure his neighbour is in a good state.

104 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah and Ahmad

105 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

106 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bazzār

Imām ʿAbdullāh Bā ʿAlawī was so exemplary in caring for the welfare of his neighbours that they became embarrassed by the amount of things he would give them. On some nights they did not want him to know that they had no food for supper, so they lit the oven so that he would think that they had food to eat and be content. One day he happened to meet one of his neighbour's children and asked him: "What did you have for supper last night?"

"We had no supper last night."

"But I saw the oven alight in your house."

"My family only do that because they are ashamed to ask from you."

This greatly troubled him so we went to reproach them: "You have no right to do this to me! How can you put me in this terrible situation? Any night you find yourselves with nothing, my house is yours—take what you wish from it. As long as we are neighbours, I will never permit you to go to sleep at night without dinner." This was how he treated his neighbours, as a result of the strength of his faith.

A Muslim must be concerned for the welfare of his neighbour. The Prophet ﷺ taught parents that if they buy their children a toy or some other present, they should make sure that the children do not go out into the street with it, in case their neighbour's children see it and ask their parents for something similar and their parents are unable to afford it. He also said ﷺ: "If you buy some fruit, then give him (your neighbour) some, or else bring it into the house without him seeing it and do not let your children go out with a piece of it, so as not to make his children jealous. Do not let him smell the food from your cooking pots without giving him some."¹⁰⁷ In other words, either feed your neighbour or do not expose him to the smell of food which he is unable to afford. This is the extent to which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ took care of his neighbour's rights.

In these times Muslims grossly neglect the rights of their neighbours. Many of them do not even know who their neighbours are. This has become normal in some cities where Muslims from

107 Narrated by al-Bayhaqī, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Kharāʾitī and Ibn ʿAdī

different countries may live together in one building but they do not get to know one another or visit each other. The doors of their apartments may be opposite one another and in spite of the short distance between them, a man's neighbour may die without him knowing, and thus he does not attend his funeral prayer. Not only has he neglected the man's right as a neighbour, but he has neglected his general right as a Muslim – that his brother Muslim attend his funeral prayer.

This is all the result of the Muslims losing the real meaning of their faith and the result of their inability to reconcile the modern way of life with Islam. All Muslims must concern themselves with their neighbours' welfare, help them as much as they are able, greet them and wish them well on days of 'Īd and at the beginning of the month of Ramaḍān, and console them if they suffer misfortune. Those who honour their neighbours' rights prepare themselves for the best neighbourhood, in the proximity of Allah in the Abode of Honour and in the proximity of His Prophets and Messengers and His righteous servants.

O Allah, give us the ability to honour the rights of our neighbours and make us among those who work together to gain Your pleasure.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions and all those that follow his guidance. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON SIXTEEN

assisting the oppressed

*The one who defends the honour
of another Muslim will be rewarded
by Allah with assistance in this
life and in the Hereafter*

Assisting the oppressed is an absolute religious duty which Muslims must honour as far as they are able. Some people presume that Islam is merely performing the prayer, paying Zakat, fasting the month of Ramaḍān and making the pilgrimage to Makkah, and they ignore the moral teachings of the religion. In reality, the Pillars of Islam are a structure around which the religion's moral teachings must be built. If a Muslim knows that other Muslims have been oppressed but does not help them as far as he is able, he will be abandoned by Allah at a time when he hopes for His assistance. On the other hand, the one who defends the honour of other Muslims and gives them support will be rewarded by Allah with assistance in this life and in the Hereafter.

Muslims must sacrifice what they are able in order to support the oppressed amongst their brethren. Those who are nearby must do what they can to directly defend their brothers and sisters from oppression. Those who are far away may be physically distant but they are close in terms of shared belief and common principles, so they must do what they can to help. We constantly witness the oppression of Muslims in many areas of the world. It is obligatory for Muslims to assist their oppressed brothers and sisters as far as they are able through prayer and supplication, by spending their wealth to support them and by other means.

The fact that giving support to the oppressed is obligatory dictates that Muslims must live their lives in a state of awareness of the condition of their fellow Muslims. This awareness does not, however, go beyond what is demanded by the Sacred Law and what concerns the individual. The degree to which a Muslim should have concern for his brother is expressed in the statement of the Prophet ﷺ: "Assist your brother whether he is the oppressor or the one being oppressed."

“O Messenger of Allah,” his Companions asked, “No doubt we should assist our brother if he is being oppressed, but how can we assist him if he is the oppressor?”

“If he is the oppressor (and he is your Muslim brother) then prevent him oppressing others for this is assisting him,”¹⁰⁸ he replied. In other words, the meaning of assistance here is preventing the oppressor from exposing himself to the wrath of the All-Powerful and preventing him from being harmed, whether or not he realises where that harm is coming from. If he is an oppressor he will suffer because of his oppression, so he must be prevented from oppressing people. Oppression in this world will be manifested in the form of darkness on the Day of Judgement¹⁰⁹ so the best form of assistance someone can offer to the oppressor is to prevent him from oppressing others.

Giving assistance to the oppressed and bringing relief to their suffering are considered part of noble character in Islam. They are qualities which those trying to get close to Allah compete over, sacrificing their money, their time, their thoughts and even their lives in doing so. They make their transaction with Allah and their trade prospers, since they concern themselves with that which Allah loves and has prescribed. As a result, they gain a level of proximity to Him and receive His compassion and mercy. Assisting the oppressed is one of the best expressions of the mercy and faith that every Muslim should possess in their heart. No Muslim should fail to support his brother in some way. He may support him financially or convince others to offer their support.

It is very important for Muslims to concern themselves with this issue. Their families should be aware of the true situation of the Muslims and they should reflect upon the issues that affect them. Every Muslim is part of the same body, so all Muslims should feel what is happening to the rest of the body. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The likeness of the believers in the love, mercy and compassion that they

108 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

109 This is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ expressed it in the hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad and al-Dārimī. The meaning is that the oppressor will be in darkness on that Day on which only the pious believers will possess light. The Arabic word for oppression “*ẓulm*” and the word for darkness “*ẓulmah*” are from the same root.

show each other is one body: if one part of the body suffers from an ailment, the whole body suffers from insomnia and fever.”¹¹⁰

O Allah, assist us and give us the ability to assist the oppressed. Bestow upon us Your most precious gifts and drive away from us the evil of oppression and the evil of the oppressors and make us among those who are guided and who also guide others. May Allah bestow His peace and blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

110 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

LESSON SEVENTEEN

keeping promises

*Believers consider the breaking of a
promise to be a departure from the
etiquettes of the Sacred Law and a
failure to fulfil its obligations*

Keeping one's promises and honouring one's covenants are attributes of those who believe and strive to follow the way of the Prophet ﷺ. Allah says: *Honour the covenant of Allah when you have entered into it.*¹¹¹ The Prophet ﷺ informed us that one of the signs of hypocrites is that they break their promises and he thus warned against resembling them. For this reason believers do everything they can to keep their promises.

The true example of keeping promises was set by the Prophet of Allah ﷺ, his noble Companions and the pious people of this community. We should follow them and take them as an example. A man bought something from our Master Muḥammad ﷺ in the days before he received revelation. The man paid most of the price and promised that he would bring the remainder to the Prophet in the same place the following day. He forgot, however, and only remembered his promise after three days. He came and found the Prophet waiting in the same place. The Prophet said to him: "You have placed undue hardship upon me – I have been waiting here for three days!"¹¹² This is how the Messenger of Allah ﷺ honoured his promises.

Whenever Imām Ja'far al-Ṣādiq made a promise to do something, he would not be content to eat or drink until he had done that thing. The righteous preferred to spontaneously do good to others without first making promises. If, however, they needed to make promises, they were careful to keep them. If they promised to do something within a certain time, they went to great lengths to ensure they did this. They would even do more than sticking to the original promise and do what they had promised to do earlier than they had promised, may Allah be pleased with them. This is how a Muslim should be.

111 *Al-Naḥl*, 16:91

112 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd

Amazingly, it is common for Muslims not to keep their promises. They have set working hours, for example, but they neglect the terms of their contracts and come to work late or leave early. Another example is when someone invites guests to their home at a particular time. Due to the widespread abandonment of this character trait and Prophetic practice, some of the guests come early and others come late. The time of the one who arrives on time is wasted by those who come late, and sometimes even the host does not keep his promise. A lot of time is thus wasted, and people may suffer as a result.

The problem is so wide-spread that it is common for Muslims to regard fulfilling promises, being punctual and keeping one's word as being non-Muslim values. However, this shows an ignorance of the religion. No other law has emphasised the importance of fulfilling promises like the Sacred Law of Islam. Non-Muslims generally stick to their promises in the hope of worldly benefits such as for the sake of their reputation, for worldly gain or for some other limited benefit. In contrast, believers consider the breaking of a promise to be a departure from the etiquettes of the Sacred Law and a failure to fulfil its obligations. They fear that by failing to fulfil a promise, they are exposing themselves to the wrath of Allah. Believers will attain true faith by keeping their promises and, through that, unlimited benefits and eternal bliss.

Muslims should regulate their affairs according to the Sacred Law, and live their lives in accordance to Divine guidance.

May Allah give us the ability to embody the character traits which are pleasing to Him, and make us people who uprightly follow the teachings of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in their words and deeds.

O Allah, make the Muslims firm, rectify and take care of their affairs and deflect harm from them.

May Allah bestow His peace and blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON EIGHTEEN

humility

*Believers should regard themselves
to be the lowest of Allah's creation
and the most needy of His servants*

The moral teachings of Islam prepare the one who embodies them for complete felicity. One of the qualities of the heart which the believer must possess is humility (*tawāḍuʿ*). Allah loves this quality and has promised to raise the station and degree of the believer who possesses it. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The one who shows humility for the sake of Allah is the one whom Allah raises.”¹¹³

Allah has called us to show humility to His slaves and He describes His true servants as follows: *The servants of the Most Compassionate are those who walk on the earth in humility, and if the ignorant address them, they say, ‘Peace!’ They are those who spend the night in worship of their Lord prostrating and standing.*¹¹⁴ His saying *those who walk on the earth in humility* expresses their humility even in relation to inanimate things and in relation to the earth upon which they walk. This is because humility, despite being an internal state, has an outward form which becomes manifest upon a person’s limbs and in their actions. Thus, if humility is firmly embedded in someone’s heart, the effect of this will be seen in their speech and in their dealings with people.

Just as Allah has promised to raise the people of humility, He has also promised to lower the arrogant and to abase them in this life and in the Hereafter. He says in the Qur’an: *Truly He does not love the arrogant.*¹¹⁵ If arrogance is firmly embedded in someone’s heart, its effect will be apparent in their haughtiness, pride and in the way they walk with their head held high. It will also be evident, amongst other things, in their disdain for sitting with the poor and their aversion to sitting at the back of a gathering or to dressing modestly. Arrogance may be manifested in worldly things such as wealth, power and

113 Narrated by Muslim

114 *Al-Furqān*, 25:63

115 *Al-Nahl*, 16:23

status, despite the fact that this world is of less value to Allah than the wing of a gnat. Thus those who show arrogance in worldly affairs only do so because they have no veneration for Allah in their hearts.

This world is too contemptible for people to show arrogance concerning it. They should know that Firʿawn, Hāmān and Qārūn possessed more than they do. Are they really the ones they wish to take as an example? Are they content for their fate to be like theirs, which their Creator has mentioned in the Qurʿan? Real pride and honour are not to be attained through this world, because *honour belongs to Allah and His Messenger and to the believers*.¹¹⁶ People may also show arrogance with regard to acts of obedience to Allah, religious knowledge and other affairs connected to the religion. They should know that this lowers their rank, ruins and devalues their worship and their religion and reduces them to a state of abasement in this world and the next. May Allah Almighty protect us from that!

Believers must therefore take the path of humility and attempt to attain it, even if it is just affectation at first, until it becomes firm in their hearts. Those who believe themselves to be better than anyone else in creation have left the path of humility and some arrogance has entered their hearts. Believers should regard themselves to be the lowest of Allah's creation and the most needy of His servants, while fearing His power and His ability to take retribution should He wish to do so. If this is their state, they will not be shaken by events taking place around them and they will continually seek to attain humility in their speech and actions.

They must emulate the Master of the Humble, the Messenger of Allah, the Trustworthy ﷺ. Any of the slave-girls of al-Madīnah could call upon him and request that he speak to someone on their behalf, buy something for them or fulfil some need for them. If confronted by one of them in the street, he would go with her to deal with her problem and then return.

The people of his household were asked about his state when he was at home. They replied that he was like one of them with regard to household chores: he would sweep the house, patch his clothes and carve the meat. However, if the time for prayer came, he would leave the house as if he did not know them and they did not know

116 *Al-Munāfiqūn*, 63:8

him,¹¹⁷ such was his exaltation for his religious duty. ‘Ā’ishah, the Mother of the Believers ؓ said: “We did not use to take undue notice of him: when he entered the house, we were not in awe of him, nor did we fear him.” This was because of the state of utter humility in which he entered. “The exception was a lamb which used to live in the house. It used to come and go, but if the Messenger of Allah ﷺ entered, it would sit in the corner and remain motionless until he went out.”¹¹⁸ How awesome was his character and humility!

