

# With Allah

Muharram 1445/August 2023  
Letter No. 2, Amman, Jordan

Dear Believers: as-Salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatu Llahi wa barakatuh.

In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Compassionate: All praise to Allah Most High, and blessings and peace upon His beloved Prophet Muhammad, a light-giving lamp to everyone in the world.

To commence: Allah tells us the secret of our existence in this world by saying in verse 18.7 of Surat al-Kahf:

إِنَّا جَعَلْنَا مَا عَلَى الْأَرْضِ زِينَةً لَّهَا لِيَبْلُوَهُمْ أَيُّهُمْ أَحْسَنُ عَمَلًا

“Verily have We made everything on earth  
a fleeting bedizening of it,  
to try them dire which of them  
may prove finest in works.”

The context of this verse, plain from the verse before it, is to console the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) that it is not his task to *make* everyone believe, but only to *convey* Allah’s message to them, after which everyone is personally responsible, as their *own* trial from Allah, to believe or not. Why? Because everything on the face of the earth, Man and all his possessions, are just a fleeting bedizening or ‘beautifying’ of it that won’t last, a dire or ‘terrible’ test to every last one of us: will we be tempted away from Allah by the tinsel and sparkle and glitter of things that don’t last, or will we get down to our proper business of competing to really please Allah, and trying to be the best of all in good works?

The words of Allah here “Verily have We made everything on earth a fleeting bedizening of it” indicate that Allah has made *ma ‘ala l-ard* or ‘everything on earth’—such as possessions, children, plants, crops, nature, and anything else of benefit—*zeenatan laha*, or ‘a fleeting bedizening of it.’ *Zeena* thus entails that the world is not beautiful in itself, but all these things in it are only *temporary* beauty measures, like makeup, that make it look so.

Allah then says, *Li nabluwahum* meaning ‘to try them dire.’ Allah has created us to undergo *bala*’ or ‘difficult trials.’ The root of the verb here implies that they almost wear out (*yubli*) the person being tried, as clothes get worn out, here meaning in order to see what we are religiously made of. Sa’d ibn Abi Waqqas said, “O Messenger of Allah, which of mankind are the greatest in trials (*bala*)?” He answered (Allah bless him and give him peace): “The prophets (*anbiya*’), then the most righteous (*salihun*), then those who most resemble them, then those who next most resemble them. A man is tried in the measure of his religion (*din*): If his religion is solid, his trials are increased; while if his religion has some flimsiness in it, they are lightened: trials keep after the servant until he is walking upon the face of the earth without a single sin remaining on him” (*Ahmad*, 3.78 (1481). H).

Then Allah says: *ayyuhum ahsanu ‘amalan* or ‘which of them may prove finest in works,’ translated as ‘finest in works’ because the Arabic adjective *ahsan* here is an elative denoting the most superior thing in terms of *husn*, or being beautiful to behold, like the finest article made of its type, such as a stunningly made sword or surpassingly beautifully-worked saddle, so ‘finest’ seemed to best encapsulate the meaning. The *ulema* of *tafsir* or ‘scholars of the meaning of the Quran’ say that the last part of this verse means three things: (1) that the fundamental purpose of all of the wonders we see on earth is *dhuhur ihsan al-muhsineen* or ‘to show the most excellent spiritual works of those who excel in doing good’; (2) that since this is the aim one should put all one’s energies behind, Allah intends by this verse *al-tarhib fi al-taraqqi fi madarij al-ihsan* or ‘to inspire our desire to ascend in the ranks of excelling in doing the best’; and (3) that since those who are finest in works are Allah’s real point in creating the world, people who stubbornly commit unbelief and evil-doing are completely beside the point, without other meaning to Allah than as a test for believers to pray, work, and strive against their misguidance and evil.

As for the *muhsineen* or ‘those who excel in good works,’ the *ulema* of *tafsir* cite Yusuf (upon whom be blessings and peace) as the great prototype of the *muhsin* in the Quran. At every juncture of Surat Yusuf, some terrible trial is sent down upon him, but he always turns to Allah, and his *ihsan* and character only shine all the brighter. Until at the end of the sura in verse 12.101, when he has triumphed over every enemy and woe, reached the highest rank in the land under the king, and is the savior and benefactor of his family despite all his brothers have done to him, he addresses Allah with the words:

‘My Lord, You have endowed me of sovereignty,  
and taught me of what dreams portend;  
Originator of the heavens and earth:  
You are my ever-powerful Friend and Protector  
in this world and the next;  
Take back my soul in whole submission to You as a Muslim,  
and put me among the supremely righteous.’

