



[Live in Dependence on the Divine Presence](#)
With the Intention to Do What is Good and Right

Opening duas. Allah (swt) revealed in the Holy Qur'an:

A kind word with forgiveness is better than a charity followed by an injury. Allah is sufficient and clement. O you who have arrived at secure belief, do not invalidate your charity by reminders of it, or hurting the feelings of the poor, like the one who spends his wealth only to be seen by the people and do not believe in Allah and the final day. His likeness is the likeness of a smooth stone upon which is dust, and it is hit by a heavy downpour that leaves it hard and bare. Such people gain nothing from what they earn through acts of charity, and Allah does not guide those who cover up the truth. (2:263-4)

Also, Allah (swt) reveals in the Qur'an:

Every community has a direction to which it turns, so surpass one another in good works. Wherever you may be, Allah will bring you all together. Clearly Allah has power over all things. (2:148)

Finally, in Surah al-Shura, He says:

And those who answer the call of their Lord and establish salat and whose affair is decided by consultation between themselves and those who spend on the deserving from which I have provided them. (42:38)

The subject obviously today is doing good, and the benefits of doing good. We are very grateful that it is a nice warm “Spring” day today, and grateful to Allah (swt) for that. I think it very important that every one of us who advocate and try to live as Sufis, every Muslim, every *mu'min*, live with a humble understanding of our dependence and reliance on the *ambiyā*, and on the Divine Presence, and dependence on those who are loved by Allah (swt), who live with love and piety towards that Divine Presence in one another and toward that Divine Presence everywhere. It is especially important that we live in dependence on in a dignified way, understanding that we depend on the qualities, names, and attributes of Allah (swt) to live a good life.

There cannot be a good life without the Attributes and Names of Allah (swt). If we choose to do that and strive to do that, then we will be purifying ourselves. We will be those who Allah speaks about when He says what I recited, about the people who believe and do charity, and act generously: **“...whose kind words of forgiveness are better than charity followed by an injury.”** We can be of those people who not only vie with one another in good works, but understand that in doing good works, Allah brings us together at a level that transcends our ego. For those who can purify themselves and vie with one another in good works, and who can be tolerant with one another, and patient, those individuals are especially loved by Allah, because their goal is to serve Allah and Allah’s creatures. Allah goes on to say, as I quoted, that those who answer the call of their Lord, and who establish worship, and whose affairs are a matter of counsel will also spend what we have bestowed upon them.

What this means in practical terms is not so much who or what we think we are, but who we really are, and who we think we can be. People who are at peace with themselves can be people who are arrogant, and who are ego-centered. If you are at peace with yourself, then it may very well be that your peace may not be a kind of deep and lasting peace. How do you know if you are at peace with yourself? One way of knowing is if you are at peace with others. If you are at peace with others, and at peace with Allah, then you can

be at peace with yourself. If you are always struggling with your relationship with Allah and with others, then you can be deceiving yourself. If you are covering the faults of others, that's one thing. If you are covering your own faults and not addressing them, that's another thing. The ego plays a very important role.

Doing good is for others, and doing good for oneself in these terms is learning how to take initiative and making the right choices at the right time, not for one's own benefit, but for the benefit of being able to do good for others—not to be defensive or offensive. To be able to know what is right and to act with immediacy and a sense of self awareness and self-consciousness, and self-conscience is very important. To be able to receive the light as it shines upon us may be difficult at times, because it might reveal some imperfections in us, and our first reaction or response is to defend ourselves. Not very many people, though I'm sure there are some, take a look in the mirror and see how many pimples they have on their face or lines on their faces, or whatever it may be, a sneer, and then break the mirror. But when it comes to people, it's easy to blame others.

The focus is not just on consciousness but it is on seizing the moment, and seizing any opportunity that comes along to do good with it. The Sahabah (may Allah bless their memories and give them light in the Hereafter) were so attuned to guidance they were receiving it from Rasūlullāh that they acted immediately on things. They sometimes acted too fast in the sense they had to be restrained a bit by Rasūlullāh, because they were too ready to chastise and too ready to draw conclusions, that perhaps were not the correct conclusions. We also have to have a mechanism for understanding, not for defending and excuse-making. I always tease Allaudin who, when I say, "Can you please go get..." and he's out the door already without knowing what it is. Then he blames himself for forgetting, once he's out the door. This is not, Allaudin, a sign of dementia because you've been doing it since you were in your 30's.