This was how he trained his Companions, so that they saw no shame or disgrace in wearing patched clothes. They busied themselves with serving the old women and the weak amongst them, setting the best example for us, may Allah be well pleased with them.

We should make humility our constant state, since Allah raises all those who lower themselves before His majesty. We should show humility in all that we say and do. We should be ashamed of attributing good qualities to ourselves since they are gifts from Allah and, if He wishes, He could remove what He has given us in the blink of an eye. If we take excessive pride in our outward appearance, we should realise that it could be ruined by the slightest blemish. If we are proud of our good health, we should realise that it could be lost by the slightest pain in our teeth, eyes or ears. If we boast about our wealth, we should realise that in an instant we may become penniless. A calamity could wipe out our wealth, or we could find ourselves in the throes of death, at which time our wealth would be of no benefit and we would not be heard of thereafter. So we should beware of having pride with regard to worldly matters and beware of pride creeping into our religion and ruining it. Rather, we should abase ourselves in front of our Lord, so that He will raise us.

Allah, guide us to the best of actions and the best of character, for no one but You may do so, and rid us of evil actions and character, for no one but You may do so, by Your mercy, O Most Merciful!

May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions and all those who follow them with excellence until the Day of Recompense. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

117 Narrated by al-Bukhārī

118 Aḥmad, al-Bazzār, al-Daraqūṭnī, al-Ṭabarānī, al-Bayhaqī and Abū Yaʿlā

LESSON NINETEEN

abstinence

*Muslims who are truthful in their Islam
live their lives in a state of contentment
with what Allah has provided for them*

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ mentioned three matters connected to the character of a Muslim and swore an oath concerning them. He said: “There are three things about which I swear an oath: that the more forgiving a person becomes, the more he increases in nobility; that charity does not decrease a person’s wealth, and that whenever someone opens upon himself the door of asking from others, Allah opens for him the door of poverty.”¹¹⁹

Let us focus on the third thing, namely a Muslim’s abstinence (*‘iffah*) concerning the property of others. Just as being generous with one’s wealth, readiness to spend it and preferring others over one’s self are character traits of a believer, so too are abstinence concerning the property of others and contentment with what Allah has provided.

Believers only seek wealth through ways which Allah has prescribed such as trade, manufacturing, agriculture and other means which are in accordance with the Sacred Law. They do not hanker after the wealth of others and they never ask from people when they are capable of working and earning their living. If people beg, claiming poverty, while possessing provision for a day and a night, then what they receive from people is unlawful. It is only lawful for people to beg, claiming poverty, if they do not possess provision for a day and a night. If they are given what they need for that day, they must refrain from begging until the following day, when Allah will once again provide them with what they need.

If Muslims show abstinence concerning the property of others, Allah will give them the means to achieve contentment. As the Prophet says ﷺ: “Real wealth is not in the amount of goods one possesses. Real wealth is inner wealth,”¹²⁰ meaning contentment. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ sought refuge with Allah from poverty. The

119 Narrated by Aḥmad and al-Tirmidhī

120 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Mājah

scholars say that what he meant was not a lack of material possessions but rather inner poverty which keeps the one who is afflicted by it hankering after others' wealth, so that he lives in a state of poverty even if he possesses the world and all that it contains. This kind of poverty causes a great deal of damage. Muslims must thus take the path of abstinence, spending their surplus wealth and guarding their tongues against excessive speech. When someone asked one of the great men of the past for advice he said: "Keep your palm open and keep your jaw shut." In other words, spend freely from what you possess and guard your tongue against excessive speech, for the one who sticks to this advice will be considered by Allah as someone who remembers Him much and is grateful to Him. This is how the Muslim should be.

To return to the hadith mentioned at the beginning of the lesson, the believer must look at the results of those actions about which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ swore an oath. The first thing was that: "The more forgiving a person becomes, the more he increases in nobility." Whoever forgives the one who has harmed them, or forgoes a right which is due to them, will be ennobled. They will not be harmed or abased by forgiving others. Many people say that if you forgive someone and forego your right over them, you encourage them to take advantage of you, and people will scorn you and look down upon you. Mention to them what the Prophet ﷺ said in this hadith.

Secondly, people say that if you spend your wealth in various charitable causes, your wealth will be reduced and your financial state weakened. Say to them: "Charity does not decrease a person's wealth." In fact charity increases a person's wealth as long as it is given to those that deserve it.

Thirdly, "whenever someone opens upon himself the door of asking from others, Allah opens for him the door of poverty." The more people ask, the more they increase in poverty. The hadith refers to those who ask for themselves, greedily coveting the wealth of others. They are the ones for whom Allah opens the door of poverty. Those who ask on behalf of the needy, encouraging the wealthy to spend for the common good to gain Allah's reward, are not those intended by this hadith.

Muslims who are truthful in their Islam live their lives in a state of contentment with what Allah has provided for them, seeking their sustenance in that which Allah has prescribed and putting their trust in Him. They abstain from others' possessions, pay no heed to them and do not covet them. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Whatever wealth comes to you without you seeking it, take it and use it if you are in need of it. Otherwise give it away in charity. As for the wealth which comes to you as a result of your own effort, do not allow your heart to be attached to it."¹²¹ You should not be attached to the wealth which you have striven to earn. As for that which is given to you, the right way to deal with it is not to reject it, as long as it is from a legal source. If you are in need of it, you should take it and if not, you should give it away in charity.

May Allah make us people who are content with what they have and make plentiful our inward and outward sustenance. Make our wealth be in our hands so that we spend from it freely and not in our hearts so that we become attached to it.

May Allah make us among those who spend from their wealth seeking His noble countenance.

May Allah bestow His blessings upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

121 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim, al-Nasā'ī and Aḥmad

LESSON TWENTY

raising children

*A child's attachment to the religion
should begin even before its birth.*

The Sacred Law of Islam stresses that Muslims must concern themselves with the proper upbringing of their children. The key to raising children well is for the parents to realise that their offspring are a trust in their care and they must honour that trust by raising them a way that is pleasing to their Lord. They must know that by failing to do so their wealth, spouses and children turn into enemies and become a trial for them. Allah says: *O believers, among your spouses and your children are enemies for you, so beware of them. If you overlook their wrongs, and forgive and pardon them, then know that Allah is Forgiving and Merciful.*¹²² He also says: *It is not your wealth nor your children that will bring you nearer to Us in degree, except (in the case of) he who believes and does good works.*¹²³

The wealth of those that believe and do good deeds is a means for them to draw near to Allah, because they spend that wealth in its proper place. Likewise their children are a means for them to draw near, because they raise them in the way which Allah has ordained.

The reward for the good deeds which people perform continues to reach the souls of their parents after they have passed away. Therefore it is extremely important for a Muslim to concern himself with the good character of his wife and the good upbringing of his children. The integrity of the family rests upon these good qualities, as does the integrity of society, and in turn, the integrity of the state.

Parents are obliged to nurture not just their children's bodies, but also their souls. They are obliged to attach their hearts to the religion of their Lord so that they will end up being the delight of their eyes on the Day on which Allah resurrects His creation. Allah says in His description of His righteous servants that they are: *Those who say, 'Our Lord, grant us of our wives and offspring the delight*

122 *Al-Taghābun*, 64:14

123 *Saba'*, 34:38

*of our eyes, and make us an example to the god-fearing.*¹²⁴ This can only be achieved if a man gives his children a good upbringing and concerns himself with the good character of his wife.

The starting point in raising children is to have a good intention concerning them: a wish for them to become close to Allah, to be among those who uphold His religion and to be amongst His righteous servants. Thus, a child's attachment to the religion should begin even before its birth. There are some men who think only of worldly matters when they learn of their wife's pregnancy: the child will bring in a good income, we will find him a good job so that our provision will be plentiful, or he will be a source of pride and status for us. There are others, however, who envisage their children being obedient to Allah so that they receive the reward for that obedience. They imagine them being upright and firm on Allah's path and thus being a cause for them receiving His mercy, preparing for them a place in Paradise and being the delight of their eyes in the Hereafter.

The intentions with which children are raised have a big effect. The Prophet ﷺ said: "Marry a woman who will bear many children, and one who will be a loving wife, because your number will be a source of pride to me in front of the other nations on the Day of Judgement."¹²⁵ In this hadith there is an indication that a person's intention on getting married should be that he will have children who will increase the number of those who reach the Pool¹²⁶ of the Prophet ﷺ so that they may be a source of pride to him. Look at the beauty of this intention which should be in the heart of someone who is thinking about getting married. This shows how great a teacher and nurturer the Prophet ﷺ was. In another hadith he said: "Marry and increase, because your number will be a source of pride to me in front of the other nations on the Day of Judgement."¹²⁷

Along with this intention, he also taught us to give the call to prayer in the newborn baby's right ear and the call to commence prayer in the left ear. This is what he did with our masters al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn when Fāṭimah al-Batūl al-Zahrā' ﷺ gave birth to them. The Prophet ﷺ established this practice so that the first thing

124 *Al-Furqān*, 25:74

125 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad, Ibn Hibbān and al-Hākim

126 The *Hawd*

127 Narrated by al-Daylami

in this world which reaches a new-born baby's ear is the words of the call: "Allah is most great, Allah is most great, I bear witness that there is nothing worthy of worship except Allah, and I bear witness that Muhammad is the Messenger of Allah." The baby hears the word "Allah" and the name of His Messenger ﷺ and he hears veneration for the things which Allah has made sacred in the words "come to prayer, come to success."

The child's attachment to the religion is reinforced by feeding it only completely lawful food and by mentioning Allah's name before breast-feeding or bottle-feeding.¹²⁸ One of the righteous people of the past used to make it a condition on his wife or his children's wet-nurse that they would only breastfeed when they were remembering Allah, so that the children would absorb the effect of Allah's remembrance with the milk and the illumination that goes with it.

Parents should also choose good names for their children. Some people deviate from the correct path and choose for their children the names of disbelievers or evildoers. Rather, they should choose the names of the Prophets or the righteous servants of Allah. Amongst the best are those names derived either from the root word 'a-b-d (meaning worship and servitude) such as 'Abdullāh (the slave of Allah), 'Abd al-Rahmān (the slave of the Most Gracious), 'Abd al-Rahīm (the slave of the Most Merciful), or 'Abd al-Karīm (the slave of the Most Generous) or from the root word ḥ-m-d (meaning praise) such as Muḥammad (the possessor of abundant praiseworthy qualities), Aḥmad (the one who praises Allah the most), Ḥāmid (the praiser) and Maḥmūd (the praised one). The names which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ chose for his sons and daughters are also excellent, as are the names chosen by his grandchildren and progeny. Parents must choose good names for their children as it is one of the rights a child has over its parents.

Parents must care for their children properly as they grow up. Before the age of seven, children should become attached to the prayer and the other religious duties which make up the Five Pillars of Islam. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: "Command your children to perform the prayer when they are seven years old, and

128 By saying 'Bismillāh,' meaning 'in the name of Allah.'

strike them for neglecting it when they reach ten.”¹²⁹ The parents’ commanding their children to pray at the age of seven assumes that they have already taught them how to pray before they reach that age, so that they are commanding them to do something with which they are familiar. Then they must discipline them if they neglect the prayer from the age of ten. If the parents fail to enforce this and allow the prayer to be neglected, they have committed a sin. This is because of the greatness of the prayer, which is one of the pillars of Allah’s religion. It is like a rope that connects the slave to Allah. Whoever severs this rope has cut himself off from Allah’s mercy. The Messenger ﷺ said: “The bond which is between us and them is the prayer.”¹³⁰

Furthermore, parents must ensure that their children have a good education and must choose righteous teachers for them. They must also choose good companions for them and keep them away from bad company. As far as possible, they should monitor their speech and actions and give them guidance and direction. Their children will then be the delight of their eyes, righteous and beneficial members of society, at whose hands much good will be done. They will also be a cause for them to draw near to Allah and for their reward to be increased.

May Allah bring us close to Him, bless our children and help us to give them the best upbringing, for truly He is the Most Generous and the Most Merciful.

May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

129 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd

130 Narrated by Ibn Mājah, al-Nasāʾi and al-Tirmidhi.

LESSON TWENTY - ONE

instilling good character
in one's wife

*The husband must know that
his wife is a trust in his hands*

Just as the believer must concern himself with giving his children a good upbringing, it is also his duty to instil good character in his wife. Allah describes the believers as being concerned for the state of their wives as well as their children. They are: *Those who say, "Our Lord, grant us of our wives and offspring the delight of our eyes, and make us an example to those who possess taqwā."*¹³¹ The previous chapter explained the ways to bring up children so that they will be a delight to the eyes of their parents. How can a wife be a delight to the eyes of her husband? It can be achieved by the husband instilling in her good character.

