

بِسْمِ اللّٰهِ الرَّحْمٰنِ الرَّحِیْمِ

[Striving for Higher Akhlaq:](#)
Du'as for Allah's Help in Reforming our Character

Allah tells us in the Holy Qur'an:

By the pen and what they right, you are not, by the blessing of your Lord, a man possessed. Truly, yours will be a reward unfailing. Truly, you have a sublime character.

Allah says in Surah Takathur,

Material rivalry diverts you, until you come to the grave. Nay, soon you shall know; soon you shall know. Nay, if you only knew with knowledge of certainty, you indeed most surely would see hell. Then you would surely see with the eye of certainty. Then shall be asked on that day about the bliss Allah granted you.

Subhāna-Llāh. Alhamduli-Llāh. All glory and all praise belongs to Allah Swt for His kindness to Mohammed (sal). A power in Allah for which no community has seen such before, and which nothing can render incapable of or inescapable from. Though it is great, nothing can escape the Will of Allah.

Asalaamu aleikum Rahmatullahe wa barakatuu. Allah says in what I read to you that we stand on a standard of high *akhlaq*, moral character. Imam Jafar as Sadiq (ra) said, "The most beneficial thing for a man or woman is to realize his or her faults

before others do.” So this is the goal of today’s *khutbah*, to remind us. After we can identify the basics of moral and ethical excellence, and perhaps look at some of the weaknesses in our own character that prevents us from attaining the highest level of *akhlaq*, it should be pointed out to us also our weak points that stop us in our rise to the achieving of a high level of *akhlaq*. In one of the *du’ā*, we hear:

O Allah, bless Mohammed and his household. Raise me not a single degree before the people without lowering me its like in myself. And bring about no outward exaltation for me without an inward abasement in myself to the same measure.

If we could remember this *du’ā*, it would be a great benefit to all of us. Another *du’ā*:

Let me live as long as my life is a free gift in obeying. But if my life should become a pasture for shaytan, seize me to thyself before the hatred of You overtakes me, or wrath against me becomes firm.

From these two *du’ā*, we can identify clearly certain negative aspects in character, and pray for the help of Allah Swt to reform them by taking positive action.

Remembering that as Muslims, we are not passive. We are active in our own attitude, our own demeanor, our own expressions, and sincerity, our own faith. We are not saved because we believe in Jesus as our one and only savior. We do not play the rules of luck or birth. But who we are, how we are raised, and how we understand the value of repentance, and forgiveness, and love of one another that transcends all faults, these are very important characteristics and qualities, as well as taking responsibility for our own life as it unfolds before us, not to thinking that we are the creators solely of our own destiny. But we make our efforts; and as they unfold, we learn how to deal with that unfoldment. And [we learn] how to make the

adjustments that Allah Swt has just told us we can make: by attitude, by *du'ā*, by changing certain characteristics in us, even just our greetings.

I was just speaking to your brother Pervaiz who is in Okinawa now, after a month or so in Seoul, in his mini-*khilwa*, working for the company he works for. He was telling me he has had the opportunity to reflect on certain things. One of those things is how people greet each other and treat each other in the Far East. You've always heard me say the farther East you go, the more people focus on their *adab*. The kindness they have – more than that – not just the words, but the respect they give to one another in their facial expression, the extending of their hand in greeting. It's of course part of every deep tradition. Native American used to show two hands to show no weapons. It's the same tradition in the Middle East among the Bedowy. There are certain traditions which are sustained longer, not that they are unique to those characters.

If we look at the negative traits, then we can get an understanding of some things. We can ask Allah's help in reforming those traits by taking very positive action around them. For example, acting superior when one is placed in a high position. It can be in any position: an employer, a *shaykh*, a pastor, a politician or whatever it may be. The second one is greatness on account of high respect, not just by position but because one has a kind of charisma. And because of that, people respect you. You have to actively be humble. I think about some of my friends, like Uncle Joe. Someone once asked him what his religion was, and he said, "I'm a born again Christian." They asked him what that meant. He said, "Every day I try to be a better Christian." He didn't get into theology, so people respected that. Every day, he, among other people I know, practice humility. They make their prayer. They have phrases like, "Have a blessed day." This is catching on now in Lynchburg these days.

Must be on the list of things you are supposed to say now, instead of, "Have a good day."

