

With Allah

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Dear Believers: as-Salamu 'alaykum wa rahmatu Llahi was 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, His mercy to all worlds of beings.

To commence: Allah's guidance in the Quran is best for us in this world and the next. He says in Surat al-Nahl 16.96:

مَا عِنْدَكُمْ يَنْفَدُ وَمَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ بَاقٍ ۗ وَلَنَجْزِيَنَّهُنَّ الَّذِيْنَ صَبَرُوا ۗ أَجْرَهُمْ بِأَحْسَنِ مَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ

What you have ever vanishes,
and that with Allah ever lasts.

And We shall certainly requite the steadfast their wage,
as if their every deed
were the best one they ever did.

Here, the first two lines are a *ta'leel wa madmun* or 'the reason and content' of the last words of the previous verse just above it "Verily what is with Allah is better for you, if you only knew"—Why? Because *ma 'indakum yanfadu wa ma 'inda Llahi baaq* or "what you have ever vanishes, and that with Allah ever lasts." The words *ma 'inda Llahi* or "that with Allah" mean everything we send ahead for ourselves of immortal good deeds, whether dhikr, the prayer (salat), or hajj, or anything else that is performed for Allah that He accepts. What you have, by way of contrast, ever vanishes. The verb *yanfadu* in the phrase *ma 'indakum yanfadu* or 'what you have ever vanishes,' means *nafaad*, or 'to disappear little by little until it is gone,' such as wealth, rank, position, good looks, strength, and finally life itself. All of it "ever vanishes," which is why Allah uses the *mudari'* or 'imperfect tense' of the verb *yanfadu*, to mean always, continually, and by degrees: something is always disappearing out of our lives bit by bit until nothing remains of it, while spiritual works alone are what we ultimately have at the end of the day. Notice that in the second line, when Allah says, *wa ma 'inda Llahi baaq(in)*, "and that with Allah ever lasts," for *lasts*, Allah uses the word *baaq(in)*, the pausal, indefinite form of the word *baaqi*, which is an active participle (name of the doer), literally meaning here the *laster* or the *remainder*, to emphasize its *thubut* or 'sureness, certainty, permanence, and immutability'—for unlike what we have, it will *never* disappear.

Then Allah says, *Wa lanajziyanna lladhina sabaru ajrahum*, "And We shall certainly requite the steadfast their wage," for this sura was revealed in Mecca before the Hijra, when the Muslims still numbered less than sixty or seventy people, and if person entered Islam, he might face persecution, lose social position (mansab) or other worldly advantages, and have to practice his *din* in the face of some very real opposition. This would take considerable *sabr*, meaning 'fortitude, patience, or undaunted steadfastness.' This is why Allah uses a number of powerful emphatics in this verse to assure the patient to hold fast to their *din*. For example in the word *lanajziyanna* or "We shall certainly requite," the first *lam* (letter L) is *lam al-qasam* or 'the *lam* of swearing an oath,' meaning here *Wa Llahi* or "By Allah"—that is, Allah swearing by His very Self that He shall *requite* them or 'give them in full' everything He has promised them. This verb is also forcefully energized by the *iltifat* or 'turn to a different name for the subject of the sentence,' namely the word *We* in this third line of the above verse, from the word *Allah* in its second line. Too, the marker in Arabic of *nahnu* or "We" is the first *nun* or 'letter N' in the verb *lanajziyanna*, and this pronoun marker by which Allah refers to Himself is called *nun al-adhama*, or 'the letter N (denoting We) of insuperable greatness'—just as we say in English "the royal We" which kings and queens once used for themselves. Notice too that Allah has appended to the end of this verb *lanajziyanna*—whose core is *najziy* ("We shall requite")—the doubled *nun al-tawkeed* or 'letter N of intensive emphasis' to indicate certitude of occurrence, often seen in verbs used in oaths. All of these strengthen the steadfast by complete certitude that Allah will fulfill His sworn word to those who fulfill their *din*. It applies to all who bear up under pressure to give up, lessen, or compromise their *din*, till the end of time.

The word *sabr* or 'patience' is defined in Arabic as *habsu l-nafs 'ala makruh*, or 'making oneself put up with the disliked.' It includes fortitude and patience to (1) do what Allah says, (2) leave what He forbids, and (3) put up with other people. The third of these is often the hardest, and the Prophet in particular (Allah bless him and give him peace) had to bear up under great abuse, harassment, and threats of all kinds from the idolators of Mecca. The troubles we Muslims find in life with situations, things, and people, are all part of Allah's plan to either bring us close to Him if we prove steadfast and undaunted; or else put us far from Him—if we are dismayed, or despair, or give in to what we are supposed to hold out against. Here, as in everything else, the secret of *tawfiq* or 'success from Allah' is always *al-isti'ana bi Llah* or 'asking Allah's help.' It could be as simple as the prayer "My Lord, help me" (*Rabbi a'inni*) at one's moment of need.