The husband must know that his wife is a trust in his hands. The Sacred Law grants him rights over her and grants her rights over him. He must live with her in the best way, treat her with kindness as far as he is able and he must educate and nurture her. He must instil in her reverence for the religion and for the Sacred Law and distance himself and her from the things which anger Allah and displease Him. He must live with her on the basis of what Allah has made legal for him.

His intention in his sexual relations with her should be to have children who will increase the numbers of the Prophet's nation so that it may be a source of pride for him on the Day of Judgement. He must not have relations with her without first mentioning Allah's name. After mentioning Allah's name, he should intend in his relations with his wife the fulfilment of his sexual desire and the preservation of his chastity.

The believer may not have relations with his wife during her monthly period. Allah's order is clear in the Qur'an: *They ask you about menstruation. Say it is a cause of harm so let women alone*

131 *Al-Furqān*, 25:74. Taqwā is to obey Allah's orders and avoid His prohibitions in a state of fearful awareness of Him.

during their menstruation periods, and do not touch them until they are clean again. In other words, do not have relations with them until they have performed the purificatory bath after their period has ended. Then go to them as Allah has enjoined you, for Allah loves those who constantly turn to Him in repentance and strive to purify themselves.¹³² As the Prophet ﷺ has informed us, Allah has cursed the man who has relations with his wife during her monthly cycle and He has cursed the man who has anal intercourse with his wife.¹³³

The believer must instil in his wife's heart reverence for the prayer and those things which Allah has made obligatory. He must teach her to treat both her own parents and his with kindness and make her realise that the man who prefers his wife to his mother exposes himself to the curse of Allah, the angels and all people. She should likewise help him to treat his own parents well.

He must caution her against leaving the house in anything other than modest and decent attire and against becoming a victim to fashion, since the fashion which she follows may have been set by any person from any country. That person may be an evildoer or a disbeliever. She would be foolish to allow herself to be allured by these people and to abandon her own sense of modesty and in doing so, contravene the Sacred Law. In all this her husband is responsible for her. If she abandons her modesty, she will never be a source of delight for him on the Day of Witnessing. She will never be a pious wife, which the Prophet ﷺ described as being the greatest pleasure of this life.

The husband is responsible for stressing to her that her dignity and her honour lie in the modesty of her dress. As Allah says: *O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters and the believing women to draw their cloaks close around them (when they leave the house). That will be better, that they should be known and not molested.*¹³⁴ Thus, their modesty and decency should be known so that they are not molested by those who look at them with evil intentions, and not harmed by the words of those with sick hearts. Allah says: *Be not soft of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved*

132 Al-Baqarah, 2:222

133 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī

134 Al-Ahzāb, 33:59

*with desire.*¹³⁵ He thus forbade believing women from softening their speech when addressing strange men to avoid arousing the passions of men in whose hearts is the disease of unlawful desire. Allah also taught them only to leave the house for a valid reason, such as to visit their parents, relatives or neighbours; to gain knowledge of the Sacred Law; or to do anything which is of benefit to people. If a woman goes out on a frequent basis without any need, this may take other people off the straight path and expose them to temptation. A woman may go shopping for example and may end up joking with the shop assistant and revealing some of her beauty. Something as small as this may be the prelude to great evil, the consequences of which are dire. As for committing those heinous acts which lead to fornication, this is catastrophic. As the poet says:

*The starting point of all accidents is a glance,
And most fires are caused by the smallest of sparks.*

The husband must know where his honour and the honour of his wife lie, and he must have shame in front of Allah and proper courtesy in his dealings with Him by taking the correct path. By the attestation of the Prophet ﷺ, the man who allows a strange man to be alone with his wife or his daughters has no concern for their honour and will not enter Paradise.¹³⁶ A Muslim must protect the honour of his womenfolk and he must ensure that they maintain modesty. Women in many areas of the Muslim world have maintained this modesty and dignity in dress, but they must be wary of being taken in by what is offered to them and by what is going on around them. They must not be affected by the actions of women who shamelessly expose themselves, of heedless women who have strayed from the path and invite others to their misguidance. These women have been cursed, as the hadith testifies: "There are two groups of people from my nation who will end up in the Hell Fire, who I have not yet seen: men in whose hands are whips like cow's tails which they use to herd people, and women who are naked although they appear to be dressed, women who have strayed from the path and invite others to their misguidance. Their heads will resemble the slanted humps of camels. They will not enter Heaven, nor will they smell its scent,

135 *Al-Aḥzāb*, 33:32

136 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī, al-Bayhaqī and al-Suyūṭī

even though its scent can be smelt from a distance which would take five hundred years to cover.”¹³⁷ The Prophet ﷺ was referring to some of the fashions which will appear towards the end of time such as women styling their hair so that it appears like a camel’s hump. We take refuge with Allah from His wrath.

The believer should prepare his wife to be the delight of his eye and to be his wife in Paradise, since the wife of a believer in this life will be his wife in Paradise. Allah will make her more beautiful than the maidens of Paradise since she remained obedient to Him and patiently bore her burden in this life, whereas the maidens are created in Paradise and have no burden to bear. At the very least a man will marry seventy of the maidens of Paradise and two women from this world.

O Allah, make our wives the delight of our eyes, and guide us to the most upright of ways. Make our houses places of blessings, goodness, guidance and success by Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

137 Narrated by Muslim and Aḥmad

LESSON TWENTY - TWO

the best response

*The believer must learn to say that
which is best, for this is a means to a
peaceful life in this world and a means
to a great reward in the afterlife*

One of the noble etiquettes that Islam teaches Muslims is to respond in the best possible way when they are addressed by someone. As previously mentioned, Allah describes His righteous servants as follows: *The servants of the Most Compassionate are they who walk on the earth in humility, and if the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!"*¹³⁸ If the ignorant, those who are not bound by the limits of good etiquette and who have no concept of respect or deference, address them, they only say to them "peace." In other words, they only respond in the best way. This removes the causes of rancour, hatred and enmity, and prevents problems arising. Many people are easily provoked, but no one can take advantage of the true slaves of Allah to provoke discord or friction. If those who are sincere in their faith are insulted, they respond in a nice way. If people make fun of them, they reply respectfully as far as they are able: *If the ignorant address them, they say, "Peace!"*

Someone once insulted Imām[ؑ] Alī Zayn al-[ؑ]Ābidīn. He turned away from the man without responding and his facial expression did not change. The man was surprised so he said: "I mean you."

The Imam replied: "You are the one I have turned away from. You have abused me and I have turned away from you."

This is how a Muslim's response should be. Once some people hired a man to try and anger the Imām in public, since he was known for his forbearance. The man entered [ؑ]Alī Zayn al-[ؑ]Ābidīn's gathering and began to insult and abuse him in front of his companions. His companions wanted to seize the man and silence him but he forbade them from doing so, and the man continued to insult him. His face did not change in any way and when the man had finished he turned to him and said: "You have mentioned some of the things which you know about me and there are probably other vile attributes of mine

138 *Al-Furqān* 25:63

about which you do not know, so may Allah forgive me. Do you have any need that I can take care of?”

The man was too ashamed to respond, so the Imām said to his servant: “Do you have anything with you?”

He said: “Yes, one thousand dirhams.”

“Give it to this man.”

The servant came and poured the coins out in front of him. The man wept and said: “I bear witness that you are the son of the daughter of the Messenger of Allah. I swear to Allah, an evil group of people induced me to do this.”

The Imam said: “Refrain from this and be quiet, and take this as a gift and I have nothing against you in my heart.” With that, the man went on his way. *If the ignorant address them, they say, “Peace!”*

Allah instructs the Prophet ﷺ as follows: *Say to My servants that they should say those things which are best.* Doing other than this may cause problems, since: *the Devil sows dissension among them.*¹³⁹ If someone does not say that which is best, he may utter something harmful which angers the one he is speaking to and opens the door to many tribulations.

A Muslim must speak well at all times and reply if addressed inappropriately with that which is pleasing to Allah. This closes the door upon those who wish to cause dissension: *Say to My servants that they should say those things which are best.* The Muslim thus does not give the Devil the opportunity to sow dissension, by replying in the best possible way to anyone who addresses him. This is something Muslims have to learn and teach to their children.

One of the great men of the past was once riding on his donkey and passed by a man whose habit it was to make fun of him. “O Shaykh,” he said, “which is better: you or that donkey of yours?”

Look at the abusiveness and ugliness of the man’s address and then look at the response: the Shaykh turned to him and said: “Brother, if I pass over the Bridge¹⁴⁰ safely and enter Paradise, then

139 *Al-Isrāʾ*, 17:53

140 What is meant is the *ṣirāṭ*, the bridge over the Hell-fire over which everyone must pass.

I am better than this animal, but if I fall into the Hellfire, then it is better than me.” His reply moved the man’s heart and he went from having scorn for the Shaykh to having the utmost respect for him. The Shaykh chose the best response and this had an effect on the man, taught him a lesson and brought him back to the straight path. Had he rebuked the man for his rudeness and the error of his ways, it would only have increased him in his waywardness, so that the next time he saw him he would have insulted him even more. The Shaykh’s reply, however, extinguished the fire and had an illuminating effect on the man, making him feel ashamed of himself, and making him improve his speech.

Once Imām ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn was praying a supererogatory prayer in the mosque after everyone had left, having prayed the night prayer in congregation. A stranger to the city had left a purse belonging to him containing one thousand dirhams in the house in which he was staying. He mistakenly thought, after leaving the mosque, that he had left the purse in the mosque, so he rushed back in a state of great anxiety. The only person he found in the mosque was ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn, who was deep in prayer. Not knowing who he was, he jumped to the conclusion that he was the only person who could have stolen the purse. He thought he was concealing himself by praying until everyone had left so that he could leave with the purse without anyone seeing him. He saw ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn making a lengthy prostration, so he said to him: “Do not lengthen your prayer. Return to people what rightfully belongs to them!” When ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn perceived his presence, he quickly finished his prayer and asked the man: “What is the problem?”

“I left a purse containing one thousand dirhams in this mosque and no one could have taken it but you,” said the man.

“Please do not expose me my brother,” ‘Alī Zayn al-‘Ābidīn replied, “for Allah conceals the faults of the one who conceals the faults of another Muslim. I will give you what belongs to you. Follow me.” He took the man to his home, put one thousand dirhams into a purse and gave it to him.

“Is this a thousand?” he asked the man.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Then take it.”

So the man went away with the purse and when he returned to the house where he was staying he found his own purse where he had left it. He realised that he had been mistaken. He asked himself: “Who was the man I addressed in such a dreadful way and whom I accused of theft? Who instead of becoming angry, disputing with me and striking me, asked me not to expose him and then gave me from his own wealth?” He was amazed by the man’s character. He went out and asked whose house it was that the man had taken him to. He was told it was the house of ʿAlī, the son of al-Ḥusayn.

“Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn?” he asked.

“Yes,” the people replied.

“There is no strength or power except by Allah!” he exclaimed. “Could I not have found anyone to accuse of theft except this Imām, this scholar, this knower of Allah?” He cried and then knocked on the door and ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn came out.

“Forgive me,” the man pleaded: “I did not know you and I found my purse in my house. You are not a thief, you are an honourable man, the son of an honourable man.”

“Take the money, may Allah bless you in it,” ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn replied.

“Forgive me.”

“I forgave you even before you left my house for the first time and I pardoned you before you came to see me now.”

May Allah be well pleased with him! How excellent he was in speech and how forbearing! The believer must learn to say that which is best, for this is a means to a peaceful life in this world and a means to a great reward in the afterlife.

May Allah give us enabling grace, make us firm, make correct our speech and rectify our actions.

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions and the Followers. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON TWENTY - THREE

lowering one's gaze

*A person's hearing and vision are like
two doors which open on to the heart*

One of the greatest qualities that Muslims may possess is the ability to lower their gaze. This ability guarantees them great good and blessings in this life and enables them to avoid disobeying Allah with their eyes. Anyone who is preparing their eyes to look upon the faces of the Prophets ﷺ and the Pure Ones on the Day of Judgement and in the Abode of Ennoblement will not pollute them by looking at what Allah has forbidden.

A single glance may have a huge effect on a person's heart. A person's hearing and vision are like two doors which open on to the heart. Everything that a person sees and hears reaches the heart and has either a positive or a negative effect upon it. Therefore believers must be careful about what they allow their gaze to fall upon. Looking at the Qur'an, looking at the faces of the believers with mercy and compassion, looking at the faces of one's parents with honour and respect, and looking upon the creation to reflect upon Allah's signs all increase the faith in a believer's heart. Conversely, looking at a member of the opposite sex who it is unlawful to look at, looking at another Muslim with contempt, looking into other people's houses without their permission, and looking at the ornament of this world with approval and exaltation all have a terrible impact on the heart. A single glance at any of these things could cut someone off from their Lord for the rest of their life and be the cause of their destruction.