Moving away from the right path is a negative, being distracted, forgetful, [and instead,] understand where Allah has placed you and be grateful for that, because He has placed us somewhere, physically, and on the *siratal mustaqim, inshā'a-LLāh*. Why do we want to change that? How do we learn to accept it, and give our best and our most to it? Wavering in our mind in doing good deeds – is this a good thing, or not a good thing? Someone stands on the side of the road with a sign saying, "Out of work." You reach into your pocket. Someone sitting next to you in the car says, "How do you know they are not going to use that for drugs?" We don't know. But it is *sadaqa* to give them that. I always say, "Please make a prayer." Thank Allah for that.

Satanic motivation breeding in our minds: darkness, dark thoughts, distractions, fears anxieties, negativity, bad behavior worthy of punishment (that's pretty self-explanatory), the tendency to retaliate against hostilities (that's a hard one in the world we live in, for many Muslims), envy, lack of kindness to relatives, opposition to family members (parents, elders, brothers and sisters), misconduct of associates, threats from people. These are the things you have a tendency to retaliate against. Insincerity of people, disappointments suffered, backbiting - these are all things that cause us to retaliate in kind. All of these negative characteristics that prevent us from rising above our lowest level of conduct, *akhlaq*, have to be counteracted so we can reach to a much higher level.

The positive approach is indicated in the *du'ā* I read to counteract these negative acts with the help of Allah Swt. These are: lowering of oneself by the same level one rises in position, humility in the inner self to an equal degree as the high respect you

are held in, also, being steadfast and unmoved on the right path, grateful for where Allah Swt has placed us, firm and resolute and unwavering in one's mind in performing good deeds, understanding that death is better than a life that breeds ground for *shaytan*, reform, correcting our behavior, giving up bad behavior, and seeking the assistance for that from Allah, from the Prophet Mohammed (sal), from our *shuyukh*, and from our brothers, and from the duties of our brotherhood and sisterhood toward one another. Love, obviously, and affection, magnanimity, devotion, tenderness are also ways of counteracting negative acts. Mercy and compassion, obedience and submission, good manners, and good behavior are all ways of counteracting these negative traits—also, sincerity and friendliness toward one another, rewarding that which needs to be rewarded in a good return on things, praising and complimenting at every occasion where you can.

To summarize these issues in these *du'ās* and in Qur'an, our behavioral responses to different situations has to change to a positive aspect against the negative forces, which always have remained powerful and rampant in our society. We can't just wait for them to time out. You know what happens if you do? That little thing on the left of your browser window that says "refresh" is set on automatic. Those tendencies refresh. We have weaknesses in our habits and flaws in our character and bad behavior, and they have to be counteracted by positive action. We have to reach for a high level of moral and ethical excellence in this day and age, when so many people claim power and greatness and have wealth and power, have high achievement technologically, and have economic influences, and indulge themselves in the world and in materialistic attractions. People and groups of people and even nations are arrogant, prideful, prejudiced, and hegemonic, and fearful.

Life in that kind of environment has become very difficult; consequently, building *akhlaq* to a higher level becomes a big challenge. When we recite these *du'ā*, we

shouldn't recite them once a year, or just in Ramadan, or on the Eid, or just on Friday. But as often as possible, [so that they] remind us, not like there is just a key to unlock the door like magic, but they remind us that the only way to meet the challenges is to follow what has been prescribed for us and guided to us by those who are our guides, by the Prophet Mohammed (sal), by the *awliya-Llāh*. So we have to pray,

O Allah, deposit in me no quality for which I will be faulted, unless You set it right; no flaw for which I will be blamed, unless You make it beautiful; and no deficient noble trait unless You complete it in me.

Allah Swt says, as I quoted to you:

The mutual rivalry of piling up material things diverts you from the more serious things.

I'll give you the *tafsir* along with it.

Until you visit the graves, soon you will know the reality, soon you will know. Were you to know the certainty of mind, you would be aware. You will see that certainty of hellfire; again, you shall see it with certainty of sight, and then you will be questioned on the day about the joys that you indulged.

Allah revealed this *surah* in admonition to those who vie against and engage in mutual rivalry in self-indulgence in material wealth, over neglecting things, by being heedless of their responsibilities in order to amass and seek importance, and to make themselves obvious to people, instead of living a life of joy and modesty. That is in the way we speak, the way we carry ourselves, the way we dress, the way we

encourage others to good actions – all of which is a continuum. Society is always pulling us in one direction, especially pulling women. “This is beautiful. This is the way you should look.” But men are also pulled by their arrogance, their supposed manliness, and lack of understanding and compassion, and lack of a sense of equity and equality.

