



WHICH OF THE FAVORS OF YOUR LORD DO YOU DENY—Part II

Lecture at the Zāwiya of Shaykh Nooruddeen Durkee

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ACTIVE BELIEF IN THE FAVORS OF YOUR LORD

To receive the favors of Allah you have to believe in the favors of Allah, and submit to the favors of Allah. You have to reflect upon them and call them. You can practice getting used to accepting the favors of Allah. Think of it this way: Allah says in Hadith Qudsi, **“They love me and I love them.” “They take a step toward me, and I come running toward them.” “I assist those who love me, who are patient.”** Allah has created Himself in relationship to us to bless us with His Baraka. And to bless us beyond anything we can ask for or think of, or even imagine. When you imagine the thing you want the most, the best thing in the world, the thing you need in this moment, the assistance you need; the conversation you need; the understanding you need; the trust you need; the business deal you need so you can put food on the table-- Allah will bless you with that and more.

It only takes one touch of the favor of Allah to completely change your situation. Thousands and thousands of people every day recognize that and use it. And millions and tens of millions and billions of people don't understand it because they don't use it. Allah says to us, in Sura Baqara:

“To each is a goal to which Allah turns him. And strive together in a race towards all that is good. Wherever you are, Allah will bring you together for Allah has power over all things.” 2:148

Contemplate that in terms of the favors of God. Think about the courage it takes to

submit. Think about the courage it takes for us to trust in Allah; to ask ourself: ***What are these favors do you deny?*** The moment we start to think about that, the caveats come, the distractions come. ***What are the favors of your Lord you deny?*** We find the words of the Prophet (sal) demands us to take the initiative. To do good, immediately, before it is too late. Otherwise, it may be impossible to do good. Delay and circumstances can come about that will prevent us from doing good, and from seeking the blessings of Allah. The Prophet (sal) said,

“Take the initiative for doing good deeds. There will be temptations and allurements as a dark night. A person wakes up a believer, and by evening, he is a disbeliever. Or he sleeps as a believer, and wakes up as an unbeliever. He sells HIS religion with the pettiness of the world.”

In another Hadith, the Prophet (sal) related said, **“Don’t disdain any type of kindness, even meeting your brother in faith with a cheerful face.”** We must understand about these Hadith that the Prophet (sal) is telling us: you don’t do good for your ego, or prove to yourself that you are a good person. You learn to ask for the favor of Allah, and the goodness comes out of you like juice out of a sweet fruit. Good, as I said yesterday, for the sake of Goodness. **“Hal Jazaa’u l ‘ihsani illa l ihsan... Is the reward of goodness other than goodness?”**

We are all familiar with the Hadith on the best of deeds:

“I asked the Messenger of Allah, ‘Which is the best deed?’ and he said, ‘Believe in Allah, Jihad (meaning the Jihad al Akbar) and HIS way.’ I said, ‘Which is the best person to liberate?’ And he said, ‘The most precious and expensive in HIS community.’ (Meaning worth the cost.) I said, ‘And if I can’t do it?’ He said, ‘Then you help a workman or you can do something for the clumsy person.’ I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, how about if I become weak and not able to do some of those deeds?’ And he said, ‘Then you refrain from doing mischief to people. This is a charity from you to yourself.’”

Where does one get the power to do that, even to refrain from doing harm? Where do we even get the inclination to do it? We must turn to Allah. Remember that each one of us has 360 bones in their body. All of us are responsible to free them from potential torment by doing good

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favours and kindnesses. Let us pray to Allah (swt) to show us the different ways of doing good, so they are not self-aggrandizing. Pray that Allah will help us compete with ourselves in doing good, and take the initiative. To do this, we have to have a kind of *iman* that accepts Allah and his Prophet, and all the prophets (peace be upon them) and all of their words, without doubt, and with steadfastness and perseverance. We have to have the kind of *iman* that accepts (not deny's) the favours of Allah, accepts our destiny, accepts our path, our responsibilities, our potential.

