

# With Allah

Safar 1445/September 2023  
Letter No. 3, 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, who guides to the way of honor, triumph, and renown without end.

To commence: Allah shows us the path of total success by telling us in verse 33.21 of Surat al-Ahzab:

لَقَدْ كَانَ لَكُمْ فِي رَسُولِ اللَّهِ أُسْوَةٌ حَسَنَةٌ لِّمَن كَانَ يَرْجُوا اللَّهَ وَالْيَوْمَ الْآخِرَ وَذَكَرَ اللَّهَ كَثِيرًا

Verily you have in the Messenger of Allah  
a splendid example  
for whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day  
and remembers Allah much.

The word *ahzab* or ‘leagued forces’ in the name of this sura means the pagan fighting forces leagued against the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and those who believed with him in his times, but in a larger sense, as plain from the other contexts in the Quran where it is mentioned, all the forces of evil leagued against Allah’s messengers and the believers from the beginning of time to the end, as a test of their faith and an obstacle for them to triumph over. In this verse Allah is speaking to the entire Umma, though *a fortiori* (ay-fortYORee) or ‘especially and with even better right,’ to the *munafiqeen* or ‘hypocrites’ mentioned just before this verse on the same page, adjuring them to fight with *ikhlas* or ‘sincerity’ against idolatry and evil with everything they can.

The words of Allah here “Verily you have in the Messenger of Allah a splendid example” mean in the Prophet’s (Allah bless him and give him peace) *sabr* or ‘undaunted steadfastness’; in his *thabaaat* or ‘endurance, certainty, constancy, and perseverance’; and in his *jihaad* or ‘striving for Allah with his life, self, and arms’—that in all of these things you have an *uswatun hasanatan* or ‘splendid example.’ The root of the word *hasanatan*, namely *husn* or ‘being beautiful to look at,’ we saw in Letter No. 2 last month, but here is translated as “splendid.” The Arabic *uswatun*, like the adjective that follows it, is *indefinite* (like all words preceded in English by *an* or *a*), which in most verses of the Quran does not mean something un-emphasized (as the indefinite normally means in English), but rather something *unheard-of* in some way: here, unheard-of in its incomparable greatness and benefit to whoever realizes what it is and takes it in his two hands and proceeds to Allah with it. The verse begins with *Laqad kana* or ‘Verily,’ the initial *lam* (letter L) being *lam al-qasam* or ‘*lam* of Allah swearing by His very Self’—as if saying “By Allah!” for stress and emphasis upon what He is saying; the *qad* mounting the emphasis higher and obliquely hinting at the previous behavior of the *munafiqeen*; and the *kana* or ‘was’ referring not to the past, but to *tahqiq al-wuqu’* or ‘the absolute certitude with which it shall take place.’

The root of *uswatun* is the verb *asawa*, which means to cure or fix a wound, as is said in Arabic, *Asawa al-jurh*, or “He healed the wound.” It is not the same as *qudwa* or ‘exemplar to be followed,’ but means the example and praiseworthy quality that really deserves to be followed and comprises what is good, proper, right, and of greatest benefit to one, just as one would apply balm or cream to heal a wound. Allah’s words *fi rasuli Llahi* or “in the Messenger of Allah” are a figure of speech, as if the medicine were *within* him (Allah bless him and give him peace), to emphasize that it includes everything about him: his words, deeds, and states. The words *li man kana yarju Llaha wa al-yawma al-akhira* or “for whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day” in turn are a *badal* or ‘conjunctive phrase’ referring back to *lakum* or “you have” in the first line, and clarifying that while “you have” refers in principle to the whole Umma, the ones who will really benefit of them are “whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day and remembers Allah much.”

The words *kana yarju* (hopes) in “whoever hopes in Allah and the Last Day” mean someone in this world always longing to meet Allah, and for the reward of his spiritual works in the next world on the Last Day, which is named that because it is unfollowed by any night, and will last forever and ever. The Arabic word *kana* preceding a verb in the imperfect (al-mudari’), as here, is the usual way in Arabic to describe the customary, usual, and invariable practice of someone, expressed in the English as “whoever hopes,” meaning “always.”