The intention behind it was to try to do good and to do what is right. Still, there has to be patience, time, understanding, and communication. It's very important that there is dialogue between ourselves and Allah—not monologue, but dialogue. You have to learn how to hear Allah (swt), and to dialogue between ourselves and Rasūlullāh (sal), with our self and the *sahabah*, with ourselves and the *awliya-LLāh*. To understand what is good and what is right is also knowing when to be silent, when to withhold, when to be patient, and when to be tolerant, when to not just to spew out what's on your mind, with long lines of “this, this, that and I told you so's.” On the other hand, to avoid the critique when one is empowered, and asked and guided to give it is also a problem. So we are back to the subject of *mizan*/ balance and harmony. It is not to flaunt one's knowledge of *fiqh* or *shar'īah* or any kind of knowledge—not to be too quick, not to draw attention to oneself, but to be so attuned to Allah (swt) that one's actions would be as if they are the actions of the Prophet (sal) himself. [It goes back to] that old question, “What would the Prophet have me do,” or “What would the Shaykh have me do,” or “What would Allah have me do.”

Those who want to be rewarded by Allah are really the subjects of those who should be competing for the reward, but not in the material sense. Reward is in the only way Allah (swt) really truly rewards us: by being aware of His Presence. If you are aware of the presence of Allah, and it is really the presence of Allah (swt), you are humble and grateful. Therefore, one can say that the reward is to be in the presence of Allah and to know that one is. That is just another way of telling what I have been saying over and over again. Allah (swt) demands for us to be quick, to take initiative, to hasten to take initiative, to do favors, as He says: **“Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord and for a Garden whose width is that of the heavens and the earth, prepared for the righteous. Those who spend freely, whether in prosperity or adversity, who restrain anger, and who pardon people, for Allah loves those who do good.”** (3:133-4)

It doesn't mean to be a spendthrift, or to never be upset about anything. It doesn't mean to pardon those who are unpardonable in their sins. Certainly, we understand that. Allah loves those who do good. The intentions of the people are very, very important. The other thing that is important about that *'āyat* is: **"...for a Garden, whose width is that of the whole of the heavens and the earth."** We know the heavens are endless. So the garden must be present. It must be in another dimension, present, because how could it be wider than what is endless, infinite. There is a lot in this *'āyat*; it is very rich. There is nothing outside the universe that Allah (swt) created. So it must be in some dimension of perception and living, and once we adjust our lives and our sight, we can live both in this physical life, and when we pass in the dimension to the unseen world that is not with us right now, we can live a reality in the Presence. In other words, we are never not here. Which is another way of saying that even though the physical body may pass, the soul doesn't pass beyond the grasp of the insight of the person who sees.

"The righteous who spend freely whether in prosperity or adversity" is to think of others first, to think what is right and good first. We get a lot of flack for that sometimes. But to think of others first is a tremendous blessing from Allah. To restrain anger and pardon people are two choices of many that Allah is giving as examples. **"For Allah loves those who do good."** So be quick, restrain the anger. Analyze the situation. Be able to pardon someone without being judgmental about them. Be quick, and yet be careful. See what the mutual goal is for the good. Don't place yourself above others, and don't force yourself to be below others. **"Be quick in the race for forgiveness from your Lord"** – what is that? There are some implications here: we should recognize our faults and be quick to ask forgiveness. We should do whatever is necessary to purify ourselves and see where we are in reality. We should prepare ourselves for righteousness, and be able to restrain ourselves and pardon other people.

In other words, this is how Allah defines a good and pious person. He describes who these people are. Whether in prosperity or adversity, their actions are good; their

attitudes and state of mind are good, and we should hasten to be like them. One of the characteristics of the beauty and goodness is there is no lag time. I think of this in terms of watching the spring here... I get excited when I see the forsythia come out, or the first buds on the roses that I trim back in the winter time. First the sprout comes out, then you see the stem come out. Before you know it, that rose bush is this high, and each one is beautiful in its own sense. When it opens up, it is even more beautiful. You don't have to wait until the end of the process to see the beauty; you are seeing it all along. You are seeing the first sprout, and then you are seeing it grow, and seeing all these beautiful flowers.

What does it mean? It means the rose is not delaying itself to show its beauty; it is showing its beauty in different stages. We show our knowledge and beauty in different stages, too. If we can step back, we can watch the child grow, becoming more wise and insightful, or more disciplined and serviceful. You don't wake up one day and that person is fully developed. I especially like it when there are two roses on the bush, and one turns to the other and says, "Hi ya, bud!"