SEEKING THE FAVORS

We have just come from the month of Ramadan. A special time for reflection and repentance and gratitude. Now the challenge is to remember and continue to act in the spirit and sincerity of our Ramadan fast. One of the best ways to accomplish this is to strive to see life and the world as a favor of Allah (swt). It is like the *Laylatul Qadr*: if we think this night is the same as other nights, we are not respecting the night. If we think that everybody is exactly the same, we are not respecting the blessings of Allah. Maybe it sounds elitist and not quite right, but it's true, nonetheless. That's why we are told to keep the company of believers, because in the company of believers, it becomes easier for us to seek the favor of Allah. We must not forget we will not be here forever. As Sura Rahman tells us:

All that is upon it shall pass away—and yet shall abide the Face of your Lord, full of Majesty and Glory. Which then of the favours of your Lord will you deny? (55:26-28)

To seek the favor of Allah is the most important brick in the foundation of our lives. You can say it in many ways, but seeking the favor of Allah before you go to sleep, before you get up in the morning, and to ask Allah: ***“Favor me with the blessing that I do not stray from the siratal mustaqim, that I do not speak words that are harmful. That I do not take you for granted. O Allah, send me your favor and blessings that I may... in the positive. Make the right decisions. Or find the way to feed my family. Or to be able to make a good decision for the benefit of my friend, my husband, my wife, my children, my colleague. O Allah, favor me with the blessings to be a good Muslim.”***

Just this week I was visited by a candidate for Congress who is running against Bob

Goodlatte. He asked for the favor of our support, both financially and actively. Of course I needed to understand who he was, what did he believe, value, promise to address if he won office. I wanted nothing in return except that we agree on most issues and that his promises would be kept or at least really be his agenda. This is all we can expect from the ‘favor’ of another human being. How different it is when we seek the favor, the bounty, the grace of Allah (swt). Knowing there is nothing we can add to Allah...only the one thing He asks of us...to remember Him, to Praise Him and His Prophet, to Trust Him.

We pray to Allah that he makes our destiny clear to us. Knowing that **“Allah effaces and establishes what he wills, and with him is the source of all commandments.” (13:40)** So we should be clear what we ask for. Would that the words were sufficient to convince us all, so we have to read Sura Rahman and be reminded again and again: *What are the favors of your Lord that you deny?* Whatever Allah provides for us is good for us. Not so with whatever we do for ourselves.

It’s our duty to ask. It’s HIS delight to give. It’s a requirement of us to focus our life in such a way that we are asking continuously for HIS blessings and it is Allah’s joy to respond to us. I understand I am speaking of Allah in somewhat anthropomorphic terms. But then, think of it as just resonance with the universe, the dynamics of creation, in the reality of what we call Allah, is to create a resonance for good. For that we have to submit; we have to surrender; we have to give up control.

Of course, we won’t do it until we have to. But we should. It’s the old story: nobody needs a teacher until they have to have a teacher. It’s Allah’s blessing that we have nights like *Layatul Qadr*, and gatherings like this, but we do not get the blessings, the favor unless we approach the favors in the right way, recognizing that they come from HIM and HIM alone. And to understand that, as we studying last year in this Zawiyya, we have to change our self, know our self to find the Truth...to know our Lord.

Allah has blessed us so we can repent to HIM of our wrong actions, and return to HIM as an individual, and return to HIM as a community. And return to HIM as a people with good deeds. It’s HIS grace that allows us to be sitting here right now. Its fine, you want to thank Allah for the money you got or the assets you have, or the health you have. But the greatest of all

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this *ni'mah* is the blessing of Allah's presence. This is a path on which, if you want to, you can find every answer to every question. But we must begin with belief in Allah (swt) is HIS charity and HIS grace. The way to get that is through the practices, through what we call the religion of Islam –submission, It's not by our talent, but by our fulfilling our destiny and HIS grace and HIS Mercy, *Rahman*.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ATTITUDE

The Qur'an narrates the incident of some people who came to the Prophet (sal) and said they had accepted Islam. They thought they were doing a favor by embracing Islam. But the Qur'an said,

“They presume to regard it as a favor to you (meaning the Prophet) that they have embraced Islam. But say, O Prophet, deem not your embracing of Islam a favor to me. On the contrary, Allah has bestowed a favor on you that he has guided you to the true faith.” 49:17

So we should be very grateful to Allah for this great favor he has bestowed upon us. We might be unhappy that we don't have what we want in this moment, whatever it may be. More money. New house. Even our health; something we feel we are missing. We have to see that this is discontent with our Lord, not discontent with our world. Not bad luck. Not the situation where there is an entitlement and we are not getting it. Do we think that Allah is not completely aware of our situation?

