

# With Allah

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Letter No. 7, Amman, Jordan

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

In the Name of Allah Most Merciful and Compassionate: Praise to Allah Most High beyond all praise, and blessings and peace upon His beloved Prophet Muhammad, the light of every illumined life.

To commence: Those who attain to true *taqwa* or ‘godfearingness’ are loved by Allah, and are of the highest ranks of His *awliya* or ‘friends’ in this world and the next. As Allah says in verse 3.134 of Surat Al ‘Imran, praising and explaining the *muttaqin* or ‘those of taqwa,’ whom He has referred to in the verse just before it, by mentioning some of their traits:

الَّذِينَ يَنْفِقُونَ فِي السَّرَّاءِ وَالضَّرَّاءِ وَالْكَظِيمِينَ الْأَغْيَظَ وَالْعَافِينَ عَنِ النَّاسِ وَاللَّهُ يُحِبُّ الْمُحْسِنِينَ

Those who expend in good times and in bad,  
and who constrain their rage,

and who wholly pardon other people;

And Allah loves those who ever excel in good.

In this verse, Allah is giving some of the details of *taqwa*, described earlier in the sura as to “obey Allah and the Messenger (Allah bless him and give him peace),” as one of the greatest means of victory over the early Medinan community’s many enemies. The Quran begins here with some of the very hardest things for people to do: to spend what one has for the sake of Allah, partially as a reminder to those with newfound wealth from the spoils of battle. Allah’s words *Alladhina yunfiquna fi s-sarraa’i wa d-darraa’(i)* I have translated as “Those who expend in good times and in bad.” The verb *yunfiquna* or ‘they spend,’ in the imperfect tense, means whenever need arises, the *verb* denoting the *occasional* nature of this. Also, *what* they expend has been omitted (*hadhf al-maf’ul*), to generalize to *anything* one can expend, be it money, help, loan of a riding animal, an encouraging word, a smile, or anything else needed. The word *sarraa’* derives from *suroor* or ‘happiness,’ defined as “a state of inward relaxation and relief from the causes of sorrow, pain, or being upset,” while the *fa’aa*l pattern of *sarraa’* is a hyperbole (*hyPERbole*) or ‘very emphatic expression’ of *tul al-imitdad*, or ‘lengthiness,’ meaning a *long* spell of happiness, referring, as Tabari notes, to “a state of frequent happiness, due to affluence and ease of life.” The opposite is *darraa’*, from *darar* or ‘harm,’ and is of the same intensive pattern, denoting long ‘affliction,’ including poverty, sickness, pain, wounds, diseases, troubles of the body, loss of loved ones or possessions, or desperate times—whatever *afflicts* one. Raghīb al-Asfahani says the expression “in good times and in bad” is used to generalize to *all* times. So *taqwa* means those who spend what they can for Allah no matter what.

The words *wa l-kadhimina l-ghaydh(a)* or “and who constrain their rage” is an attribute of those of *taqwa* mentioned first above, and as Abu Su’ud notes, “He [Allah] switches to the [*noun*] form of the active participle (name of the doer) here [from the previous line’s *verb* “expend”] to indicate unceasingness (*istimrar*)”—that is, *always* constraining one’s rage. The word *kadhimina* means they suppress their anger from letting it loose. It derives from *kadhm*, or ‘to tie up the mouth of a full water-skin so tightly no water can leak out,’ which is also an emphatic hyperbole. Imam al-Mubarrid says, “It signifies that one holds back anger when absolutely full to the brim with it (‘an imtila’in minhu).” The word “rage” is used here to translate *ghaydh* because it is the Arabic word for the fiercest degree of white-hot anger. So “constraint” means when filled to the top with furious rage—that is, “Let *alone* any lesser degree of anger one is in”; and secondly, as Ibn ‘Ashur notes, it is so suppressed and hidden that it is not apparent at all. This is of course for our *own*, not Allah’s, benefit, as are all of His commands. A man once said to the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace), “Give me a piece of advice,” and he replied: “Do not get angry.” He repeated the request a number of times, but the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) only said: *La taghdab*, “Do not get angry” (*Bukhari*, 8.35 (6116). S). Experience teaches everyone not born yesterday the tremendous wisdom of these two words at every turn of life. A hot head is about the worst asset one can have, while a cool head is generally the best way to get somewhere. How many a friend lost, how many a chance lost, how many a job lost, how many a spouse lost, how many a life lost—over a temper lost. The Messenger of Allah said: “The strong man is not the champion wrestler no one can throw: The strong man is he with a firm hold on himself when anger rises” (*Bukhari*, 8.34 (6114). S). A Turkish sheikh once observed that if someone enraged were only shown his own face in a mirror for a moment, he would be too shocked at its ugliness to ever get angry again. This was not the way the Prophet was, and he even said (Allah bless him and give him peace), *Man hurima l-rifqa hurima l-khayra kullah(u)*, “Someone deprived of gentleness (*rifq*) is deprived of all good” (*Abu Dawud*, 4.255 (4809). S). In a word, angry deeds are haram, and there is no baraka in the haram.