The Qur'an states that it is those who hasten in every good work, and those who are foremost in them, and that Allah praises his Messengers for fulfilling their duties and obligations. I think the message to us is the attention and presence of Allah permits us to know His Presence, which is attenuated by fulfilling our duties and obligations. As it applies to the Sahabah, for example, they used to hasten to do favors for others as the Prophet (sal) did. In Qur'an, Allah praises the Prophet Zakariya (as) and his wife and son in Surah al-Ambiyā for taking the initiative in doing good to others. **"These three people,"** we are told by Allah, **"were ever quick in doing good works. They used to call on Us in yearning and in awe, and humble themselves before Us,"** (21:90) As for the Prophet Ibrahim (as), Ishaq (as), and Ishmael (as), Allah praised them for everything they did. One of the good characteristics was, they tried to do favors for others.

We made them leaders, guiding people by Our command, and We revealed to them the good deeds, to establish regular prayers, and to give *zakat*. And they constantly served Us and only Us. (21:73)

Allah (swt) is making no distinction here between serving the recipient of the good works and Allah. Allah is saying that if you serve the orphan, the person in need, you are serving Allah. He does not say, “Serve them and serve Me.” He says, “Serve Us and only Us.” It means they realize that those who they were serving were manifestations of the Divine. I think that’s very important to hasten to do good and to compete with one another. Some of the other People of the Book were praised because of their faith in doing good to others, like in Surah al-Imran. We hear that not all of them were alike.

Of the People of the Book, there are a portion that stand for the right. They rehearse the signs of Allah all night long. They prostrate themselves in adoration. They believe in Allah and the Last Day. They enjoin what is right and forbid what is wrong. They hastened in all good works. They are in the ranks of the righteous. (3:113-4)

Allah is not obtuse or unclear about this subject in the Qur’an. We are told exactly what kind of person to be. In this small ‘*āyat*, we get a picture of those people very clearly, how they spent their lives, their days and nights, and it demands us to be quick and hasten to compete. We have to remember that it is Allah (swt) to Whom we return, Who is the Goal for Whom we strive, wherever we are. It is Allah (swt) Who brought us together in some way or another, and Who keeps us together. The Prophet (sal) demanded us to take initiative and to do good immediately, as soon as we have the opportunity – not to be late, or our goodness will be late. Don’t be delayed, because then the blessings are delayed. That reaches even down to the prayer or coming to the *suhbat* or anything else. You delay the goodness. If something good is to happen, like prayer, and you are late... the prayer will usually go on... but sometimes the *suhbat* will be held up.

If you think about that, if enough people are being delayed, then the good will never be done. For those of us who have trouble being on time—and you know that I delay myself sometimes because I know you are going to be late, and I don't want to walk into an empty room; and I know I delay everyone else when I'm late, like the other night—the first thing I say is what? I'm sorry. I walk in and say, "I'm sorry for being late." I'm trying to remember the last time someone said that to me. You know my story. When I was a young man, I was half an hour or more early for things. I had to get used to living this life. Poor Ed Stern. He used to have to bear my anger at him. I would say, "I'll meet you at 7:00" and at 7:15, he wasn't there. 7:30, he wasn't there. He'd come at 8:30, and be greeted with my anger. He would say, "You should only have been waiting a half an hour. You should have known I would be late, so why would you let yourself wait longer than half an hour?"

For those of us who have a problem being on time, maybe you should think of the fact that if you were on time, you might be serving the needs of someone who is waiting there for you. You'd have a word for them that they needed to hear; you could open the door for them, help them with something... anyway. Children, this is only for you. It's not for the adults, because the adults are always on time. Just think about how you would feel if you were late to the *masjid*, and one of your brothers or sisters fell down and you weren't there to help them get up. "Well, someone else was there." Is that what we say? Even if 30 people were there, would you feel badly that you weren't there? What if you were late to dinner at someone's house, and they choked on a chicken bone? I'm sorry, a tofu bone! And you weren't there to give them a Heimlich maneuver. But, "Someone else was there. It's okay." Anyway, let's not delay things.

