



Seeking the Blessings of Sha'bān
Tuning to Allah through Salat

Allah Swt says in the Holy Qur'an:

And Allah and His angels shower blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe, invoke blessings upon him and salute him with worthy salutations.

And:

Proclaim the glory of Allah whenever you enter in the evening time, and whenever you enter in the morning time. To Him belong the praise of the heavens and the earth. And when the sun is on the wane and when you enter the noon time hour. Surely, the ritual prayer is a prescription for all those who believe.

In the month we are in (Rajab), and the coming months, Sha'bān and Ramadan, are the most important aspects of our lives in Islam to be attuned to Allah, which is through fasting and much prayer. As we approach this month of Ramadan and enter the month of Sha'bān, it's good to remind ourselves of all of this. I would like to take some moments today to talk about the prayer, because this is the month that should be filled with fasting and prayers and supplications. Prayer can mean many things, but to Muslims it means *salat*. It is a very special and specific act. In this case, it is an opportunity for us to organize our prayers and to make sure to do them on time. Try that experiment of having your life be designed around your prayers, as opposed to your prayers shoved into your life.

The month of Sha'bān has many meanings to it. It is the month in which the Prophet (sal) fasted a great deal. *One of the histories, attributed to Aishya (ra), said that the month of Sha'bān is the month in which the Angel of Death comes and takes down the names of the people who will die in that coming year. (Inshā'a-Llāh, there will be no names from our community on that list this year.) The Prophet (sal) fasted more in the month of Sha'bān than in any other month except Ramadan. When Hazrati Aisha asked him why, he replied that this is the month that the Angel of Death came, and he would rather be fasting when his name was written down.*

It's also called the month of blessings, because the month of Ramadan is a removal of sins. It was always assigned that there would be no battles in that month, which was a decision made by the Qureysh when it was most convenient for them to fight. Later, however, some said Sha'bān would be the month when people would put aside all differences. After the Prophet (sal) came, people said the month of Sha'bān would be when you put all these differences aside and prepare for Ramadan, and do much prayer and fasting. We should encourage each other and plead with ourselves to put aside all differences during this month, and take to these practices.

The middle of Sha'bān is very important, and the last night or two are also very important days. The journey of this month is very dimensional. [We are encouraged] to fast in the first three days, to fast in the center of the month, and at the end of the month in preparation for the arrival of Ramadan in our lives, and [to prepare] for our lives to change fairly significantly in certain ways. Some say the Prophet Mohammed (sal) discouraged people from fasting after the 15th of the month, because he wanted people to have the right attitude and excitement about Ramadan coming. The preparation for Ramadan should take time, so this month is a month for preparing our house, not just jumping into Ramadan. Think about what you are going to have for your *iftar* and *sehri*. Think about organizing your life around these times, and be settled, and appreciate the life around us. It is especially good for people who have a hard time fasting. They can

fast little by little before the month of Ramadan comes. Beyond that, there are some inner meanings of Sha'bān we can talk about, too.

In Arabic, Sha'bān is spelled with 5 letters: *shīn*, *ain*, *bah*, *alif*, *nūn*. The *shīn* stands for *sharaf* / nobility, the *ain* for the sublimity or sublime. *Bah* for *bahr* in the sense of piety and gentleness, and *alif* for *ulfah*, harmony and intimacy. And *nūn* stands for light, *nūr*. We have the inner meanings laid out for us in this month. A time when we can act and search for these qualities. We should try to act in this month with nobility, to look for what is good and sublime, to be pious and harmonious in our relationships with others and with Allah Swt, and to be engrossed in and a carrier of the radiant light of Allah Swt, to read much Qur'an, to contemplate the Divine Presence in our life, and in the gifts that have been given to us this year and in our lives. These are all gifts from Allah to His servants in this month.

Sha'bān is a month in which many treasures can be open for us if we look for them. Many blessing are sent down to us if we can receive them. Faults can be put aside and sins can be expiated, and benedictions and prayers are multiplied upon the Prophet Mohammed (sal). This is a month of blessings upon the Chosen Prophet. In Qur'an it is said, **“And Allah and His angels shower blessings upon the Prophet. O you who believe! Invoke blessings upon him and salute him with worthy salutations.”** This month is a time for much *du'ā* and *salawat*. The blessings of Allah to us and to the Prophet are a mercy, and he is sent as a mercy. The angels intercede as you petition Allah for forgiveness and with supplications.