This is the reason for the warnings which Allah gives in the Qur'an. He says to His Prophet ﷺ: *Do not strain your eyes by looking at that which We have given some of them to enjoy, the splendour of the life of this world, through which We test them. The provision of your Lord is better and more lasting.*¹⁴¹ Allah also orders His Prophet ﷺ to command the believers: *Say to the believing men that they must lower*

141 *Tā Hā*, 20:131

*their gaze.*¹⁴² Believers must in the first instance prevent their gaze from falling upon that which is impermissible.

Just as Muslims are obliged to lower their gaze, they are likewise obliged to prevent their minds from thinking about forbidden things. The Prophet ﷺ said: “The eye may fornicate and the mind may fornicate. The fornication of the eye is in its gaze, and the fornication of the mind is a wish.”¹⁴³ He described a believer’s inability to lower his gaze as “the fornication of the eye” and his inability to prevent his mind from thinking about forbidden things as ‘the fornication of the mind.’ He also said ﷺ: “Allah has apportioned to the Son of Adam his share of fornication, which he cannot avoid. The fornication of the eye is in its gaze, and the fornication of the tongue is in its speech.”¹⁴⁴ In other words, the fornication of the tongue is the uttering of obscenities, so a believer must guard his tongue against uttering such things, because this is the starting point of the most odious and degrading act, fornication itself.

This is why the possibility of fornication occurring must be prevented at the earliest possible stage: *Say to the believing men that they must lower their gaze.* The stages leading up to a forbidden action can be divided into three: firstly, perception, in which someone perceives the situation they are in; secondly, the arousal of desire in which the wish to carry out the action becomes firm in their heart, and thirdly, the readiness to act upon that wish. The rulings of the Sacred Law mostly come into effect at the third stage. When we look at money for example, what is unlawful is taking the wealth of others unjustly, whereas it is not unlawful to look at another’s wealth. A person is not forbidden from wishing he had a similar amount, or wishing that another person’s wealth was his,¹⁴⁵ but if he stretches his hand out to unlawfully take possession of it, the legal ruling comes into effect to prevent him from doing so. In the case of fornication, however, the ruling enters at the first stage, because of the difficulty of distinguishing between the stages and the difficulty of preventing a wrong action being committed. Allah says from the beginning: *Say*

142 *Al-Nūr*, 24:30

143 Narrated by Aḥmad

144 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

145 On condition that he wishes for a similar amount of wealth, not for his brother’s wealth to be removed, which is impermissible.

to the believing men that they must lower their gaze and guard their modesty. If the matter was allowed to develop further, it would be like a person who keeps livestock and allows one of his animals to see food belonging to someone else. The animal approaches the food and the man wishes to prevent it, but he is unable to do so except with the greatest difficulty.

For this reason, the Sacred Law has ordered Muslims to lower their gaze and refrain from looking at what is forbidden. The Prophet ﷺ said: “A glance is one of the Devil’s poisoned arrows. Allah says: ‘If someone refrains from glancing out of fear of Me, I will give him faith in its place whose sweetness he tastes in his heart.’”¹⁴⁶ Thus someone who refrains from looking at a forbidden picture which is shown to them receives their reward immediately “in cash”: a sweetness they taste in their heart; the sweetness of faith. The one who tries this will find this sweetness more beautiful and more valuable than all the desires of this world. Muslims should use the things with which they are tested to attain the sweetness of faith. If they are sincere in doing so, tribulations will be transformed into blessings, and they will taste this sweetness. However, if they choose to follow their desires they will put their religion at risk and cause themselves many problems.

Once a man was close to death and those around him tried to make him pronounce the testification of faith – that there is nothing worthy of worship but Allah – but the man was unable to do so. They changed the subject and he spoke, and then they once again tried to get him to pronounce it but he remained silent. They continued to do this until one of them shouted: “Why is it that you are able to speak with us normally, but when I mention the testification of faith you are silent?”

“A glance at something which Allah had forbidden has prevented me from pronouncing it,” he replied. The effect of this glance had overpowered him and prevented him from pronouncing the testification of faith at the time of his death. He had not repented to Allah for this sin, and he had not restrained himself from looking at what Allah had forbidden. It thus remained in his heart and had its effect at the time of his death. We take refuge with Allah!

146 Narrated by al-Hākim and al-Ṭabarānī

Say to the believing men that they must lower their gaze and guard their modesty. That will be purer for them. Allah is well aware of what they do. And say to the believing women that they must lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they display not their ornaments except what appears of them;¹⁴⁷ that they should draw their veils over their chests.¹⁴⁸

Thus prepare your eyes for the vision of the face of the Prophet ﷺ on the Day of Judgement by refraining from looking at that which Allah has forbidden.

O Allah, grant us enabling grace, rectify our state and rectify our bodies and our hearts and take care of our affairs as only You can do, and make us among those for whom You have decreed goodness, O Beneficent, O Merciful!

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

147 The commentators say that this refers to either a woman's face and hands or her outer clothing.

148 *Al-Nūr*, 24:30-31. Their veils thus conceal their hair, neck and chest.

LESSON TWENTY - FOUR

being trustworthy

*Whoever is trustworthy in his dealings
with people is deemed by Allah to be
worthy of being entrusted with the
secrets of the religion*

Being trustworthy is extremely important in Islam. A believer is someone who upholds people's honour and protects their wealth and property. Someone who is trustworthy in his dealings with people is deemed by Allah to be worthy of being entrusted with the secrets of the religion and being gifted the sweet taste of closeness to Him. Allah will bless such a person with inner security and safeguard him from the evil of those who wish to harm and trick him. Allah will save him from the deception of others since they were safe from being deceived by him. This is because the reward for one's actions directly corresponds to the nature of those actions.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Faithfully return that which has been entrusted to you, and do not betray the one who betrays you."¹⁴⁹ Even if someone betrays you, do not respond to betrayal with betrayal, for Allah will provide a way out for you and will recompense you with goodness. As the saying goes, "A vessel only pours forth what is in it". If one's vessel¹⁵⁰ is pure and good, then that which pours forth from it will only be good. Therefore overlook injustices, transgressions and betrayal on the part of others, for they are people whose vessels are polluted and it is thus natural that malevolence flows forth from them.

You must be extremely cautious regarding the rights and possessions of others, however insignificant they may seem. The Prophet ﷺ said, "O Mu'adh, indeed you will be questioned about the *kohl* in your eyes and the fragments of earth between your two fingers."¹⁵¹ Allah gave 'Īsā, the son of Maryam, the ability to bring the dead to life as a sign of the truth of his mission: "*I bring the dead to*

149 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī

150 Meaning one's heart

151 Narrated by Abū Nu'aym in *Hilyat al-Awliyā'*. *Kohl* is a black substance applied to the eyes to strengthen the vision and beautify the eyes. Earth was used to clean the hands in the absence of soap.

*life with the permission of Allah.*¹⁵² It has been related that he once resurrected a man who had been dead for seventy years. When his grave was split open and his soul returned to his body he stood up and asked: “Has the Day of Resurrection come?”

The people replied: “No, it has not yet come, but rather the Spirit of Allah, ʿĪsā the son of Maryam, has asked Allah to resurrect you.”

The man asked: “O Spirit of Allah, why did you request my resurrection?”

ʿĪsā replied by asking him, “When did you die?”

“Seventy years ago.”

ʿĪsā asked: “So what news do you bring?”

He said: “O Prophet of Allah, most of my actions are good, and Allah forgave my wrongdoings except for one act.”

“What was it?”

“I used to carry things for people and one day I carried firewood for someone. Upon arriving at his house with the firewood I found something between my teeth, so I took a splinter from his firewood and picked my teeth with it without taking permission. Allah thus held me to account for this saying: ‘Fulfil this man’s right.’ I was held in a state of suspension. For seventy years I have been chastised for this splinter and I am waiting for this man. If he dies and forgives me, Allah, Most High, will forgive me, this being the man’s right. Allah will not forgive me until this man forgives me.” This then acted as a warning for those who heard the man’s tale. As we can see, we must be trustworthy regarding everything, even if it as small as a tooth pick!

Fulfilling people’s rights is indeed a weighty affair. The Creator is magnanimous in overlooking His own rights, but when it comes to the rights of His slaves, He requests that they be fulfilled. He states in a *ḥadīth qudsī*: “Were I not to seek justice for the oppressed and were I not to seek retribution from the oppressor, I Myself would be an oppressor.” On the Day of Resurrection a voice will call out: “I am

152 *Āl ʿImrān*, 3:49

the Sovereign, I am the Arbitrator. It is not fitting that anyone who is destined for Paradise who has wronged a person who is destined for the Fire should enter Paradise until I take retribution from him. It is not fitting that anyone who is destined for the Fire who has wronged a person who is destined for Paradise should enter the Fire until I take retribution from him, even it is only a blow to the face.”¹⁵³ This demonstrates how great people’s rights are in the sight of Allah. Therefore, fulfil the rights of others in a way that Allah loves and be trustworthy in your speech, actions and dealings with others, and Allah will then be content with you and will raise your station.

O Allah, grant us safety, and make us among the trustworthy. Make us among the people of faith and tranquillity, those who will experience no fear or sorrow, through Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

153 Narrated by Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī

LESSON TWENTY - FIVE

honouring elders and
showing mercy to the young

*The more beautiful a person's
character, the greater his portion
of divine understanding will be*

This religion calls us to honour and revere the elderly. The Prophet ﷺ said: “To honour a Muslim elder is to show reverence to Allah.”¹⁵⁴ Elders thus have a right over the young because of their age. Elders are also called upon to show mercy, sympathy and concern for the young. We may observe these values in pious households founded upon the way of Allah. The young honour and have respect for those older than them, while older people show compassion and mercy to the young. The young learn not to sit in front of someone who is older than them in a gathering, and wherever possible not to walk in front of, nor enter a place before, someone older. They also show the utmost respect for their elders when shaking hands, and endeavour to be the first to give the greeting of peace. The Prophet ﷺ would be the first to give the greeting of peace to everyone, whether they were younger or older than him,¹⁵⁵ this being from his immense character. It is recommended, however, for the young to greet those older first, for the one walking to greet those sitting, for the one riding to greet the one walking and for someone who is alone to greet a group.¹⁵⁶ This is what etiquette dictates, but whoever wishes to compete with others in showing the best character may do so, and may rush to be the first to give greetings. The more beautiful a person’s character is, the greater his portion of divine understanding will be and the closer he will be to his Lord and to the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

Honouring elders and showing mercy to the young were once hallmarks of the Muslims whatever their circumstances. One cannot find a single Muslim country that did not possess traditions in which these values were firmly rooted. Many good traditions, however, have been lost in recent times and replaced with customs that are not in accordance with the teachings of our religion. This is due to

154 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Suyūṭī

155 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

156 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

our negligence in implementing the Sacred Law and our failure to hold fast to the values with which our Prophet ﷺ was sent. Some Muslims are so deeply impressed and deluded by the culture of the non-Muslims that they blindly follow their ways. May Allah cleanse our hearts from exalting those He does not love so that we only love people for Allah's sake, and that we only oppose those that transgress against Him. May Allah make these values spread amongst us.

One of the pious men of the past had such reverence for his older brother that if his brother was on one storey in the house he would not be content to go up to a higher storey. When they walked together on the road, his brother would be in front like the imam in the prayer and he would be behind like a follower. This is one example of how these values were manifested in the lives of the pious. Our attention should be focused, as was theirs, upon the values with which the Best of Creation ﷺ was sent. We must make these values a reality in our lives and adorn ourselves with them as much as possible. By this we strengthen our connection to our religion, and in turn our communities will then be clearly identified as faith-based communities. Our communities will be clearly founded upon the teachings of the Chosen Prophet ﷺ who said: "He who does not honour our elders, nor show compassion to our young, and knows not the worth of our scholars, is not one of us."¹⁵⁷ These are the values he wished to see in the Muslim community, so it is only fitting that we do our utmost to live by them.

O Allah, enable us to attain the most noble of character and remove from us all that is detrimental. Enable us to follow the path of those with whom You are pleased. We ask You to implement Your decree with gentleness. Make the manifestations of the religion clearly visible in our own states and in our communities, through Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

157 Narrated by al-Tirmidhi

LESSON TWENTY - SIX

brotherhood for Allah's sake

*Those who loved each other for Allah's
sake shall come together in the next
life as they came together in this life*

One of the greatest elements of Islamic character is honouring the ties of brotherhood for the sake of Allah. Striving to honour these ties is a means of receiving the outpouring of Allah's mercy and of attaining lofty ranks. It swiftly leads to the attainment of bliss in this life before the bliss of the hereafter. Allah states: *Remember Allah's favour upon you; for you were enemies, and He united your hearts, so that by His favour you became brothers.*¹⁵⁸ By the manifestation of Allah's favour—which, in reality, is our master Muhammad ﷺ and his message—we became brothers, having previously been enemies.