“...He knows what is in the land and the sea. And not a leaf falls but He knows it. And there is neither a seed in the deep darkness of the earth nor a thing green or withered but it is in a Clear Book.” (6:59)

Are any of us starving? Some here have known starvation and Allah's Mercy and Favor came to them. Do any of us not have a roof over our head? Some here have lived in the open out of necessity and Allah's Mercy and favor came to them. Do we have the means to get to our work? Do we have the time to spend with one another? Do we have the means to reflect? Do we have the clarity of mind to reflect? *Allah Hu Akbar!!* He has given us more than what is sufficient. Have we squandered it? He has given us comfort. A place to live. Friendship and

companionship. Do you know how many people don't even have one friend in the world? Do you think most people have more than one or two friends? All this is the favor of Allah, the *fadl* of Allah, the *ni'mah* the *alaa a* of Allah. It's our bad habit that we compare ourselves with others, or compare what we have with what others have. It's our bad habit that we are not content. And the miracle is Allah will respond to what we ask for. Therefore we should be very careful to ask for the right things.

We question, "Why has Allah given so much to those who don't believe in him, but he has not given me what I want? I'm sincere in my worship!" These are just tests. And even test are a favor from our Lord. Allah tells in Qur'an the story of Karoun.

So he (Karoun) went forth among the people with all his pomp, and those who were desirous of the life of this world said, 'would that we had the like of what Karoun has been given. Truly, he is the master of great fortune!' But those who have been given knowledge said, 'Woe unto you! Allah's reward is best for those who believe and who do good works. And it shall be granted unto none but the steadfast' Then we (Allah) caused the earth to swallow him and his dwelling, and he had no party to help him against Allah, nor was he of those who can defend themselves. Those who had coveted his position the day before began to say, 'Ruin seize thee! It is indeed Allah who enlarges provisions for such of HIS servants. And he straightens out for those whom he pleases. Had not Allah been gracious to us, he would have caused it to swallow us up also. Ah, the ungrateful never prosper.'" 28:79-82

This doesn't mean you can't ask Allah to help you make a good decision on the things of Dunya, like whether to get the Prius or the new Honda Civic. Quite the contrary. But what you must be aware of is: what is your intention? If you place your *iman* as being greater than the worldly, if you understand the *taqdir*, if you understand Allah has blessed you from birth, and have placed us sitting here together this very moment, then you begin to understand what the favors of Allah are. You begin to understand that the acceptance of Allah is greater than any other acceptance; the company of believers, of good people who walk the *sair ul suluk* with you, is the best company. And you believe the best action is good action towards others. You

believe that Islam is the best way of saving yourself at times when the boat seems to sink.

How do we know if the things that come to us are from the favors of Allah? Begin by practicing asking Allah for HIS favor, and accepting the favor as HE has given it to you. You will know when things come to you from the favor of Allah. There are ways to know it. It will resonate with your destiny. It will resonate with at the core of your heart, with what is right and righteous. It will be *halal*, not *haram*, it will bring you respect not disrespect from the good people, it will uplift your soul, not your *nafs amara*, it will give you humility not arrogance, trust not distrust, self esteem not self deprecation, insecurity, or denial. It will resonate with what and who you are from birth, as it did with Sidna Musa, Sidna Daoud, Sidna Suleyman, Sidna Ibrahim, Aisha, Khadija, Umm Salma, the Prophet Mohammed (sal), Abu Bakr, Sidna Umar, and all the others.

Look at all that Allah has given us, without our asking. The money that you need to pay your bills: It's in the bank, on the way to you. The car you need or the repairs you need, it is on the mind of a friend and it's on the way to you. The good advice you need? It's in the heart of someone who cares and it's on the way to you. The courage you need? It's on the way to you from the Divine Presence within you and you will find the key to open that door in the Qur'an today. It's waiting there for you. It has your name on it.

When you trust, trust completely, not just up to a point, or until it is inconvenient. When you trust someone, you don't ask for everything from them all at once. You know they are going to give it to you. Let me share with you the key: Our role is to be grateful; to say in response to these gifts: "Shukran Allah; This is sufficient. If I need more, I know You will provide it for me because You know my heart, my needs, my thoughts." That's how our relationship with Allah should be.

And let us also never forget to put our "need" in a context. The *Sahaba* did not enjoy the same luxuries we enjoy today. To protect their legs from the burning sun in the desert, they would tear up their old clothes and wrap them around their feet and legs. They had nothing but their hands to give themselves a shadow. They didn't have a nice big hat from Dick's Sporting gear. But they were happy they were Muslims, and understood it was a great blessing. They sacrificed their wealth, their relationships, and their social status, in order to follow the right way

Abu Bakr (ra), during his last illness, said to Abdur Rahman bin Awf (ra): I saw the world come before me and it knelt down, but it refrained from coming closer. Surely a day will come when people will adorn themselves with silk and fineries, and they will contempt the woolen garments. I swear by Allah the Almighty that it will be better for one to be unjustly beheaded than to wallow in the throes of this world.