Then Allah says *bi ahsani ma kanu ya'malun(a)* or "as if their every deed were the best one they ever did." What it means—and some people may be surprised by Allah's incredible generosity to the *sabirin* or "those of undaunted patience" here—according to the ulema of tafsir, is that "Allah looks at their works, and requites them the like of the reward of the very best one." That is, if one salat (prayer) deserves the reward of fifty good deeds, while another one they prayed better deserves a hundred, Allah will reward each of them a hundred, the reward of the best of them. This is mentioned by Biqa'i, Alusi in Surat al-Zumar as the

strongest position, Habannaka, Ibn Kathir, and by Abu Su‘ud as one of two positions, though it is the best interpretation because it preserves the original meaning of the word *ahsan* or ‘best.’ Biqa‘i interprets this expression by saying, “Since the most generous among kings give rewards according to works, ranging from the best down to the less than the best, He informs us [here] that He turns to the very best [of our works] and raises all the others [of them] up to it, and makes those lower than it equal to it” (*Nadhm al-durar*, 11.248). The ulema differ about the implications of this. Some say it applies to works of the same type, meaning that all of one’s salats will be judged according to the best of them; one’s every hajj will be judged according to one’s best hajj; one’s instances of patience in the face of pressures to be impatient will be judged according to the most patient and steadfast one ever was—and so forth. Others differentiate *within* these kinds of works between the *wajib* or ‘obligatory’ on the one hand, and the *nafila* or ‘non-obligatory’ on the other, one’s prescribed prayers for example rewarded according to the best of them, and one’s sunna prayers rewarded according to one’s best sunna prayers. Others say it applies to *all* good works whatever, regardless of their kind, meaning that one’s very best single work of one’s lifetime, whether dhikr (remembrance of Allah), shukr (gratitude), zakat, salat, hajj, or whatever, will become the standard of reward for all the other good works in one’s life. And Allah knows best.

Moreover, Allah uses this same identical expression in the next verse, 16.97 of Surat al-Nahl, generalizing it *beyond* just those who are patient—or perhaps telling us who the patient really *are*—to *all* believers who work righteousness. He says in it: “Whoever works righteousness whether man or woman, being a believer, We shall bestow them a life wondrous fair, and requite them their wage hereafter as if their every deed were the best they ever did.” But we have to remember that first, this is for those whose works are *accepted*, and second, it does not in itself mean that all our *sins* are forgiven, for that requires *tawba* or ‘sincere repentance,’ which means (1) to have regret, (2) to ask Allah’s forgiveness, (3) to resolve never to go back to the sin, and (4) if one wronged others financially or otherwise by it, then one must get them to forgive one, and either pay them back or have them waive the damages. The sign that one’s *tawba* is accepted is that Allah out of His mercy keeps one from ever going back to it. Finally, the above verses are a tremendous reason to keep trying to make all of our works better and better, so as to keep improving the level of the standard at which *all* of them will be rewarded by Allah when He judges us. May He show us His favor and mercy always and forever. Amin.

Regarding good works, I remember a sheikh in Turkey, some years ago now, who had all his *murids* (disciples) recite the Quran in *khatmas* or ‘from beginning to end’ and donate the reward of each *khatma* to the *mujahidin* or ‘fighters in the path of Allah’ battling in Afghanistan against the Russians who invaded their country. He told his *murids* the Russians would lose. I found this a bit remarkable, since Russia was a superpower with a massive war machine, while Afghanistan had the lowest per-capita income of anywhere in the world. But he and his *murids* kept it up over the next years, Allah helped the *mujahidin* keep up the jihad, and Russia lost. The ulema of *fiqh* or ‘details of Sacred Law’ affirm that one can donate *mithla thawab al-‘aml* or ‘the like of the reward of one’s works’ to others, and that Allah gives them the reward, without this lessening the reward of the person who first did and donated the work. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) slaughtered a ram for himself and family, and for his whole Umma or nation, showing that one *can* donate the reward for works to others (*Muslim*, 3.1557 (1967). S). Now, good works are a reason for *tawfiq* or ‘success from Allah,’ and there is no reason to suppose that all the works that were donated to the *mujahidin* were not part of the reason for their success against the Russians. So as Muslims are now wondering what they can do to help downtrodden Muslims fighting enemies who are bombing them, starving them, and trying to kill them by thirst, we can not only make *du‘a* or prayers for them, but also ask Allah to help them in every way through the good works of our own that we donate the reward of to them.

Question of the Month: If I am confronted aggressively, verbally or physically, and find it necessary to respond a bit more aggressively in order to deal resolutely with the confrontation from another inmate, whether Muslim or not—is this sinful, or will it harm my spiritual progress and growth in Islam?

Answer: Allah will judge each individual confrontation individually and justly, so no single answer can cover every situation. But first, the Prophet has said, “There is no harming, or harming back: whoever really harms someone, Allah will really harm him; and whoever makes things really hard for someone, Allah will make things really hard for him” (*al-Mustadrak ‘ala al-Sahihayn*, 3.260 (2380). H). Self-defense is acceptable, while the rules for it are longer than can be spelled out here, but are found in *fiqh* books in *Bab al-siyal* or ‘Chapter on Warding Off Aggressors,’ translated in *Reliance of the Traveller* at (07), 594–95. In brief, one’s own needs do not nullify others’ rights to personal safety, property, or reputation; and if there *is* conflict, one must use the minimum amount of force possible to stop the threatener. I have noticed that when one is strong, bold, confident, and prepared to fight, menacing animals and humans tend to shy away—while al-‘Arabi al-Darqawi use to say, *Al-sa‘iqa la tusibu l-dhakirin*, or “Not even a lightning blast can hit those making dhikr.” Be with Allah, read *Ayat al-Kursi* and ask Allah’s aid before tough situations, and *In Sha Allah*, Allah will help.

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