That is, at the height of everything, he is interested in nothing from Allah in this world but to end his life well and join those Allah loves best.

Indeed *du‘a* or ‘supplication’ is the mark of those Allah loves, and of the best of all prayers is what the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) indicated by saying: “The supplication of the Muslim man for his brother who is not present will certainly be answered: there is an angel by his head who is put in charge of him; every time he makes a prayer for something good for him, the angel says: ‘Ameen! And you shall have the like of it too!’” (*Muslim*, 4.2094 (2733). S). Which is why we should always ask each other to make *du‘a* for us, and when we are asked to by someone, we should really put our heart into it that Allah give them the best. It is also an excellent reason to make *du‘a* for the entire Umma, as well as for the guidance of all mankind, because the more people a *du‘a* affects, the greater the reward.

Question of the Month: “Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman has been quoted as saying that the *khalwa* or ‘dhikr in solitude under the sheikh’s supervision’ is 90 percent of the *tariq* or ‘way.’ Since the *khalwa* is so central to the path in reaching *ma‘rifa* or ‘knowledge of Allah,’ what is the most a *murid* in my circumstances can hope for, not having an opportunity to participate in the *khalwa*, presuming that there isn’t a comparable substitute for it?”

Answer: Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman’s words are a hyperbole (hyPERbole) or ‘figure of speech overstated for emphasis’ common to the idiom and usage of ancient and modern Arabic, and found in both the Quran and hadith, not unlike the words of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) “The hajj is ‘Arafa” (*Ahmad*, 31.64 (18774). S), to stress its importance, not that being at ‘Arafat takes the place of everything else on hajj. Sheikh ‘Abd al-Rahman’s remark was in the context of someone in Damascus or elsewhere claiming that the *khalwa* was a dead letter or obsolete. It is neither, but it remains only a *means*, and the real point of the Sufi training is as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said in the hadith qudsi, “Verily Allah says: He who is hostile to a friend of Mine I declare war against. And My slave approaches Me with nothing more beloved to Me than what I have made obligatory for him, and My slave keeps drawing nearer to Me with voluntary works until I love him. And when I love him, I am his hearing with which he hears, his sight with which he sees, his hand with which he seizes, and his foot with which he walks. And should he ask Me, I swear I shall give to him, and if he seeks refuge in Me, I swear to certainly protect him. And I hesitate to do nothing that I am going to do as much as I hesitate to take back the soul of My believing slave who dislikes to die, for I dislike to displease him” (*Bukhari*, 8.131 (6502). S).

This comes about by perfecting one’s *dhikr* with a life of *taqwa*, love of Allah, and returning one’s attention perpetually to the quest of the heart, which is Allah. When this happens, and one finally finds one’s heart, and finds the ‘joy through Allah’ (al-farah bi Llah) that resembles total absorption of one’s intellectual and emotional being in a single perception of Presence with Allah, then reconnects with this ‘sweet spot’ in the *dhikr*—over the days, months, years, and decades—one becomes of *ahbab Allah*, or ‘those beloved of Allah,’ and doesn’t need the *khalwa* of the Shadhilis or the *Rabita* of the Naqshbandis, or anything else, because one has Allah. Mawlay al-‘Arabi al-Darqawi didn’t use the *khalwa* with Muhammad al-Harraq, when he sat with him from before the noon prayer to the sunset prayer, then authorized him as a *murshid* or ‘guiding sheikh’ in the *tariq*, but al-Harraq had been hammered by adversity and enemies before that, and his life so broken that he almost died, which helped him immensely in the *tariq*, but this is *tahammul al-adha*, or ‘bearing abuse,’ which is another intensive *means*, and another story, which we will tell later, In Sha’ Allah. I hope this answers your question and lays out for you the basic trajectory of a life in the *tariq*. And Allah alone gives *tawfiq*, or ‘success from Him.’

That’s it until next month and next letter, Allah willing; with greetings of peace and felicity to everyone; was-Salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatu Llahi wa barakatuh.

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