Remember this *hadith*: Abu Hurayra narrated that the Prophet (sal) said, "***Take the initiative for doing good and good deeds. There will be temptations and allurements like a dark night. A person wakes up a believer, and in the evening he becomes a***

disbeliever. Or he sleeps as a disbeliever and wakes up a believer. He sells his religion with the pettiness of this world.” I think it would be good to put that on your desk or your wall, and you can read it every 2-3 years. There is another *hadith* related to doing good. The Prophet said, *“A good deed is made even by smiling at one’s friend.”* It was also narrated that the Prophet (sal) said, *“Do not disdain any type of kindness, even meeting your brother in faith with a cheerful face.”* I think we should all remember that *hadith*. How many of us act out of disdain by not greeting each other, let alone smiling, and the moment passes?

If a person cannot do any of these things, he should at least refrain from doing harm. “O Messenger of Allah, what is the best deed?” The Prophet (sal) said, “Belief in Allah, in jihad, and in his way.” I said, “Who is the best person?” “The most precious and expensive in the community.” I said, “If I cannot do that?” He replied, “You can help a workman or do something for the clumsy person.” I said, “O Messenger of Allah, how about if I become too weak to do any of these deeds?” He said, “You refrain from doing mischief to the people. This is a charity from you to yourself. That will be a great reward.”

All of us have capability and responsibility to free ourselves from the difficulties of life. All of us have the possible capability to free ourselves from our torpor and laziness. Every one of us can do some favor, some kindness, probably within 5 minutes of leaving this room. **“For those who take the initiative in doing good, they will be rewarded with a reward much better than the rest, and those foremost in faith will be foremost in the Hereafter, and will be those who are near to Allah in His Gardens and His Bliss.”** We live in a world today where we are dependent and co-dependent on other people and circumstances. We have to confer and take counsel with one another about things that come up in our day to day life. If people are competing in ways other than good works, then they are competing in their ego. They withhold information and dole it out very slowly. They don’t like the way someone else processes, so they don’t

bother to process with them. It can be nearly impossible to take counsel from one another and hear that counsel if that's the attitude we maintain. We have to become humble and grateful.

At the same time, another pillar of Islam, not one of the Five Pillars, but a sub-pillar, lies in the *shura*, taking counsel with one another. It would be impossible without tolerance, without competing in doing good. Allah teaches us therefore that He alone is All-Knowing and All-Powerful. If we put that into the context of what I have been talking about, and in the context of our work, we try to bring Allah (swt) into our work, into our conversations and day to day life. All human beings have some kind of relative knowledge and power. We are all equal in certain ways and unequal in other ways. We can all enjoy the honor and the dignity of being human beings, if we are truly humane beings. But to do good works in the eyes of Allah (swt) is something we have to make an effort to do. We have to take our lives very seriously, every decision, every matter, every relationship. There shouldn't be any coercion, intimidation, fear, or doubt. Doubt is a hard one. We shouldn't coerce ourselves from the inside to the outside, or allow ourselves to be coerced from the outside.

Human beings find it very difficult to decide independently about matters that concern themselves and that concern others, like in relationships, for example. We might know clearly what we like and what we want, but we might not know what the other person wants in life. We might find there is compatibility or incompatibility. If we find incompatibility, we have to have the strength to understand the limits of the relationship. If there is compatibility, then we have to understand the capacity of the relationship. It is said that to elicit a positive and true response from Allah (swt), which would be a manifestation of peace and contentment, love, tolerance, justice, and mercy and compassion, patience, perseverance, etc., we have to be honest with ourselves.

We have to understand that Allah responds to those who respond to Allah. **“Those who respond to the call of their Lord, and keep up their prayers, and whose rule in the matter of others comes out of consultation with themselves...”** (42:38) So it is good to get other opinions, other insights, and to put a lot of value on the ones who know have value. It’s better to ask a parent about their child than a neighbor or a stranger. If you ask a teacher about a student, it’s better than asking another student, in terms of their education. If you ask a friend about a friend, or a wise person about someone who can see with the eyes of insight, then you have to rate the value of those comments.

The same thing applies to ourselves. If we ask our self about our self, that’s one thing. If we ask someone else about our self, that’s another. If we ask someone of great insight, a *shaykh* or wise person, that’s another. I hope we can understand this a little better, what it really means to do good works, not just to others but to ourselves. It’s not a big step to understand how Allah speaks through our tongues, works through our hands, and walks through our feet, if we understand that if we respond honestly and appropriately in a circumstance, our companion is Allah (swt). *Asalaamu aleikum.*