Allah’s words *wa dhakara Llaha kathiran* or “and remembers Allah much” mean great devotion to Allah through His remembrance. Allah mentions the tremendousness of this quality in another verse of this sura at 33.35 where He says:

Verily men and women  
 utter in their submission to Allah;  
 And men and women who truly believe;  
 And men and women devoted in adoration;  
 And men and women true in word and deed;  
 And men and women ever steadfast in patience;  
 And men and women meek with humbled awe;  
 And men and women who expend in charity;  
 And men and women who fast;  
 And men and women who keep their private parts wholly chaste;  
 And most nobly men and women who remember Allah much:  
 Allah has prepared for all of them  
 a mighty forgiveness and incomparable wage.

The *ulema* of *tafsir* or ‘scholars of the Quran’s meaning’ tell us that “men and women who remember Allah much” are mentioned by Allah here after all the rest by way of giving preeminence to them, as a *syntactic* or ‘word-order’ superlative or emphatic that is sometimes used in the Quran, placing the highest in rank *last* in a list of others; which is why it has been translated with the words “*And most nobly* men and women who remember Allah much.” Imam Nawawi mentions this verse in his *Kitab al-Adhkar* (Book of Dhikrs) and that the Messenger of Allah (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said: “The utterly devoted have outdone all others [sabaqa al-mufarridun].” They said, “Who are the ‘utterly devoted,’ O Messenger of Allah?” He said, “Men and women who remember Allah much” (*Muslim*, 4.2062 (2676). S). The *tafsir* imam al-Wahidi (d. 468/1076) reports from Ibn ‘Abbas, who went over the Quran twice with the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), that “men and women who remember Allah much” means that “after performing one’s prayers, in the morning and end of day, when going to sleep and when one wakes up, and when leaving home or coming back, one remembers Allah Most High.”

Abu ‘Uthman al-Hiyari, one of the greatest of the *ulema* of Ihsan, said, “*Much dhikr* (al-dhikr al-kathir) is that you remember Him *in* your dhikr of Him: that you did not attain unto His remembrance save *through* Him and *through* His pure generosity”—that is, seeing Allah as the One graciously creating the words of the dhikr in you, not as if *you* are the one creating it. This combines *shukr* or ‘thanks’ with the dhikr, and *in* the dhikr, which makes it a different and better sort of dhikr that cannot be anything but great.

Such dhikr is the key to understanding one of the most important hadiths connected with the first verse above, about the *uswa* or ‘splendid example’ of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) that is of the greatest benefit in applying to one’s life as if applying a cream to a wound to heal it, for he said: “Wondrous strange indeed is the matter of the believer; Verily everything about his matter is best, and that is true of no one else but the believer: If happiness befalls him, he gives thanks (*shakara*), and it is best for him; while if affliction befalls him, he is undauntedly steadfast in patience (*sabara*), and it is best for him” (*Muslim*, 4.2295 (2999). S). Which is to say, that because the believer remembers Allah always, in good times and in bad times, just as the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) and the Sahaba did, nothing can harm him or make him dejected, because he is positive of the mighty reward of Allah for both. When the Canadian war correspondent Eric Margolis was covering the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, he went to an emergency Afghani hospital for amputating war-torn arms and legs. The combatants operated on were young and old, but despite there not being a single bit of anesthetic in the whole hospital—nothing to kill pain whatsoever—he did not find anyone making a single sound or shedding a single tear. Each had his own jihad, had Allah, and was a believer. I grant that this is 180 degrees opposite from the received ideas about ‘therapy’ in the West today, where everyone is expected to be a sob-sister and moan about their ‘pain,’ but I submit that the way of the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) is more effective, life restoring, peaceful, and closer to the only One who can really help, who is Allah. And whoever does it is on the road to a better life.

Question of the Month: I have an “inmate store” where I sell food items and other things to fellow inmates. If they want a candy bar today, they may pay me two candy bars when they pay me back. Is this a form of *riba* (usury)?

Answer: This is valid in the Hanafi school and is not considered *riba*, because for them *riba* in sales involves only gold, silver, and foodstuffs that are *mawzoon* or ‘weighed out,’ as foodstuffs are, for example, that are sold by weight in bulk or as dry goods to customers. In your example here, the candy bars are countable individual things, even if sold two for one, and are not weighed out foodstuffs, so the transaction is *halal* and legally valid, and not *riba* or usury.

Till next letter, Allah willing, greetings of peace and felicity to everyone; was-Salamu ‘alaykum wa rahmatu Llahi wa barakatuh.