Brotherhood for Allah can be divided into that which is general and that which is special. General brotherhood exists between all those who believe. Allah says: *The believers are nothing less than brothers to one another, so reconcile between your two contending brothers.*¹⁵⁹ Special brotherhood exists on the basis of a firm pact between brothers who love each other in a specific manner, for Allah's sake. This type of brotherhood imposes more significant conditions than general brotherhood. This special brotherhood is a means of reviving the concept of working together to serve Allah's religion that the Companions understood. It is also a means of experiencing pure love, since Allah has created the human soul in such a way that it finds tranquillity in brotherly love, which makes life pleasant, revives one's inner strength, fortifies one's resolve and revitalises one's spiritual ambition. The word used for mankind in Arabic (*insān*) is related to the word for intimacy (*uns*), pointing to the fact that one human experiences intimacy through the company of another. This intimacy is a natural human attribute, but if it comes about as a result of brotherhood and love for Allah's sake then it becomes an expression of one's obedience to Allah and worship of Him, and Allah in turn greatly rewards those who attain this.

158 *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:103

159 *Al-Hujurāt*, 49:10

For this reason, brotherhood for Allah's sake will unite people on the Day of Judgement when those who loved each other for other than the sake of Allah will show enmity towards one another: *Close friends on that day will be foes to one another except those who feared Allah.*¹⁶⁰ Thus on that day, brotherhood for Allah's sake is a means for the removal of hostility, for intercession and for the attainment of nearness and love. Those who loved each other for Allah's sake shall come together in the next life as they came together in this life.

The Prophet ﷺ said: "Allah will resurrect certain people and they will be upon pulpits made of pearls with light on their faces, so that the Prophets and martyrs envy them, even though they are neither Prophets nor martyrs."

A Bedouin knelt down and said: "Describe them to us, O Messenger of Allah, so that we may come to know them."

He said ﷺ: "They are those who love each other for Allah's sake, from diverse lands and tribes. They come together to remember Allah."¹⁶¹ The Prophet ﷺ also said: "When two people love each other for Allah's sake, the more beloved of the two to Allah is he who loves his companion most."¹⁶² In another hadith he said: "Whoever takes someone as his brother for Allah's sake, Allah creates a new station for him in Paradise."¹⁶³

This special type of brotherhood can be witnessed in the lofty example of the Companions of the Prophet. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ paired off each emigrant with a helper¹⁶⁴ and made a special pact of brotherhood between them, even though they were already brothers in religion. The Helpers understood that this special brotherhood dictated that they give the Emigrants half of their wealth.

Our master 'Alī meanwhile said to the Prophet ﷺ: "You paired the Emigrants off with the Helpers, but you did not pair me off with anyone."

160 *Al-Zukhruf*, 43:67

161 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī

162 Narrated by al-Bukhārī in *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, Ibn Ḥibbān, al-Bayhaqī and al-Ḥākim

163 Narrated by Ibn Abī Dunyā, al-Daylamī and al-Suyūṭī. The meaning of a 'new station' is a station higher than the one he was previously in.

164 The "Emigrants" (*al-Muhājirūn*) were those emigrated from Makkah to al-Madinah. The "Helpers" (*al-Anṣār*) were the people of al-Madinah who welcomed and assisted the Emigrants.

The Prophet ﷺ replied: “You are my brother in this life and the hereafter!”¹⁶⁵ He thus reserved an even higher type of brotherhood for those closest to him.

In emulation of that first generation, true believers continually seek the deeper meanings of this special brotherhood.

May Allah make us amongst those who seek brotherhood and mutual love for His sake. May Allah revive this brotherhood in our communities, our cities and in our lands.

O Allah, make us among those who listen and act upon what we hear, bestow upon us the character traits of those who are rightly guided and help us to follow Your Prophet. Rectify our state inwardly and outwardly.

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

165 Narrated by al-Tirmidhi

LESSON TWENTY - SEVEN

remembrance of Allah

*The quickest way of purifying the heart,
the easiest way of attaining forgiveness
and the best means of attaining goodness*

In the previous chapter, we discussed the topic of love and brotherhood for the sake of Allah. Let us now look at what is called “the Hadith of Love”—so called because in it the Messenger of Allah ﷺ expressed his love for his Companion Mu‘adh bin Jabal and then taught him a beautiful supplication.

The Prophet ﷺ said: “O Mu‘adh, truly I love you, so never forget to say after every prayer: ‘O Allah, help me to remember You, show gratitude to You and perfect my worship of You.’”¹⁶⁶ This is an awesome and all-encompassing supplication that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ taught Mu‘adh. After this immense profession of love for him, he taught him to seek Allah’s assistance in attaining or practising three things. The first is remembrance, the second is gratitude and the third is excellence. Due to their greatness, we need Allah’s assistance in attaining them. We will analyse them one by one.

There are many commands in the Qur’an, but the only thing that we are commanded to do in abundance is to remember Allah: *O you who believe, remember Allah in abundance and glorify Him morning and evening. It is He who bestows blessings upon you, as do His angels, to bring you out of darkness into light.*¹⁶⁷ Thus, if we remember and glorify Him, He will bring us out of darkness and into light. He also promises to remember us if we remember Him: *So remember Me and I will remember you and show gratitude to Me and do not deny Me.*¹⁶⁸ What a tremendous thing it is for Allah to remember you! You may be a weak slave, but if you remember Allah, He remembers you by bestowing His mercy upon you. The Prophet ﷺ reports that

166 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd. The Arabic for this supplication along with the other supplications mentioned in this chapter can be found on p.204 onwards

167 *Al-Ahzāb*, 33:41-43

168 *Al-Baqarah*, 2:152

Allah says: “Whoever remembers Me to himself, I remember him to Myself, and whoever remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a better gathering.”¹⁶⁹

Allah bestows His mercy upon all the believers who remember Him, unless they openly disobey Him and persist in committing grave sins. Allah revealed to the Prophet Dāwūd: “Tell the wrongdoers not to remember Me, because I have sworn that I will remember the one who remembers Me. For if they remember Me – having turned away from Me, making light of Me, continuing to disobey Me – then I will remember them by cursing them.”¹⁷⁰ As for those who are seeking Him, remorseful for what they have done, even if they are disobedient, then Allah will remember them with mercy and will bring them close to Him.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ once said to his Companions: “Shall I not inform you of the greatest and purest of your actions in the sight of your Lord; the action which elevates you most; that which is better for you than spending gold and silver; and better for you than to meet your enemy and for you to strike their necks and they strike yours?”

“Of course,” they said.

“The remembrance of Allah,” he said.¹⁷¹

He also said ﷺ: “There is no action that a human can perform which is more effective in saving him from the punishment of Allah than the remembrance of Allah.”¹⁷² This is why Allah says of the righteous that they are: *Those that when they have committed an act of indecency or have wronged themselves, remember Allah and seek forgiveness for their sins—and who can forgive sins except Allah?—and they are never obstinate in persisting knowingly in (the wrong) they have done.*¹⁷³

Allah commands us to perform acts of worship in order to remember Him. For example, He says to those who come to His House to perform the pilgrimage: *When you pour forth*

169 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

170 Narrated by Ibn ʿAsākir, al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī and al-Suyūṭī

171 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī, Aḥmad, Ibn Mājah and al-Ḥākim

172 Narrated by Ibn Abi Shaybah and al-Ṭabarānī

173 *Āl ʿImrān*, 3:135

from ^١Arafāt, remember Allah at al-Mash^٢ar al-Harām.¹⁷⁴ Remember Him, for He has guided you, though you were astray. Then go forth from where the people go forth, and seek Allah's forgiveness. Truly Allah is Oft-Turning, Most Merciful. When you have completed your rites, remember Allah as you used to remember your ancestors—no, more than you used to remember them.¹⁷⁵ Allah says regarding the Friday Prayer: When the prayer is finished, then disperse through the land and seek the bounty of Allah and remember Allah in abundance that you may prosper.¹⁷⁶

Remembrance was one of the attributes of the Chosen One ﷺ. As ʿĀ'ishah, the Mother of the Believers رضي الله عنها, said: "The Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to remember Allah at all times."¹⁷⁷ The Companions would count the Messenger of Allah ﷺ repeating one hundred times in one gathering: "My Lord, forgive me and turn to me, truly You are the Oft-Turning, the Most Merciful."¹⁷⁸ This is the Beloved of Allah repenting and seeking forgiveness. How much more are we in need of this than he! The Messenger of Allah ﷺ went as far as to say: "Remember Allah so much that they say you are mad!"¹⁷⁹ and "Remember Allah so much that the hypocrites say you are showing off!"¹⁸⁰

Let us look at the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ and how much they used to remember Allah. One of them lived amongst a people who were polytheists. He repeatedly tried to emigrate to al-Madīnah to be with the Prophet ﷺ, but his people prevented him. One day he managed to escape, but some of his people found him on the road and prevented him from going further. He said to them: "What benefit is it to you if I remain amongst you? Allow me to go to Muhammad and you may take my property." They agreed to this and allowed him to go on his way after taking everything he possessed. All they left him were two ragged cloths for him to wear. Thus when he arrived in al-Madīnah he became known as "*Dhū'l-Bijādayn*" or "the Possessor of

174 *Al-Mash'ar Āl-Harām* is a hill at Muzdalifah where it is recommended to stop and remember Allah during the performance of the pilgrimage.

175 *Al-Baqarah*, 2:198-200

176 *Al-Jumu'ah*, 62:10

177 Narrated by al-Bukhārī, Muslim and Abū Dāwūd

178 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī, Abū Dāwūd and Ibn Mājah

179 Narrated by Ibn Hibbān, al-Hākim, Aḥmad and al-Bayhaqī

180 Narrated by al-Ṭabarānī

the Two Ragged Cloths?” This man had a passionate attachment to the remembrance of Allah. Once the Messenger of Allah ﷺ passed by the mosque with some of his Companions and they heard someone loudly remembering Allah inside. One of them said: “Perhaps this man is showing off, O Messenger of Allah ﷺ.”

He replied ﷺ: “No, he is someone who experiences pain out of his fear of Allah.”¹⁸¹ He was referring to Dhū’l-Bijādayn.

Dhū’l-Bijādayn then went out with the Prophet on his expedition to Tabūk, and it was there that he died. The greatest of the Companions dug his grave. Then the Messenger of Allah ﷺ came and levelled the floor of the grave with his blessed hand. He then prayed the funeral prayer over him and told the Companions to pass him the body of Dhū’l-Bijādayn. He then placed him in his grave. Then he said: “O Allah, evening has come and I am content with him, so be content with him.”¹⁸² He said this is of a man whose tongue was constantly moist with the remembrance of Allah, such that the remembrance of Allah dominated his whole being.

Remembrance is one of the attributes of the believers, and is something which should be manifest in their lives. They should remember Allah in all their different states. Allah says: *Truly in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of the night and day are signs for people of understanding – those who remember Allah while standing, sitting and on their sides, and they reflect upon the creation of the heavens and the earth; (they say): “Our Lord, You did not create this in vain! Glory to You! Grant us salvation from the punishment of the Fire!”*¹⁸³

When Allah wishes to describe His pious slaves, He describes them as people who remember Him in abundance. He lists their attributes as follows: *For Muslim men and Muslim women, for believing men and believing women, for devout men and devout women, for truthful men and truthful women, for patient men and patient women... and then He says finally: for men and women who engage much in Allah’s remembrance – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and great reward.*¹⁸⁴

181 Narrated by Ahmad, al-Ṭabarānī and al-Bayhaqī

182 Narrated by al-Bazzār

183 *Āl ʿImrān*, 3:190-191

184 *Al-Aḥzāb*, 33:35

The Prophet ﷺ advised his Companions to remember Allah constantly, as this increases one's faith. One of the Companions once said to him: "The laws of Islam are too much for me, so command me to do something which I can hold fast to."

He said: "Let your tongue be constantly moist with the remembrance of Allah."¹⁸⁵

All believers must thus have a portion of time that they spend remembering Allah. The most important type of remembrance is reciting the Book of Allah. No believer should neglect this and allow the days to pass without spending time reflecting upon the speech of their Lord. *Then the Messenger will say: "O my Lord, truly my people treated this Qur'an with neglect!"*¹⁸⁶ Secondly, all believers should read a portion of the invocations of the morning and the evening which it is narrated that the Prophet ﷺ used to read. Thirdly, they should also read the invocations for certain actions. For example, you should say upon leaving the house: "In the name of Allah, I place my trust and reliance in Allah. There is no strength nor might except in Allah." When you say this, an angel calls out to you: "You have been protected, shielded and guided," and the devil distances himself from you.¹⁸⁷ All this you gain from such a small supplication. What is stopping you from also remembering Allah when you enter your house? We have been commanded not to enter our houses without mentioning the name of Allah, so that the devil is prevented from entering.

