



A Loan of Love: Appreciating the Blessing of Family in Difficult Times

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One of the greatest factors that increases one's faith is seeing revelation come alive. It is one thing to read the Qur'an and prophetic traditions without seeing their practical applications and manifestations. It is another thing altogether to experience the truth of revelation firsthand in one's own life. In the present circumstances, we are able to experience this in the hadith collected by al-Bukhārī and reported by Ibn 'Abbās in which the Prophet ﷺ stated, "There are two blessings which most people are cheated out of: good health and free time."¹

The point here is not to talk about the blessing of good health; people are obviously very concerned about that blessing right now. The larger takeaway is that there are blessings very near to us that are easy to overlook, perhaps because we are so concerned with getting other things or because we have grown accustomed to them and take them for granted. For those of us who live near *masjids*, the temporary closure of many houses of worship and the inability to attend Friday congregational prayer and congregational prayers in general has awakened in our hearts a newfound love for the houses of Allah. This rekindled yearning and desire to be in the *masjid*, especially so close to Ramadan, is a blessing that brings alive for the Muslim the statement of Allah, the Exalted:

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَمَنْ يُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ يَهْدِ اللَّهُ قَلْبَهُ

No affliction happens except by the will of Allah. And Allah will guide the heart of whoever has *īmān* in Him.²

‘Alqama bin Qays (d. 62 AH), a scholar of Kufa and student of ‘Abdullāh bin Mas‘ūd, commented on the preceding verse, "This refers to a person afflicted by a trial but knows it is from Allah and so is pleased with Allah and submits to Allah's will."³

An integral part of that submission involves being blessed to search for indications and representations of Allah's perfection in a trial as opposed to being preoccupied

¹ *Saḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:88, no. 6412.

² Qur'an 64:11.

³ Abū Ja‘far aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr aṭ-Ṭabarī* (Riyadh: Dār ‘ālim ul-kutub, 2003), 23:12.

with the trial itself. A person who is able to do so is able to praise and thank Allah in moments of tribulation and difficulty as opposed to complaining about the affliction itself. One is able to practice an act of worship that is often confused with being connected to one's limb and tongue more than it is connected with the heart: gratitude. If Muslims benefited nothing more from this pandemic than a greater appreciation, reverence, and love for the *masjid*, it would suffice them as a blessing. In order to better appreciate this blessing, consider that when people are resurrected from their graves, they will be wading in various levels of perspiration, commensurate with the sins they have committed. To this point, the Mālikī scholar Abū Bakr bin al-ʿArabī (d. 543 AH) commented, “In this book, we have clarified that each individual will be drowning in his perspiration in accordance with his sins. The location is the same, yet the perspiration of each individual will rise with him without affecting the person standing next to him in the same location, contrary to what occurs with water on earth.”⁴

Among those who will experience some relief on that day is a person whose heart is attached to the *masjid*. In the hadith collected by both al-Bukhārī and Muslim and reported by Abū Hurayrah, the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ stated, “There are seven people whom Allah will shade on a day there is no shade but His shade...a person whose heart is tied to the *masjid*.”⁵ In the narration collected by Muslim, a version of the hadith reads, “A person tied to the *masjid* from the time he leaves it until he returns.”⁶ This attachment, though caused by painful realities in this life, will reap huge rewards in the hereafter for the person whose heart is truly connected to the *masjid*. To this end, the great scholar of al-Andalus, Abū ʿUmar Yūsuf bin ʿAbdul Barr (d. 463 AH), mentions in his commentary on Imam Mālik's *al-Muwatṭāʾ*, “Whoever is in Allah's shade on a day when there is no shade but His shade has escaped the horrors of circumstance *inshaʾAllah*, and Allah knows best. May Allah make us among them. *Ameen*.”⁷

⁴ Abū Bakr b. al-ʿArabī, *ʿĀridat al-aḥwadhī* (Cairo: Maktaba Ibn Taymiyya, n.d.), 12:235.

⁵ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, 8:163, no. 6806.

⁶ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, 2:716, no. 1031.