The believer, showing appreciation for Allah and His Prophet, the angels it is said intercede for us. This gives us a foundation for really expiating the sins entering into Ramadan, and into a better life. We shouldn't fear repenting, and we shouldn't involve our ego. Receiving the blessing and forgiveness of Allah is automatic if we come to Allah in the right way. The blessings of Allah are many. In this world there are blessings

for prosperity, and virtue, good actions; for health and well being, safety and security. There are internal blessings too. There is peace in the heart and in the soul; a desire to comply with Qur'an and Shar'iah, the desire to serve Allah, and a foundation for our life in the future. These are some of the inner meanings of the month. It is a time for us to be conscious.

Last year, some people were quite healthy when they entered into the month of Sha'bān and Ramadan. This year they found themselves not healthy. They should reflect upon how they lived their year, and what their spiritual life was, and how they might reclaim their health through their spiritual approach. It's not impossible, you know. The Prophet (sal) said, ***"When someone pronounces a single blessing on me, Allah blesses them 10 times more."*** The joy of supplication and making *du'ā* for the Prophet (sal) is in itself complete, but there is something that comes back to us also from it. Consciousness over negligence, piety over worldliness, service over being served, peacefulness over anxiety, strength over weakness of mind or emotion, and attentiveness to our commitments to Allah instead of forgetfulness: these are the cornerstones of Sha'bān.

We should pray that Allah gives us the power and ability and love in our heart to make this month extremely important. On the Night of Absolution, the Night of Laylatul Bahra, the special mercy and grace should come to us. Allah reveals to us that if we perform the ritual prayer, and pay our *zakat*, and bow our heads with those who bow in worship, then great blessings will come to us. We come from the month of Rajab where Allah Swt revealed prayer to the Prophet (sal), and gives us the gift of prayer. It is understood, after some negotiation, that we are to pray 5 times daily through the aegis of Prophet Musa (as). We also learn how to come near to Allah, and of the difference between the sight of Prophet Mohammed and ours. In Sha'bān, we see how important this prayer is.

Now prayer has come to the people of Islam, and in the very next month, we learn that it is through prayer and fasting that we come to know Allah, that we come to a better

understanding of our own life and purposes. We will be fulfilling our purpose in this world, not just because we are coming to Ramadan, not just because this is one of the best of the four best months of the year. But because we as human beings cannot fulfill our greatest dreams, and our greatest potential and hopes, unless we come piously, humbly, sincerely, gratefully, with our heads on the ground five times a day. Prayer is a key to not only peace and happiness in the Hereafter, but it is a key to success in this world and in the Hereafter.

The beginning of the day and end of the day we are surrounded by prayer. When the sun rises and goes down, we pray. In the midst of this, we pray. The purpose is a prophetic tradition called al-Akbar. The word *akbar* can also mean the tradition of the Prophet (sal). It is not limited just to the word ‘*hadith*,’ just as *salawat* can mean prayer. We learn from this tradition about the Ansars. The Ansars were the citizens of Medina who embraced Islam and welcomed Rasūlu-Llāh (sal) and supported him and the mujaharūn, the immigrants who came from Mecca to Medina.

The Prophet (sal) was asked by one of these people about the dawn prayer.

“Who performed it for the very first time?” He informed the person, “The very first person to perform it was Hazrat Adam.” Then the Prophet (sal) said the following: “The salat dhuhur was first performed by Ibrahim (alahis salaam) when Allah Swt delivered him from the fiery furnace of Numa. And the afternoon prayer, salat ‘asr, was first performed by Yaqub (as) when Jibreel gave him the news about Yusef. The maghrib prayer, sunset, was first performed by Daoud when Allah relented toward him and accepted his repentance.

The prayer of the first third of the night was performed by Yunus, when Allah brought him forth from the belly of the whale. It was then that Jibreel (as) came and said, ‘Allah pronounces the greeting of peace upon you. And He says to

you, “I ask you what is the difference in views of the torment I have inflicted upon you in the realm of the lower world? Are you well pleased with Him?’ And Yunus stood up and performed four rak’as of ritual prayer and said, ‘I am indeed well pleased with the Lord. Yes, I am well pleased with my Lord!’”

The first two ritual prayers the Prophet (sal) was commanded to perform were the *salatul fajr* and the *salatul maghrib*. The Messenger of Allah (sal) made these regular practices. Then he was told to perform *rak’as* of ritual prayer in the morning, and two cycles in the evening, and this continued until Miraj. This was the night the Prophet (sal) was transported, and we spoke about that last week (6/16/12).