Likewise we should not eat without first mentioning the name of Allah. After eating we should thank Allah by saying: "Praise be to Allah who fed me this and provided me with it without any ability or power on my part." Just by saying this, our previous sins will be forgiven.¹⁸⁸ This shows the greatness of this religion. Say after every prayer "*Subhānallāh*" (transcendent is Allah) thirty-three times, "*Alḥamdulillāh*" (all praise belongs to Allah) thirty-three times and "*Allāhu Akbar*" (Allah is most great) thirty-three or thirty-four times, and round it off by saying: "There is no deity except Allah, alone. He has no partners. To Him belongs the dominion and all

185 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mājah, Ibn Ḥibbān and al-Ḥākim

186 *Al-Furqān*, 25:30

187 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.

188 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī.

praise. He has power over all things.” If you say this you will also be forgiven your sins even if they are as abundant as the foam on the sea.¹⁸⁹ When you lie down to sleep you should say three times: “I seek the forgiveness of Allah the Almighty, besides Who there is no deity; the Living, the Sustainer, and I repent to Him.” If you say this you will also be forgiven your sins, even if they are as abundant as the foam on the sea.¹⁹⁰ Before you sleep say once again “*Subhānallāh*” thirty-three times, “*Alḥamdulillāh*” thirty-three times and “*Allāhu Akbar*” thirty-four times. This will be of more assistance to you in your daily routine than a person helping and serving you.¹⁹¹

To truly remember Allah means to make the heart aware of the greatness of the One being remembered and to desire to be drawn close into His lofty presence. Thus remembrance begins in the heart and may then become manifest on the tongue. The best type of remembrance is when the slave remembers Allah with his heart and his tongue together. This is the quickest way of purifying the heart, the easiest way of attaining forgiveness and the best means of attaining goodness.

May Allah make us among those who remember Him and are remembered by Him. May He bestow upon us the secret, the light and the blessings of His remembrance. Truly He is the Most Generous and the Most Merciful.

May the blessings of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

189 Narrated by Muslim.

190 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī.

191 This refers to the hadith narrated by Muslim, Aḥmad and Abū Dāwūd ﷺ. ʿAlī and Fāṭimah ʿ asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ to give them a servant to help them with their daily chores, but instead of doing so he gave them this supplication.

LESSON TWENTY - EIGHT

gratitude

*To show gratitude to Allah is to earnestly
apply the teachings of Islam in your life*

Showing gratitude to Allah, exalted is He, is the obligation of every Muslim. True gratitude is an immense character trait and the believer who possesses it has reached a high rank. Allah says, pointing to the rarity of those who possess this trait: *Few of My servants are truly grateful.*¹⁹² Allah also promises that He will increase the blessings of those who are grateful: *Your Lord has proclaimed: "If you are grateful, I will surely increase you, but if you show ingratitude, verily My punishment is severe."*¹⁹³

True gratitude is for the heart to be filled with witnessing the magnitude of the Bestower and His bestowal of immense bounties and grace upon His slaves. This witnessing leads believers to use their bodies to perform acts of obedience. They thus use the bounties that Allah has bestowed upon them for the purpose for which they were created, conscious of Allah's grace and kindness and the immensity of His generosity. If they do this, they warrant an increase in blessings from Allah. Believers must be aware of the limitless blessings that Allah has bestowed upon them. Allah says: *If you were to count the bounties of Allah, you would never be able to number them.*¹⁹⁴ He also says: *He has showered His blessings upon you, both seen and unseen.*¹⁹⁵ Allah has showered His blessings upon every human being, but the greatest blessings are Islam and faith. If Allah has conferred upon you these two bounties, show gratitude to Him and praise Him. To show gratitude to Him here is to earnestly apply the teachings of Islam in your life. If you do so, Allah will raise your rank and increase you in faith, knowledge of Him, closeness and tranquillity and will bestow upon you felicity in this life and the hereafter.

192 *Saba'*, 34:13

193 *Ibrāhīm*, 14:7

194 *Al-Nahl*, 16:18

195 *Luqmān*, 31:20

Showing gratitude to Allah is a cause of receiving an increase in His favours and graces. All of Allah's servants receive millions of His bounties in every instant. They experience these blessings in their sight, their hearing, their limbs, their movement, their stillness and their intellect. They experience them both internally and externally. There are millions of cells working in your body, each one performing a specific task. Each individual cell contains numerous blessings; transcendent is Allah, the Sublime!

You must therefore be aware of Allah's bounties. He has made you a member of the best of nations brought forth to mankind, so thank Allah and constantly show gratitude to Him by giving each individual bounty its due. Employ your sight and hearing for the purpose for which they were created. Do not, for example, listen to someone's conversation if you know that they are averse to you hearing them. If you do this, you will be punished on the Day of Judgement by molten lead being poured into your ears.¹⁹⁶ Only listen to speech that draws you nearer to Allah and that which benefits you in your religion or your worldly affairs. Your tongue was created to remember Allah, to recite the Qur'an, to benefit you and assist you in your religion and in your worldly affairs, so use it for these purposes. Beware of using it for a purpose that Allah has forbidden. If Allah has endowed you with wealth, then show gratitude to Him by making sure that it comes from a source that is lawful and making sure that it is spent in the correct way. Every time Allah confers a bounty upon you, show gratitude to Him by using it for its intended purpose. Gratitude is the means of safeguarding Allah's blessings. If you do not show gratitude for them, those blessings are in danger of being taken away. As a poet once said:

*When you receive blessings, heed them
For truly sins eradicate blessings
Safeguard them by showing gratitude to Allah
For indeed Allah's vengeance is swift*

Thus, strive to be amongst the grateful, and strive to emulate the Prophet ﷺ who showed us the greatest example of gratitude. He would stand in prayer in the night until his feet became swollen. He

196 As in the hadith narrated by al-Bukhārī

was asked, “Why do you do this, O Messenger of Allah, when Allah has forgiven your past and future sins?”

He answered, “Should I not be a grateful servant?”¹⁹⁷

What is remarkable is that if you show gratitude to Allah, He will in turn show gratitude to you!¹⁹⁸ Who are you and what is your gratitude compared to the gratitude of Allah, the Creator, the Fashioner, the All-Capable? Allah states: *Whoever desires the Hereafter and earnestly strives for it, and he is a believer—those shall have their striving rewarded.*¹⁹⁹ He also says: *Whoever performs a good deed voluntarily, truly Allah is Grateful, All-Knowing.*²⁰⁰

O Allah, help us to remember You, show gratitude to You and perfect our worship of You. Make us among the grateful, those who remember You often, those that constantly return to You, those who humble themselves to You, by Your mercy, O Most Merciful.

May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

197 Narrated by al-Bukhārī

198 In Arabic the word *shukr* is used to describe the gratitude the slave shows Allah as well as the recognition and reward that Allah grants the slave.

199 *Al-Isrā’*, 17:19

200 *Al-Baqarah*, 2:158

LESSON TWENTY - NINE

seeking perfection

*The awareness that Allah is
observing you, so you perform
acts of worship as if you see Him*

Seeking perfection²⁰¹ in worship and action is one of the attributes that this great religion call us to. It is one of the characteristics of the upright who follow the way of the noble Prophet ﷺ. Allah proclaims: *Transcendent is He in Whose hand is dominion, and He has power over all things; He Who created death and life, that He might try which of you is best in deed; and He is the All-Mighty, All-Forgiving.*²⁰² The Prophet ﷺ also said: “When one of you performs an action, truly Allah loves for you to perfect it.”²⁰³ The Prophet ﷺ clarified the meaning of perfection when Jibrīl said to him: “Tell me about perfection.”

He replied: “Perfection is to worship Allah as if you see Him, and if you see Him not, know that He sees you.”²⁰⁴ What is meant here is that you are aware that Allah is observing you, so you perform acts of worship as if you see Him.

A believer must therefore seek to perfect his every action. If he does so his actions become sound and pure, and are then accepted by Allah and their reward multiplied. A few good actions performed with excellence are superior to many good actions performed without it. It is better, for example, for someone to recite a small amount of the Qur’an whilst reflecting upon it, seeking to understanding its meaning and perfecting its recitation than for them to recite many pages doing none of those things. Likewise Muslims should seek to perfect their ablution and other acts of worship. The noble woman and scholar, Sayyidah Nafisah, said, after praying the funeral prayer over Imām al-Shāfi‘ī in Egypt: “May Allah have mercy on Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfi‘ī, indeed he used to perfect his ablution!” Look at

201 The word used in Arabic is *ihsān* which can be translated as “excellence,” “perfection,” “making beautiful” and also “goodness” and “kindness.”

202 *Al-Mulk*, 67:1-2

203 Narrated by al-Bayhaqī, Abū Ya‘lā and al-Suyūṭī

204 Narrated by Muslim

the understanding of this knower of Allah – the only attribute she mentioned about him was his perfecting his ablution, but in doing so she indicated that he had attained the station of perfection in his worship of his Lord. This is because whoever perfects the ritual ablution will inevitably perfect the prayer and whoever perfects both of these has perfected their entire religion and all deeds in their life. Thus she attributed this quality to him, drawing people’s attention to the fact that if believers fail to perfect certain actions, they will in turn fail to attain perfection in all their actions. Someone who pays no heed to perfecting their ablution will pay no heed to perfecting their prayer, and likewise their zakat, fasting, pilgrimage, charity or any other act.

When believers attain perfection, Allah elevates their rank and then recompenses them with goodness. Allah states: *Shall the recompense for goodness be other than goodness?*²⁰⁵ They should thus seek perfection in all of their states and their affairs, especially their acts of worship. They should perform these acts in a state of awareness that the One they are worshipping is observing them, so that it is as if they see Him. This is truly a lofty state. Many people perfect their actions when they are aware that another person is observing them but when there is no one else present, they have no concern for perfecting them. Is it not sufficient that Allah is observing them? Believers must purify their hearts from the disease of being concerned with creation whilst ignoring their Creator. They should ascend to a higher level of faith such that they have far greater awareness of their Creator than they do of the creation.

A man was once praying. Then he sensed that someone had entered the room, so he deliberately improved his prayer. He then heard a voice from above him saying to him: “Had you not performed the beginning of your prayer for Allah, your name would have been removed from the Book of the Felicitous and it would have been recorded in the Book of the Wretched.” Those who make no attempt to perfect their prayer have been severely warned by Allah: *So woe to those that pray, those who are heedless of their prayers; those who only want to be seen.*²⁰⁶ They have failed to attain perfection in two ways. Firstly, they are heedless of their prayers, meaning that they

205 *Al-Raḥmān*, 55:60

206 *Al-Māʿūn*, 107:4-6

delay performing them until after their specified time. Secondly, they wish to show off to people by performing them. Thus due to their heedlessness and showing off, they deserve to receive tidings of “woe” and a severe warning from Allah. We seek refuge with Allah from this.

We ask Allah to give us perfection in all our actions and to raise us to the highest degrees of perfection. Forgive us for our wrongdoings and treat us in a way that is befitting of Your mercy and Your compassion, O Lord of the Worlds.

May the blessings and peace of Allah be upon our Master Muhammad and upon his Family and Companions. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

LESSON THIRTY

embracing noble character

*Looking at how your faith is
reflected in your words and deeds*

Attaining noble character must be one of a Muslim's main priorities, since the Prophet ﷺ summed up his mission by saying: "I was only sent to perfect noble character."²⁰⁷ Thus those that believe in the message of the Seal of the Prophets must fully embrace the noble character which is the essence of this message. When this is attained, amazing transformations take place. We see this transformation in the lives of the Companions of the Prophet ﷺ. Many of them were in a state of polytheism, disbelief, ignorance, aggressiveness. They were people who were ready to wrongfully kill others. They were then transformed into people of noble character, moral excellence, fine manners, goodness, humility, generosity, mercy and compassion. Allah refers to this when He says: *Remember Allah's favour upon you; for you were enemies, and He united your hearts, so that by His favour you became brothers.*²⁰⁸

He also states in relation to the Prophetic mission: *Allah conferred a great favour upon the believers when He sent from amongst them a Messenger who was one of them, who recites to them His verses, purifies them and teaches them the Book and the Wisdom, while before they had been in manifest error.*²⁰⁹

After them having been in manifest error, He said to them: *You are the best nation brought forth to mankind.*²¹⁰ The people of this nation brought good to mankind. They guided and taught the various peoples of the earth. They rectified the societies in which they lived, and were a means for people to attain success in this life and the next. They were masters of inner and outer knowledge,

207 Narrated by Mālik, Aḥmad, al-Bukhārī in his *al-Adab al-Mufrad*, al-Bayhaqī and al-Ḥākim.

208 *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:103

209 *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:164

210 *Āl 'Imrān*, 3:110

people of righteous action who struggled for Allah’s sake, in a state of fearful awareness of Him.

The fact that you believe in Allah and His Messenger ﷺ dictates that you reflect upon how you have received this immense message from Allah and how deeply its meanings have entered your heart. You must also look at how your faith is reflected in your words and deeds. You can see that Allah mentions faith along with good works in numerous verses of His Book, and He gives glad tidings to those who have faith and do good works. Thus you need to analyse your character and improve it so that it reflects the degree to which you have received the Prophetic message. The distinguishing feature of the believer is noble character.