⁷ Yūsuf bin ʿAbdul Barr al-Mālikī, *At-Tamhīd* (Mohammedia: Maṭbaʿat al-Fadhāla, 1967), 2:283.

Consider all of the people at this very moment who long to be in Allah's houses all over the country; then consider that Allah created the painful circumstances by which that longing would be developed in their hearts. A painful experience in this life may be what will save them from the horrors of that most awesome day. Realize that this is but one of numerous manifestations of Allah's unmatched wisdom and the subtle ways by which He guides His servants to that which they need the most.

Another blessing of this pandemic and a clear indication of Allah's wisdom is that through it Allah has brought family members together who have grown accustomed to living apart, each in his own orbit, often between a material world and a virtual one. Similar to health, free time, and the *masjid*, family is a blessing that many are cheated out of. Allah indicates the blessing of family clearly in Surah an-Nahl when He states:

Allah gave you spouses from yourselves and gave you children and grandchildren from your spouses and provided you with good and wholesome things. Do they believe in falsehood and show ingratitude for the favors of Allah?⁸

Their closeness is similarly implied in the following statement of Allah, the Exalted:

When the deafening blast (of the horn) occurs, the day when a person will run away and leave behind his brother, his mother, and his father, his companion (i.e., his wife), and his children. Each one of them on that day will be preoccupied with his own concern.⁹

The great Yemeni scholar of the thirteenth *hijrī* century Muḥammad 'Alī ash-Shawkānī (d. 1250 AH) commented in his exegesis, *Fatḥ ul-qadīr*, "These individuals were mentioned specifically because they are one's closest relatives, to whom one is expected to show the most affection and compassion. Running away

⁸ Qur'an 16:72.

⁹ Qur'an 80:33–37.

from them and leaving them behind would only occur due to unimaginable horror and a tragic situation.”¹⁰

The scene that Allah depicts with our closest family members fleeing from us indicates how close families should be. As ash-Shawkānī himself mentioned, these relatives are “expected to show the most affection and compassion.” Unfortunately, though the terrors of the Day of Judgment have not been realized, many family members are already distant from one another; and this has become our norm. Life is set up in such a way that family members spend as little time together as possible. Many of us begin our days heading to work and school, rushing to our rooms in order to wind down from having to deal with people all day or to fulfill family duties of preparing or purchasing dinner. Once dinner is prepared or presented, it is not uncommon for family members to go their own separate ways and busy themselves with a screen of some sort. Many of us take it for granted that we even have family. Even more saddening is that, even with the present pandemic, families are frustrated having to spend extended time together, many for the first time in a long time. There is a longing to get away, back to “better times” when family members spent hours apart. This seems counterintuitive as the widespread fear of a serious, life-threatening virus would seem to be just the impetus required to bring family members closer. However, it is often not until disaster strikes, until one is actually afflicted with illness, until the threat of loss is real, that we begin to take things seriously and long for time lost. Like any blessing, many are cheated out of it and do not realize its true value until it is gone or taken away.

Imam Muslim collects a narration reported by Anas bin Mālik, may Allah be pleased with him, in which he describes how his sickly, younger half-brother, Abū ‘Umayr, passed away. Anas’s mother, Umm Sulaym, seeks to break the news gently to her husband, Anas’s stepfather Abū Ṭalḥah. She prepares a tantalizing meal for him and shares an intimate evening with him. Thereafter, she breaks the difficult news to him, using words indicating her strength of faith and a proper conceptualization of the value of family. She said, “If some people were to loan

¹⁰ Muḥammad bin ‘Alī ash-Shawkānī, *Faṭḥ ul-Qadīr* (Mansoura: Dār-ul Wafā’, 2005), 5:512.

something to a family and, thereafter, requested that the loan item be returned, should the family refuse to return the loaned item.”

Her husband, Abū Ṭalḥah, replied, “No.”