The next line, *wa l-afeena 'ani n-nas(i)* or “and who wholly pardon other people,” is another trait of the godfearing. This sense of *'afw*, translated as “wholly pardon” here, is defined by the ulema as “letting off someone who deserves to be punished and disregarding what he has done to one and its due punishment, as if it had never happened”—this of course referring to personal offenses other than those deserving prescribed legal penalties (*hudud*) in Allah’s religion. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said, “No wealth was ever lessened by giving charity; Allah never increased any servant by his wholly pardoning another (*bi 'afw*) save in honor, triumph, and renown (*'izz*); and no one ever showed humility to another for Allah’s sake, save that Allah raised him all the higher” (*Muslim*, 4.2001 (2588). S). Nawawi remarks of the second of these, about wholly pardoning others, that it has two interpretive aspects. The first is in this world and is that when people know he pardons (*'afw*) and pays no attention (*safh*) to what enemies have done to him, he surpasses others (*sada*), grows great in hearts, increases in honor, triumph, and renown (*'izz*), and in their respect for him (*ikram*). The second is in the next world and is his great reward and his *'izz* or ‘honor, triumph, and renown’ there. But there is no reason why Allah could not choose to honor him with these in both worlds. Now the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) has said, “Whoever has done a wrong to his brother, let him ask him to pardon him for it. Because there won’t be any dinars or dirhams [to buy him off] there [at Judgement Day], before his own good deeds are taken away from him to repay his brother. And if he doesn’t have any good deeds [left], a portion of his brother’s *bad* deeds will be taken off the brother and cast on himself” (*Bukhari*, 8.138 (6534). S). So perfect justice will be done, because Allah is perfectly just. If one however wholly pardons others and tells Allah one has forgiven them, one has waived the option mentioned in this hadith, but may hope for the even higher reward and still greater benefit of being of those of *taqwa*, who have the highest degrees in paradise. But even in such a case, the offense committed by others against one, if they do not repent and ask Allah’s forgiveness for disobeying Him by their sin, will deserve its due punishment. Abul Hasan Shadhili, of the Imams of Ihsan, related that his own sheikh, Ibn Mashish, told him: “There are two bad deeds that when committed, a great many *good* deeds seldom have any *benefit* with: bitterness about what is destined by Allah, and wronging the servants of Allah. And there are two good deeds that when done, a great many *bad* deeds seldom cause any *harm* with: being contented with what is destined by Allah, and paying no attention (*safh*) to wrongs done one by the servants of Allah.”

In the final line, *wa Llahu yuhibbu l-muhsinin(a)* or “And Allah loves those who ever excel in good,” the last word, *muhsinin*, means those of Ihsan, which has two possible senses here. Most of the ulema of tafsir, including Tabari, Ibn Kathir, Abu Su’ud, Wahidi, Zamakhshari, Ibn ‘Ashur, and Abu Hayyan, say it means performing the best of spiritual works in the very best way in every detail, which the Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) explained in the hadith of *Sahih Muslim* as “to worship Allah as if you see him,” and this *implicitly* includes the works mentioned in this verse of expending charity, constraining rage, and pardoning others, though only one of the ulema, Tusi, has explicitly mentioned that by its very meaning Ihsan includes these things. Others of the ulema understand a more specific, second meaning here, namely *al-ihsanu ila l-ghayr* or ‘doing good to others’ which more obviously relates to the things mentioned in this verse, saying the *muhsinin* are those who give help, kindness, and support to others, which fits the context here very closely—though the majority’s position, that Allah intends both senses, is especially convincing in the larger context of this verse among the other verses coming before and after it, describing those of *taqwa*, may Allah make us of their number and company.

Question of the Month: My prison Muslim community is, and many prison communities are, predominately Salafi. I stopped attending our Jum’a because the khutbas are concretely anti-Tasawwuf [against Sufism]. Am I committing a sin by not attending our prison Jum’a, and is there an alternative that is Islamically valid, or must I attend regardless of the circumstances?

Answer: I sent this question to the Karachi office of the Hanafi scholar Taqi Usmani, previous mufti of Pakistan, and the answer returned was that Wahhabism in the khutba is not an excuse for missing Jum’a, so you have to go. Pray for Allah to guide those giving the khutba, and whatever they rant about Sufism, you can depend on what you *know* from your own experience to affirm its opposite. To my experience, few of them who rant seem to know the fundamentals of Sufism.

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