Those who strove to attain the station of perfection in past centuries were known by many as “Sufis”. One of them said: “Our path is noble character so whoever surpasses you in noble character has truly surpassed you on the path and surpassed you in rank.” Thus the foundation of their way is nothing more than the noble character with which the Prophet ﷺ was sent.

Reflect upon your character in your dealings with others and strive to obtain praiseworthy traits and purify yourself of blameworthy traits which are hated by your Lord and His Prophet ﷺ. Seek the pleasure of Allah through obtaining these praiseworthy traits for “Truly a man attains the rank of one who fasts and stands in prayer (at night) by virtue of his good character.”²¹¹ Thus, merely through good character you can attain the rank of someone who is constantly engaged in worship. The Prophet ﷺ informed us that: “There is nothing weightier placed on the scales than fine character.”²¹² Al-Ḥasan related from al-Ḥasan from al-Ḥasan from Abū’l-Ḥasan from the grandfather of al-Ḥasan that: “The finest of things (*aḥsan al-ḥasan*) is fine character (*al-khuluq al-ḥasan*).”²¹³ Fine character is an adornment Allah chooses to bestow upon those

211 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, Aḥmad and al-Ṭabarānī

212 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd, al-Tirmidhī and al-Suyūṭī.

213 Narrated by by Al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn ʿAsākir. The names of all the narrators and the wording of the hadith all revolve around the word “*ḥasan*,” meaning good or fine. The narrators mentioned here are: Ibn Ḥassān al-Samī, Ḥasan Ibn al-Dīnār, al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī, then Imām ʿAlī ibn Abī Ṭālib ﷺ and finally, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ

He wills from amongst His servants. The Prophet ﷺ said, “Allah never beautifies a person’s physical form and beautifies his character and then feeds him to the Fire.”²¹⁴

We should now concern ourselves with attaining noble character and reflect upon the lessons in this book. We hope that Allah will cause these lessons to benefit the reader and the author. Strive to perfect your character as far as you are able and perfect your dealings with people. Show mercy and compassion to the creation and Allah will show you mercy and compassion, for the reward corresponds to the action. In an authentic hadith the Prophet ﷺ narrates to us the story of a Jewish man who was a wealthy trader. He would say to his debt collector: “Go to the affluent man and allow him time to pay back his debt. Overlook the poor man’s debt so perhaps Allah will in turn overlook our wrongdoings.” When the man died, Allah brought him in front of him and asked him: “What did you used to do?”

He said: “O Lord, I would send out my debt collectors and say to them, ‘Go to the affluent one and allow him time to pay back his debt and overlook the poor man’s debt, maybe Allah will in turn overlook our wrongdoings.’”

Allah said: “It is only fitting that We are more generous than you and We have pardoned you for your wrongdoings.”²¹⁵ Thus the reward for pardoning Allah’s slaves was being pardoned by Allah.

It has also been narrated that a beggar once approached a Jewish woman. She had been eating and she was just about to put the last morsel of her food into her mouth. However when she saw the beggar, who was hungry, she gave him that last morsel. Some days later a wolf came and snatched her baby son. She ran after the wolf screaming: “My son! My son!” All of a sudden a man appeared, took hold of the wolf and removed the baby safe and sound from its mouth. He then gave the baby back to his mother. He said to her: “I am an angel sent by Allah from the heavens to save your son and return him to you. Allah says to you: ‘A morsel for a morsel!’ In other words you gave a morsel for Allah’s sake, so We returned to you this morsel (her baby) in exchange.”²¹⁶ Thus, the reward corresponds to the action.

214 Narrated by al-Bayhaqī and al-Ṭabarānī

215 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī

216 Narrated by al-Suyūṭī

So strive to attain noble character and read the books which deal with the Prophetic biography and the Prophetic attributes as much as possible. Reading these books will strengthen your faith and certitude and help you to emulate the Messenger ﷺ and follow his teachings.

We ask that Allah places the light of these noble qualities in the heart of every reader and that He enables them to fully attain them, so that they may ascend and attain full illumination through the teachings with which the Chosen One ﷺ was sent.

O Allah, make this a reality purely through Your bounty and generosity, O Most Generous, O Most Merciful! O Allah, help us to benefit through that which we have learnt and teach us beneficial knowledge. Show us Your enabling grace and Your beneficent care. Treat us as You are worthy of treating us, and deflect from us all evil. Bless us with Your protection and rectify our affairs, the affairs of this country and the affairs of all the Muslim lands. Make us people who are rightly guided and guide others. We ask that You are content with us when we die so that we have the best of endings. Enable us to steadfastly perform the actions which You love and which please You. Show us Your grace, O Most Merciful.

Bestow everlasting blessings upon Your slave, the Chosen One, Muhammad, and upon his Family and Companions and upon Your Prophets and Messengers, Your angels and all Your pious slaves. Bestow blessings upon us along with them through Your mercy, O Most Merciful. All praise be to Allah, Lord of the Worlds.

Appendix

EXCERPTS FROM LECTURES BY HABIB ʿUMAR



This appendix contains excerpts transcribed from some of Ḥabib ʿUmar’s lectures as well as his answers to questions that were posed to him. He expands upon noble character and explains how a person may rid himself of blameworthy traits and attain praiseworthy traits. He offers advice for those living in non-Muslim countries and explains the causes of Muslim weakness.

ATTAINING CLOSENESS TO THE MESSENGER OF ALLAH

We must always remember and remind each other that our closeness to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ in the next life is according to the beauty of our character. He said ﷺ: “The most beloved of you to me and the closest of you to me on the Day of Judgement are the best of you in character.”²¹⁷ Only the one who possesses noble character is fit to be in the presence of the Possessor of Awesome Character ﷻ.

217 Narrated by Aḥmad, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Ḥibbān

Good character is inextricably linked to knowledge and to one's connection to the Messenger of Allah. This link dictates that the one who possesses noble character bestows abundant prayers upon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Look at the relationship between these three hadiths:

“The most beloved of you to me and the closest of you to me on the Day of Judgement are the best of you in character.”

“The closest people to me on the Day of Judgement are the ones who bestow the most prayers upon me.”²¹⁸

“The closest people to the station of prophet-hood are the scholars and the martyrs. The scholars guide others to that which the Messengers brought, and the martyrs sacrifice their lives for that which the Messengers brought.”²¹⁹

The heart of anyone with good character is connected to the Messenger of Allah and this connection drives such a person to spend a portion of his time bestowing prayers upon the Messenger ﷺ. Likewise anyone that bestows abundant prayers upon him will receive a portion of that Prophetic character. Then through his character and connection, Prophetic knowledge will be clarified to him so that he sacrifices himself for the sake of the religion and busies himself conveying and clarifying the message that the Prophet ﷺ brought.

TRUE REMEMBRANCE OF ALLAH

You need to focus on renewing your approach to Allah by working on remembrance. Remembrance is for the presence of the One being remembered to dominate the heart of the one remembering.

The one remembering Allah Almighty may be so busy with the outward form of remembrance or the words or some of the meanings that he is not actually remembering Allah! Even actions which outwardly seem to be acts of obedience may in reality be performed in heedlessness of the One being obeyed. Look at the statements of the Messenger of Allah:

218 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī and Ibn Ḥibbān

219 Narrated by Abu Nuʿaym

“Had this man’s heart been in a state of submissiveness, so too would be his limbs;”²²⁰

“Pray again, because you have not prayed.”²²¹

Outwardly he had prayed—he sat, bowed, prostrated but the Prophet ﷺ said to him:

“Pray again, because you have not prayed.”

Allah says:

*Establish the prayer for My remembrance.*²²²

If you have not truly remembered Allah, you have not established the prayer. Likewise in your other actions and through these actions you remember Allah – in praising Him, proclaiming His oneness and greatness and in the etiquette which you show to one another. Many people, even those who are seen to be callers to Allah, remember their actions, not their Lord! So their actions become a kind of veil. They could have some light in them, but they are still a veil. Or they could be pure darkness, depending on where the heart is pointed. You hear in the hadith that Jihād is the pinnacle of Islam but:

“A man may be killed on the frontline but only Allah truly knows his intention.”²²³

It is not about outward forms. We want to establish true remembrance of Allah. The more you witness your own presence, the more His presence vanishes. The more you witness His presence, the more your presence vanishes. Your presence is a tiny candle but no sun or created thing is similar to His presence. When His presence radiates does your candle remain?

Renew your approach to Allah. Find a new way to remember Allah, different from any way you have used before. You are now present in this gathering because He has made you present. You are remembering Him by His remembrance. I ask you by Allah: if He had not first remembered you, how could you remember Him?

220 Narrated by al-Bayhaqī

221 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

222 *Tā Hā*, 20:14

223 Narrated by Aḥmad

Leave the remembrance of yourself, your body, your soul and all your affairs. O Allah, Help us to remember You, show gratitude to You, and perfect our worship of You, by Your mercy, O Most Merciful!

PURIFYING OUR LOWER SELVES

How can we purify our lower selves from blameworthy traits such as arrogance, ostentation and envy?

We can do this with a combination of knowledge and action. Through knowledge we come to know the reality of these traits and how a person comes to possess them and the fact that they go against our best interests in this life and the next. Then we act against the dictates of these traits.

The cure for arrogance (*kibr*), for example, which is for someone to see himself as being great, is to return to the knowledge of the self. Every human originates from a contemptible drop of fluid and its ending is a putrid corpse. Between those two times it carries filth in its stomach. We should also reflect upon our weakness in the face of illness and in the face of difficulties. By continually reflecting upon these realities we realise that it is unbefitting to be arrogant. Thus we uproot arrogance from the heart. Then we act in contradiction to the dictates of arrogance. Arrogance dictates, for example, that we sit at the front of a gathering or that we are haughty in our way of speaking. Instead we should sit in the middle of the gathering and try to be humble in the way we speak.

The cure for ostentation (*riyāʾ*), which is seeking to attain status in people's hearts, is to know that such a trait will nullify the reward of your actions. If the people for whose sake you perform acts of worship knew that they were being sought, and not Allah, they would look down upon the person performing those acts. The reality is that those people who are being sought are unable to benefit or harm that person who is seeking them. Also anyone seeking other than Allah in his acts of worship will lose his rank with Allah and bad deeds will be recorded against him instead of good deeds. Then we should

conceal any action that may be concealed. We must openly perform those actions that cannot be concealed such as the congregational prayer, the Hajj, teaching and calling to Allah but while doing so disliking any thoughts of ostentation that come to our minds. We should repeat the Prophetic supplication three times in the morning and three times in the evening:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أُشْرِكَ بِكَ شَيْئًا
وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

*Allāhumma innī aʿūdhu bika an ushrika bika shayan wa ana
aʿlamu wa astaghfiruka limā lā aʿlamu*

“O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You in any way, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know.”

The cure for envy (*ḥasad*), which is resenting the fact that Allah has bestowed a blessing on someone, is to know that showing envy is expressing opposition to Allah. Allah has decreed a certain thing and the envious person wishes that it were not so. If someone has envy he should know that he will lose his rank with Allah and will not be able to prevent the person he envies from receiving Allah’s blessing. Allah may in fact increase that blessing, causing the envious person even more grief in this life before the suffering he will experience in the next. When reflecting upon this, any intelligent person would abandon envy. Action is easy: if you find yourself envying someone, then praise that person and pray for them abundantly. Ask Allah in a state of prostration that He strengthens that person and increases him in that which Allah has blessed him with, especially in the thing which you envy him over.

The root cause and foundation of all these blameworthy traits is love of this world (*ḥubb al-dunyā*). The means of removing all these traits and the foundation of all praiseworthy traits is love of the Prophet ﷺ.

HOW TO ATTAIN ALL PRAISEWORTHY ATTRIBUTES

There are too many praiseworthy attributes that we must attain and too many blameworthy attributes from which we must purify ourselves. Even if we focused on just one of these attributes it would take a lifetime. What can we do?

If you can attain two attributes it will lead to the attainment of all praiseworthy attributes and to purification from all blameworthy attributes:

1. Constant awareness of Allah with a heart that is present;
2. Following the Messenger of Allah ﷺ with complete awareness (of that following).

ATTAINING SINCERITY

We are commanded to pray and fast and we are physically capable of doing so. However, we are also commanded to have sincerity (ikhhlās). This is a command to attain an internal state. How do we obey this command?

In this regard you are required to do three things:

1. To plead with Allah that He blesses you with sincerity
2. To constantly check the level of sincerity in your heart
3. To love to attain it and to love those who have attained it.

You can also recite Sūrat al-Ikhlās in abundance and repeat this Prophetic supplication which is a protection from *riyāʿ* (ostentation):

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ أَنْ أَشْرِكَ بِكَ شَيْئًا
وَأَنَا أَعْلَمُ وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا لَا أَعْلَمُ

*Allāhumma innī a‘ūdhu bika an ushrika bika shayan
wa ana a‘lamu wa astaghfiruka limā lā a‘lamu*

“O Allah, I seek refuge in You from knowingly associating partners with You in any way, and I seek Your forgiveness for that which I do not know.”