She said, “So be patient and seek reward with Allah for the loss of your son.”¹¹

There are so many points to ponder in her words, perhaps the most salient being that our time with one another is limited; ergo, every moment is special. Even when a family is not faced with tragedy—and we ask Allah to bless and protect all of our family members—children grow up so quickly. For many of us, it was just yesterday when our children admired our every word and movement. Then, their friends became their world and our role as parent did not seem to matter so much anymore. Shortly thereafter, they began families of their own or at least started lives of their own. The point is that if we begin to look at each family as a loan of comfort, a loan of love, a loan of mercy that will one day be reclaimed, perhaps that perspective will help us to appreciate the blessing of being able to spend meaningful time together.

A pathway towards recognizing the true value of family begins with the heart. That we actually begin to feel that family is a blessing is found in the attention that we give to them with our hearts. When family is perceived as a blessing, one cannot help but think about them and desire their well-being. This desire is manifest on our tongues when we begin to thank Allah more for the blessing of family and to incorporate the supplications for family in our daily practices. Ibn ‘Umar reported that the Prophet ﷺ would never leave out the following words every evening and every morning, “O Allah, I ask you for protection in regards to my religion, my worldly affairs, my family and my wealth...”¹² Al-Amīr Aṣ-Ṣan‘ānī remarked, “[Asking for protection] regarding one’s family is to be saved from poor or negative interaction with them as well as from them being afflicted with illness and

¹¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 2144.

¹² *Sunan Abī Dāwūd*, no. 5904; *Sunan an-Nasā’ī al-kubrā*, 10:325, *Sunan Ibn Mājah*, no. 3871; classified as authentic by al-Albānī.

disease or from a preoccupation with overindulgence of transitory, material possessions.”¹³

Allah Himself mentions that His servants, the servants of the Most Merciful, say:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا قُرَّةَ أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

And [they are] those who say, “Our Lord, make our spouses and our children the joy of our eyes and make us ourselves leaders in piety and righteousness.”¹⁴

Ibn Kathīr commented, “They ask Allah to bring out from their progeny and offspring those who obey Him and worship Him alone, without partner.” He quoted al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī as saying, “It is for Allah to allow His Muslim servant to see his wife, his brother, and his close relative obedient to Allah. I swear by Allah that there is nothing more joyous to a Muslim than seeing his child, grandchild, brother, or close relative obedient to Allah, the Exalted.”¹⁵

Their appreciation for family is seen in their concern for the well-being of their family members in this life and the next, which shows a true comprehension of reality. Certainly, all parents want to see their children physically, financially, and emotionally well. Yet, no matter how intact these aspects of life are, they must come to an end. Consequently, a parent does a disservice to those closest to him or her if the only concern is for their material well-being and not for their eternal well-being. This desire for family well-being that is expressed in one’s prayer for family must also be realized through action. In this regard, Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī notes:

It is important to understand that the Arabic term *du‘ā’* linguistically means “seeking,” which means that the one making *du‘ā’* is calling out for what he or she is seeking after and hoping to attain. At times, *du‘ā’* is performed by supplicating to and asking of Allah, just as when a person says, “Allah, forgive me. Allah, have mercy on me.” Other times, *du‘ā’* is seeking the

¹³ Al-Amīr as-Ṣan‘ānī, *Subul as-salām* (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2014), 8:314.

¹⁴ Qur’an 25:74.

¹⁵ Ibn Kathīr, *Tafsīr Ibn Kathīr* (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2010), 6:132.

means by which something desired is to be attained, which is busying oneself with the obedience of Allah and His remembrance.¹⁶

Later in the same reference, Ibn Rajab cites a prophetic tradition collected by at-Tirmidhī in which Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī reported that the Prophet ﷺ quoted Allah as saying, “Whoever is distracted from asking me directly because he is preoccupied with the Qur’an and remembering me, I will give him the best of what I give those who ask me directly.”¹⁷ Ibn Rajab highlights the fact that when someone really desires something, he or she not only asks for it but actually strives to attain it. Accordingly, those who truly appreciate the blessing of family and, therefore, want the members of their family to be the joy of their eyes strive to take care of the blessing Allah has given them by helping their family be obedient to Allah and attain happiness in this life and the next. This is by achieving the latter part of the supplication mentioned in Surah al-Furqān, which reads:

وَالَّذِينَ يَقُولُونَ رَبَّنَا هَبْ لَنَا مِنْ أَزْوَاجِنَا وَذُرِّيَّاتِنَا فُرَّةً أَعْيُنٍ وَاجْعَلْنَا لِلْمُتَّقِينَ إِمَامًا

And [they are] those who say, “Our Lord, make our spouses and our children the joy of our eyes and **make us ourselves leaders in piety and righteousness.**”¹⁸

Those who want to see the best in their families help their families by not only asking Allah to guide them and protect them, but they lead by example, striving to create a family founded in Islamic values. Establishing prayer in the home on time as a family is a wonderful opportunity that often is not shared by men in the family, who should be praying their obligatory prayers at the *masjid* as much as reasonably possible. With curfews and home-shelter ordinances in effect, this is a real opportunity for parents to set the tone for timeliness with prayer in the household. It is an opportunity for the entire family to pray together. It is also an opportunity to practice the common remembrances to be said after the prayers and in the morning and in the evening. Imagine the blessing of a family whose members encourage one another to do an action that will supersede many other actions on the Day of Judgment. Abū Hurayrah reported that the Prophet ﷺ said

¹⁶ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Faṭḥ al-Bārī* (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī, 2004), 1:18.

¹⁷ *Sunan at-Tirmidhī*, no. 2926.

¹⁸ Qur’an 25:74.

to his economically deprived companions when they complained about the advantage that the wealthy had for good deeds, “Shall I not teach you something by which you will catch up to those who have done more than you, and get ahead of those who come after you? Only those who do as you do will be able to achieve such excellence.”

They said, “Yes, Messenger of Allah ﷺ.”

He ﷺ said, “Say *Subḥānallāh*, *Alḥamdulillāh*, and *Allāhu Akbar* thirty-three times after every prayer.”¹⁹

This does not diminish the value of charity, which the Prophet ﷺ described as “evidence” for one’s *īmān*,²⁰ it is an indication of the importance of the remembrance of Allah. For the family, developing this habit of worshipping together will help them preserve their identity as Muslims and take pride in their religion.

One should also model family service by making time to help one another around the house and showing love through a shared sense of family duty. The idea that we worship Allah through helping one another with tasks, chores, and service to one another can really help to set a new, positive tone in the household. Imagine if mundane chores like washing dishes and folding clothes were not just seen as tasks but as an actual means of drawing close to Allah. This balance between family service and worship was established by our Prophet ﷺ in the tradition collected by al-Bukhārī and reported by ‘Ā’ishah who, when asked about what the Prophet ﷺ used to do when at home, responded, “He used to be in the service of his family; however, when it was time for prayer, he ﷺ left to go pray.”²¹ Look at the balance and the model that he ﷺ set for his family and for his followers. Consider also that the Prophet’s ﷺ service to his family was visible and memorable to those dearest to him. It is this appreciation for family, realized in the heart, expressed on the tongue, and practiced through the limbs that will not only show our appreciation to Allah for the blessing of family but also allow us to be

¹⁹ *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, no. 223.

²⁰ Ibn Rajab al-Ḥanbalī, *Jāmi‘ al-‘ulūm wal-ḥikam* (Dammam: Dār Ibn al-Jawzī 2002), 1:412.

²¹ *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī*, no. 676.

remembered by those dearest to us when we will be in need of their appreciation. Allah, the Exalted, commands righteous, appreciative children, saying:

وَاخْفِضْ لَهُمَا جَنَاحَ الذُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ وَقُلْ رَبِّ ارْحَمْهُمَا كَمَا رَبَّيَانِي صَغِيرًا

Show merciful humility towards them (i.e., your parents), and say, “My Lord, show mercy to them because they cared for me when I was young.”²²

We ask Allah to bless us to take full advantage of this opportunity that He has placed before us out of His supreme wisdom and mercy just as we ask Him to remove this and all affliction from Muslims everywhere. *Ameen*.

²² Qur'an 17:24.