The *salatul fajr* was the first prayer of the day time, and it was customary of the religious scholars to begin their listing of prayers with the midday prayer. This was based on a saying of the Prophet (sal) who said, ***“Jibreel came to me beside the house of the Ka’ba, and there he led me in the midday prayer as soon as the sun declined from the meridian just enough to lengthen the shadow by the width of the strap of a sandal.”***

This is looked at in two ways. One is, everyone prays. Another is there are the prayers of the elect. There are prayers that are set at specific times for historical reasons that reflect relationship with the prophets. If you always *jum* your prayers together, or you wait to do them late, you are not greeting each prophet properly. You are not recognizing the benefit of their presence and their *maiyyat* / accompaniment with you. It’s not just you are supposed to do something; there is a benefit from it.

If you want to make the prayers of the spiritual elect, or the elect of the elect, this is the way you have to think about the *salat* of the elect. It is a way for people to be submissive and humble, to awaken people who are vigilant, the people who watch over their hearts, the people who are welcome guests of Allah Swt. There is a report that goes as follows. I think it gives a sense of the meaning of prayer, and of this month, and of the month to come.

Yusef Ibn Assam was passing through a large jamat in a mosque in Khorasan when he came across a huge halkah of people. He stopped and asked someone about that halkah. He was told that this was the halkah of Hatim. He was speaking on the subject of abstinence, caution, khawf, fear and hope. Yusef turned to his companions and said, "Come, let us ask him a question about salat. If he gives a satisfying answer, let us join the group." I mentioned this story to you recently, and I'm repeating it to you so you get this story in your mind. He went up to Hatim and said, "Asalaamu aleikum. I have a question." "Please ask it," he was told. "I wish to ask you about salat," said Yusef. "Do you wish to ask about the significance of its spiritual experience, marifah; or about the discipline, the adab to be observed during the performance? These are two distinct questions requiring two distinct answers," he said. Yusef thought and said, "In that case, let me ask you about the adab to be observed in the performance of salat."

And Hatim replied, "It means you rise to the occasion, literally. You walk to the place of worship with an attitude of dedication. You begin the actual prayer with appropriate niyyat, and you pronounce the declaration of Allah's extreme greatness by saying, 'Allahu Akbar.' It means you recite from the Qur'an with a clear and distinct pronunciation. It means you perform the act of bowing with humility, the act of prostration with submissiveness, the testimony with sincerity, and the salutation with a feeling of compassion."

Yusef's companion asked him to ask about the significance of the marifah as a spiritual experience, so he did. Hatim responded, "It means that you set the Garden of Paradise to your right during prayer, and the fire of hell to your left, the Bridge beneath your feet, and the Balance beneath your eyes, and that you worship your Lord as though you see Him; even if you do not see Him, know that He sees you." Ihsan. This is the prayer of the Sufi. "O young man, how long

have you performed this ritual prayer?” asked Yusef to Hatim. “For twenty years.” Yusef said to his companion, “Come, let us perform this kind of prayer for the next 50 years.” Then he turned to Hatim and said, “Where did you find out about this?” And he said, “From those books of yours which you used to dictate to us.”

There is a difference between saying and knowing, speaking and doing, for all of us. You know what is right. You hear the *khutbah*. I speak it. But how are we going to do it? The truth is the prayer begins when we make our *niyyat* to come to the *masjid*. It actually begins when we make that *niyyat* to do our *wudu*, and then the *niyyat* to come here. Our prayer begins in the physical sense, if we can follow this guidance of Hatim, and remember that we are standing between Paradise and hell, and what is before us and what is under our feet and what is behind us; [remember] the balance scale of our actions is where our sight is, and the balance of our actions in the past and in the future. When we think with heartfelt love about praying and fasting, then this month and next month will bring great blessings to us.

More than that, we live in a world of great turmoil and difficulty, and if we pray with most sincerity with much depth in our *sunnah* and *fard* and *nawafil* prayers, truly Allah promises peace in this world and peace in the Hereafter. I think it is very logical. How can we have peace in this world, if around us there is no peace? Obviously, we cannot make it with our hands so quickly, and we are going to worry that misery will come. We are going to concern ourselves about those near and dear to us. But if our neighbor doesn't have peace, and if we don't strive to have peace, and if we don't take some time during the day for these prayers during these months, how is there any hope at all? Allah Swt tells us that we can have peace in this world and in the Hereafter. To have peace in this world means to pray with sincerity, and the whole world will have to have peace. This is a promise to us. So, we should have our minds and hearts focused on that promise day in and day out especially during these months, *inshā'a-LLāh. Asalaamu aleikum.*