To live a balanced life means to protect yourself also from unwanted words, unwanted glances, unwanted feelings, unwanted challenges that are not necessary if you are truly not arrogant. “Well, I’m in control of my life. I can say anything. Anything anybody says to me, I can parry it.” But it’s not true. There is always some way that negativity can come to you and influence you. It’s better to be in the center, in the middle, to hold as one’s guide and model people of gentility, and honesty, modesty, and sincerity, and love and happiness. The best way to prove oneself is by one’s inner demeanor and one’s character. Allah Swt warns us of amusement, being busy with unimportant small things, and neglectful of great aims and ideas.

We always want our children to have good vision, and have great hopes and ideas for the future, and have goals. [We want to] encourage them to reach those goals, and not to settle for less; not to settle for a person who is less, a place that is less; to make the best of where Allah has placed you, for whatever reason He has placed you there – to make the absolute best of it. Then you can do your best in that place, and then you have to deal with the arrogance. Then you have to deal with all the praise; and that’s good. That’s an opportunity to strengthen the character. Allah emphasizes that we shall soon come to know reality of pride and arrogance, as well as the neglect for the Hereafter in that *‘āyat* [of *surah*] 102 by repeating those verses over and over again. **“Soon you will know, soon you will know.”**

This *surah* is a reference to that which the human being will see and experience in the Hereafter as a consequence to the over-indulgence, and accumulation of material possessions perhaps. But there is also another aspect of it: wasting your life. Understand the value of things. It's not that you shouldn't have things that are valuable, or beautiful, or encouraging, or uplifting. It's that we don't want to waste our talent and our lives. Visit the graveyard every once in a while. Is there anybody here who likes to visit the graveyard, really look forward to it? Good for you. But most of us don't like to visit a graveyard; it makes things too real. Every once in a while it's very important to do that. When the time comes and we lie down there, and we leave all the pomp and the ceremony and the material gains behind – all the beautiful clothes we bought, our collection of shoes, my 473 pairs of pants for all the ups and downs of loss and gain of weight I have gone through, the jewelry and all the things – then we have to look forward to something else, in another time and another place.

Allah's message to the Prophet Mohammed (sal) said, ***“Man says, ‘My wealth, my wealth,’ but you have not from your wealth save the food you eat, and what you wear, and what you spend in the way of Allah.”*** In today's world, I guess you could say what you don't wear, too. ***“I do not fear you for poverty, but I fear you because of vying from wealth.”*** Sidna Ali (ra) said, *“Two things have killed people: the fear of poverty which forces man to gather wealth by any means and any way, and demanding pride.”* Again, Imam al Jafar as-Sadiq, one of our *awliya-Llāh* in the line of Prophet Mohammed (sal), his grandson, says, *“No one is proud or behaves arrogantly except for the disgrace that he finds in himself.”* Allah warns us when He says, ***“Were you to know with certainty of mind, you shall certainly see the hellfire and shall see it with certainty of sight, and be questioned.”***

Imam Jafar said, when answering the question of Abu Hanifa about the bounties that would be questioned to us on the Day of Judgment,

It refers to us for whom Allah has given His servants bounties and made them united after they were diverse, and joined their hearts together in brotherhood, after they had been enemies with each other. And He has guided them to Islam through Us, and this is the bounty that will not cease. And Allah asked them about the right of the bounty which He has given them and guided them to Islam by Us. Yes, bounty is the Prophet and his household.

Therefore, we have to ask Allah to protect us from pride and arrogance and vying to seek from Him only wealth, and say, “*Allahumma salli ‘ala Sayyidinā Muhammadīn, wasīlatī ‘alaika wa ālihi wa sallim.*” And:

Allah, bless Prophet Mohammed and his household, raise me not a single degree from before the people without lowering me in its like in myself, and bring about no outward exaltation from me without an inward abasement in myself by the same measure.

Inshā’a-llāh. Remember that the honoring may come from the outer, but it also comes from the inner, one’s ego. And also the abasement: you would prefer it to come inwardly, not from the outer. So abase yourself before you are abased, and account for yourself before you are accounted. *Asalaam aleikum.*