And 'Abdullah bin Mas'ud (ra) said:

You are only guests in this world and what you own is only a borrowed trust.

Eventually the guest will depart and the borrowed trust must be returned to its rightful Owner.

[Narrated: Dhahhak bin Muzahim]

So let us not forget to be grateful to the rightful owner. If you are grateful to Alah for HIS favor, He will increase it. If we are grateful for the worldly things Allah (swt) has given us, He will certainly increase those, too. If we are grateful for our *iman* Allah (swt) will increase that. If we are grateful for our *taqdir*, Allah (swt) will increase our understanding of that. What else do we want? Wanting only begets more wanting. Instead, cultivate the happiness and appreciation for what we have.

“This day I have perfected you your religion and completed my favor on you. And chosen for you Islam as a religion” (5:3) .

Here Allah uses the word favor, *Ni'mah*. Why does Allah use the word favor? He didn't say, “And completed my creation on you.” But favor. That was revealed to the Prophet Mohammed (sal) on His way back from His last pilgrimage. He said it would be the last verse of Qur'an to be revealed. It was later included in Suratul Maidan, which was originally revealed about the year 6 or 7 after the Hijra. This is the complementary verse to the verse that describes the Prophet (sal) as being the seal of the prophets. Those two verses support the notion that

Islam is the final religion. But it means more than that. It proves the ongoing and sustained power of the favor and grace and the bounty and blessing of Allah.

We have a tool that each one of us should be using really well, and with humility, to seek the favor of Allah. The tool is the reminder given to us in Sura Rahman: *Which of these favors of your Lord do you deny?* Don't deny any. Denial is the cause of loss, self deception, a block to healing, a precursor of arrogance. Whether personally or collectively denial rarely brings any good and separates us from those we love and who love us. Especially Allah swt. See in sura Waqia:

See the seed that ye sow in the ground? Is it ye who causes it to grow, or are We the cause? Were it Our will, We would crumble it to dry powder, and ye would be left in wonderment. Ye are indeed left with debts for nothing. Ye are indeed shut out from the fruits of our labor. See the water which you drink. Do you bring it down from the rain clouds, or do We? If it were Our will, We could make it salt and unpalatable. And why don't you give thanks? 56:63-70

We are all connected to the creation, and we are a part of it. Why are we so arrogant and selfish? We do we come to things from a place of doubt? We become so trapped in our indulgences, selfishness, wants and desires that we rob the future of its legacy. We have so many decisions that confront us every day in our lives that have to do with our relatedness. Don't think that you can have relationships with human beings and not deal with relatedness with yourself and the rest of the universe, let alone with what's nearest to you and the other human being. One of the greatest of our decisions to confront in life is how we relate to other human beings.

How we relate to other human beings affects us, affects the physical environment, and it also affects the spiritual environment. When the baby cries, and the mother comforts it with words is one thing. When the baby cries and the mother gives it milk, both are drawing from the same food source. In the Qur'an Allah says,

It is Allah Who has made you the vicegerent of the earth. Our responsibility is for Us, and yours is for your deeds.

Each one of us has a responsibility, and each one of us has the ability to make decisions and modify those decisions, and shape them. As we make, modify, and shape decisions, we are making, modifying, and shaping and re-shaping the world and our relationships. No other species does this. A lion does not ask, “Should I kill that antelope, or should I become a vegetarian lion?” It doesn’t work that way. We are the only ones who do that, no matter what children’s book writers want us to think.

The fact that we are able to take enough to satisfy us is one thing. The fact that we are able to take more than what will satisfy us is another thing. The fact is, we are conditioned to take more and more and more. That has to do with food, resources, and human relationships. When we exceed our limits, we cause problems. Our universe...the universe loses its mizan. Remember all that we said yesterday about the introduction to this Sura and the reality of the favors of Allah. When we push too far, exceed the balance, cross the line, then, eventually, those problems come back to us. Instead of being among those who blindly take from the favors of Allah, denying that they are from Allah, let us be among those who gratefully accept these gifts.

CONCLUSION

CLOSING DUA