KEEPING THE COMPANY OF THE PIOUS

How can we keep the company of the pious in a place in which we are surrounded by people who are heedless and good company is rare?

Reading the works and biographies of the pious, following their on-line lessons and connecting your heart to them are all types of companionship. Even if you are in a place where you are surrounded by the heedless and by disbelievers, you may attain some of the secrets of this company.

Also, if Allah allows you to have presence when you are remembering Him, then you are sitting in the presence of the One you are remembering. Allah says: “I am the companion of the one who remembers Me.”²²⁴

You may also enter into the company of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ by truly loving him, bestowing abundant prayers upon him, intending to follow him in everything you do, reading his biography and realising his greatness in the sight of Allah. Through keeping the company of the pious you prepare yourself to keep the company of the most pious of all people (the Messenger of Allah) and then you are ready to be in the company of Allah through pure sincere slavehood.

Wherever you are on the earth, even if most of the people living there are disbelievers, you are in a place to whose people Muḥammad ﷺ was sent. Your land is also a place of prayer and prostration (*masjid*) because the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said: “The

224 *Hadīth Qudsī* narrated by al-Bayhaqī

whole earth was made a place of prostration for me.”²²⁵ So whatever place in the earth you live in, you are in the *masjid* of your Prophet. This is why he said: “If the time for prayer comes and any member of my nation is in any place on the earth then he should pray in that place.” The whole earth is his *masjid*, which has been given to him by Allah. If you are aware of this you will be connected to the people of Allah.

PROTECTING OURSELVES FROM HEEDLESSNESS

What advice do you have for people who due to work or study spend long periods of the day with non-Muslims who are heedless of Allah? How can they prevent their hearts from being affected by them?

We have to be with them physically while our hearts are connected to Allah. We have to know that our work or our studies are of secondary importance to our connection with Allah and His Messenger and the truth with which he was sent ﷺ. We should interact with them illuminated by the light of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ, displaying the Prophetic character and the beauty and perfection that we have been commanded to display. We should be trustworthy in all our dealings and we must not engage in actions, sayings and customs of non-Muslims that contravene the Sacred Law.

We should also constantly remember Allah and His Messenger ﷺ in our hearts while at work or university, and spend time outside of work or studies connecting to Allah and the pious people through their books or their lessons. We should remember that Allah is the One who changes people’s hearts and at any moment He could make us disbelievers like those around us. He has favoured us by showing us the truth, and we should have concern for those around us.

We should thus call non-Muslims to Allah, not relying on ourselves but rather on the greatness of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ. We should have humility in our hearts while at the same time realising that we have been ennobled through our connection to

225 Narrated by al-Bukhārī and Muslim

our Lord. Although we may be learning something related to the material world from non-Muslims, in reality we are there to teach them something far greater and more important. The fact that Allah has ennobled us with *lā ilāha ill'Allāh Muḥammad Rasūlullāh* dictates that we are teachers, and on this basis we should interact with them. We should be aware that Allah has entrusted us with the message, and if they are ready to accept it we should choose the best means of conveying it.

THE CAUSES OF MUSLIM WEAKNESS

What are the causes of the current weakness and abasement of the Muslims?

The roots of any kind of weakness and abasement in reality lie in people's ignorance, heedlessness and their turning away from Allah. Many Muslims are content to leave what Allah has made obligatory or to do what He has forbidden. They are content to have a weak connection to their religion such that the minimum amount of effort is sufficient for them. An example of this is for someone to perform the prayer without even knowing its pre-conditions and its integral parts or for someone to ignore the directions of the Sacred Law in their business transactions.

People venerate ephemeral things and this causes them to ignore the affair of the Almighty. When people give anything priority over the affair of Allah, Allah will abase them. This is the general state of the Muslims but there is no doubt that good remains and the means of repairing the damage remain.

The solution is for people to sincerely return to Allah and to venerate the injunctions of Allah and His Messenger ﷺ at all levels. They must strive to purify their hearts and must truly show mercy to others because the "All-Merciful shows mercy to those who show mercy to others."²²⁶ If Muslims show mercy to those around them, Allah will show mercy to them and will support and raise them.

226 Narrated by Abū Dāwūd and al-Tirmidhī

Persons Cited in the Text



1. Imām ʿAbdullāh bin ʿAlawī Bā ʿAlawī was a great scholar and ascetic. He died in Tarīm in 731 AH (1331 CE).
2. ʿĀʾishah ؓ, the Mother of the Believers, is ʿĀʾishah bint Abī Bakr, the beloved wife of the Prophet ﷺ. She died in al-Madīnah in 58 AH (678 CE).
3. Imām ʿAlī ؓ is ʿAlī bin Abī Tālib, the fourth of the Rightly Guided Caliphs. He died in al-Kūfah, Iraq in 40 AH (660 CE).
4. Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn bin al-Ḥusayn bin ʿAlī was one of the greatest of the Followers, the generation that came after the Companions. He was known for his knowledge, generosity, love of worship and immense fear of Allah. He died in al-Madīnah around 92 AH (710 CE).
5. Al-Aqraʿ ibn Ḥābis ؓ was a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He died in 31 AH (652 CE).
6. Ayyūb ؑ, or Job, is Allah’s Prophet and Messenger.
7. Dāwūd ؑ, or David, is Allah’s Prophet and Messenger.
8. Dhu’l-Bijādayn ؓ is ʿAbdullāh bin ʿAbd Nahm, a companion of the Prophet ﷺ. He died in 9 AH (630 CE).

9. Fāṭimah al-Batūl al-Zahrā' ﷺ is the most beloved daughter of the Prophet ﷺ, wife of Imām ʿAlī and mother of al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn. She died in al-Madīnah in 11 AH (632 CE).
10. Firʿawn is Pharaoh. His enmity to Mūsā and his crimes against Allah and against mankind are mentioned in the Qurʿan.
11. Imām al-Ḥaddād is ʿAbdullāh ibn ʿAlawī al-Ḥaddād. His teachings spread far and wide during his lifetime and continue to spread to this day. He was recognised as being the “Renewer” of the 12th Islamic Century. He died in Tarim in 1132 AH (1719 CE).
12. Jibrīl ﷺ is Gabriel, the angel entrusted with conveying revelation.
13. Al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn ﷺ are the sons of ʿAlī and Fāṭimah. Both were greatly loved by their grandfather, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Al-Ḥasan died in al-Madīnah in 50 AH (670/1 CE) and al-Ḥusayn died at Karbala, Iraq in 61 AH (680 CE)
14. Hāmān was the minister of Firʿawn (Pharaoh). He is mentioned several times in the Qurʿan.
15. Imām Jaʿfar al-Šādiq (“the Truthful One”) was the grandson of Imām ʿAlī Zayn al-ʿĀbidīn. He was a great scholar and knower of Allah. He died in al-Madīnah in 148 AH (around 765 CE).
16. ʿĪsā the son of Maryam ﷺ, or Jesus the son of Mary, is Allah’s prophet and messenger.
17. Muʿādh bin Jabal ؓ was one of the closest of the Companions to the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ said of him, “Muʿādh is the most knowledgeable of you regarding that which is lawful and unlawful.”²²⁷ He also sent him as a judge and teacher to Yemen. He died in present-day Jordan in 18 AH (639/40 CE).
18. Mūsā ؑ, or Moses, is Allah’s Prophet and Messenger.
19. Sayyidah Nafisah was the great-grand daughter of Imām Ḥasan bin ʿAlī and was known for her knowledge and piety. She died in Egypt in 208 AH (823 CE).

227 Narrated by al-Tirmidhī

20. Qārūn was one of Mūsā's people. He became deluded by his great wealth and was punished by Allah, as mentioned in the Qur'an.
21. Al-Shāfi'ī is Imām Muḥammad bin Idrīs al-Shāfi'ī, founder of the Shāfi'ī school of Sunni law. He died in Egypt in 204 AH (820 CE).
22. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ؓ was the second of the 'Rightly Guided Caliphs.' He died in al-Madīnah in 23 AH (644 CE).
23. Ibn 'Umar ؓ is 'Abdullāh bin 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb. He was one of the closest of the Companions to the Prophet ﷺ and narrated many hadith. He died in Makkah in 74 AH (693/4 CE).

Supplications Mentioned in the Text



ONE OF THE TREASURES OF PARADISE²²⁸

لَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

Lā ḥawla wa lā quwwata illā billāh

“There is no strength or power save by Allah.”

THE SUPPLICATION UPON ENTERING THE PRAYER²²⁹

وَجَّهْتُ وَجْهِيَ لِلَّذِي فَطَرَ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ حَنِيفًا
مُسْلِمًا وَمَا أَنَا مِنَ الْمُشْرِكِينَ

*Wajjahtu wajhī lilladhī faṭara-ssamāwāti w'al-arḍa
ḥanīfan musliman wa mā anā min al-mushrikīn*

“I turn myself to He Who created the heavens and the earth,
a pure monotheist, in submission, and I am not of those
who associate others with Him.”

228 From Lesson Seven

229 From Lesson Ten

THE SUPPLICATION AFTER EVERY PRAYER²³⁰

اللَّهُمَّ أَعِنِّي عَلَى ذِكْرِكَ وَشُكْرِكَ وَحُسْنِ عِبَادَتِكَ

*Allāhumma aʿinnī ʿalā dhikrika
wa shukrika wa husni ʿibādatik*

“O Allah, help me to remember You, show
gratitude to You and perfect my worship of You.”

THE PROPHET’S CONSTANT PLEA FOR FORGIVENESS

رَبِّ اغْفِرْ لِي وَتُبْ عَلَيَّ إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ التَّوَّابُ الرَّحِيمُ

Rabbi’ghfirli wa tub ʿalayya innaka anta attawwābu’rrahīm

“My Lord, forgive me and turn to me, truly
You are the Oft-Turning, the Most Merciful.”

THE SUPPLICATION UPON LEAVING THE HOUSE

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ تَوَكَّلْتُ عَلَى اللَّهِ وَلَا حَوْلَ وَلَا قُوَّةَ إِلَّا بِاللَّهِ

*Bismillāhi tawakkaltu ʿal’Allāhi
wa lā ḥawla wa lā quwatta illā billāh*

“In the name of Allah, I place my trust and reliance in Allah.
There is no strength or power save by Allah.”

230 All of the following supplications are taken from Lesson Twenty-Seven

THE SUPPLICATION AFTER EATING

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَطْعَمَنِي هَذَا
وَرَزَقَنِيهِ مِنْ غَيْرِ حَوْلٍ مِنِّي وَلَا قُوَّةَ

*Alhamdulillāhi'lladhī ata' manī hādhā wa
razaqanihi min ghayri ḥawlin minnī wa lā quwwah*

“Praise be to Allah Who fed me this and provided
me with it without any strength or power on my part.”

THE SUPPLICATION UPON GOING TO SLEEP

أَسْتَغْفِرُ اللَّهَ الْعَظِيمَ الَّذِي لَا إِلَهَ
إِلَّا هُوَ الْحَيُّ الْقَيُّومُ وَأَتُوبُ إِلَيْهِ

*Astaghfirullāh al-‘Azīm'alladhī lā ilāha
illā Huwa'l-Ḥayyu'l-Qayyūmu wa atūbu ilayh*

“I seek the forgiveness of Allah the Almighty, besides Who there
is no deity, the Living, the Sustainer, and I repent to Him.”

TO BE READ AFTER EVERY PRAYER

Say this after saying “*Subḥānallāh*” thirty-three times, “*Alḥamdulillāh*”
thirty-three times and “*Allahu Akbar*” thirty-three or thirty-four
times:

لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا اللَّهُ وَحْدَهُ لَا شَرِيكَ لَهُ،
لَهُ الْمُلْكُ وَلَهُ الْحَمْدُ وَهُوَ عَلَى كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ

*Lā ilāha illʾAllāhu waḥdahu lā sharīka lahu, lahuʾl-mulku
wa lahuʾl-ḥamdu wa huwa ʿalā kulli shayin qadīr*

“There is no deity except Allah, alone. He has no partners.
To Him belongs the dominion and all praise. He has power
over all things.”

If Allah wishes to bestow His grace upon someone, He places in their heart the desire to travel the path towards self-purification and gives them the ability to rectify the attributes of their soul. Allah decreed that success in this life and the next be judged according to the degree to which people purify their souls and attain noble character. It is thus the duty of every believer to seek to attain noble character and emulate their Prophet ﷺ who said: "I was only sent to perfect noble character."

In a series of thirty lessons, Ḥabīb ʿUmar bin Ḥafīz discusses the importance of character refinement and focuses on the traits and qualities that every believer should strive to acquire. He demonstrates how the Prophet ﷺ and the pious people of his nation embody each character trait and shows the reader how to emulate them.

In our times we have never been more in need of improving our character and rectifying ourselves. This is a book for every seeker, every believer and every family. May it be a source of light for every heart and the catalyst for moral transformation.