

THROUGH THE LENS OF IMAN

REFLECTIONS FOR THE SOUL

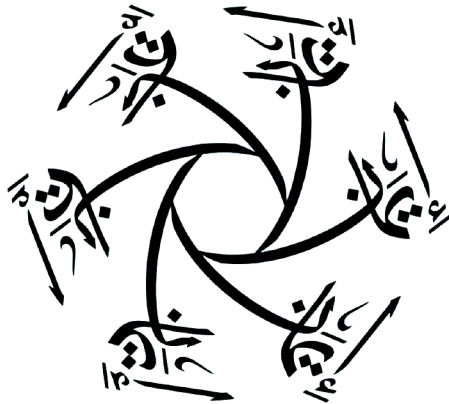


MUFTI MUHAMMAD TAQI USMANI

TRANSLATION AND NOTES BY ABEER ARAIN

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Foreword

In today's world, our modern society is too preoccupied with following western philosophy and values. Social media platforms are readily available for displaying wealth and luxury lifestyles, whether it is genuine or not. Unfortunately, we are surrounded by a never-ending competition for acquiring more wealth and attention. In the midst of these worldly distractions, it has become difficult for Muslims to build a strong connection with Allah ﷻ and the Qur'an. We fall into the trap of *ghaflah* (heedlessness), where people are not concerned whether they are living their daily lives according to the laws of Allah ﷻ and the Sunnah of His Prophet ﷺ. In the Qur'an, Allah ﷻ has mentioned that the temporary life of this world is beautified for the disbelievers and is nothing but amusement and play. For the obedient Muslims, Allah ﷻ has promised an eternal life without sickness, jealousy, or death. They will remain young, and never become old and destitute. There will be everlasting happiness and never-ending joy.

One of the best ways to realign our thoughts and rectify our mistakes is to acquire knowledge from scholars who spend their life teaching the Book of Allah ﷻ. This not only keeps us informed but also strengthens our connection to our *dīn*. In the current times when it is easy to get distracted by the temptations of wealth, fame, and ostentation, we have teachers who are spreading beneficial knowledge of *dīn* without asking for anything

in return. One such person is Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani who is blessed with great knowledge by Allah ﷻ.

Mufti Taqi Usmani belongs to a family of Islamic scholars, and he has authored more than 100 publications on various topics, including Islamic finance, Qur’anic sciences, and exegesis of the Qur’an. His speeches are known for their simple language and uncomplicated symbolizations from everyday life. The anecdotes of his ancestors also impart a strong impression on his audience. Shaykh Usmani’s speeches had a tremendous impact on my life as well. Therefore, I decided to compile some of them in a short book as my humble contribution to benefit my Muslim sisters and brothers around the globe.

Through the Lens of Imān is a compilation of Shaykh Usmani’s enlightening and thoughtful speeches on various occasions. He delivered the talks in Urdu, and *Alhamdulillah* they are now translated into English to reach a broader audience in the West. This book aims to bring our attention to the common matters of everyday life and relate them to the teachings of the Qur’an and Sunnah.

I would like to thank Shaykh Mufti Taqi Usmani and his team at Darul Uloom, Karachi, Pakistan, for allowing me to translate and publish his work. I would also like to extend my thanks to Brother Haris Ahmad

Time and Trade

وَذَكِّرْ فَإِنَّ الذِّكْرَى تَنْفَعُ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٥٥﴾

And remind, for indeed, the reminder benefits the believers. (al-Dhariyat 51: 55)

The above ayah discusses the concept of a ‘reminder’. *Fadhakkir* is the word mentioned in the Qur’an for the term reminder, and it comes from *tadhkeer* which has the literal meaning of ‘reminding about something that has been forgotten’. It may also mean ‘to remind about one’s inattentiveness’. The ‘reminder’ mentioned in the above ayah is about the actual goal for our life. Why are we sent to this world, and what are we actually doing?

We are so consumed in the worldly life that its real meaning seems to have been lost. When we study the life of our Prophet’s ﷺ companions, we find that they had a habit of reciting Surah al-Aṣr before adjourning their gatherings.

وَالْعَصْرِ ﴿١﴾ إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ لَفِي خُسْرٍ ﴿٢﴾ إِلَّا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَعَمِلُوا الصَّالِحَاتِ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالْحَقِّ ﴿٣﴾ وَتَوَاصَوْا بِالصَّبْرِ ﴿٤﴾

(I swear) by the Time, indeed man is in a state of loss, except those who believed and did righteous deeds exhorted each other to follow truth and exhorted each other to observe patience. (al-Aṣr 103: 1-3)

What was their purpose of reciting Surah al-Aṣr? It is because in Surah al-Aṣr, Allah ﷻ reminds us of the designated time we are given in this world in a very powerful way, and when Allah ﷻ reminds us that as humans we are at a loss, it means that He demands our immediate attention. We are at a major loss unless we remain steadfast, perform good deeds, and encourage others to be patient and righteous. That is because every human being comes into this world with a limited time, and only Allah ﷻ knows how much time has been allotted to each of us. The departure from this world is a universal truth accepted by everyone who walks on this earth, irrespective of their beliefs. Nobody denies the certainty of death.

The time given to us is like a bag of trading goods. Everyone arrives in this world with ample stock. The purpose is to trade our goods in a way so that we can benefit from Allah's approval and blessings by being granted *Jannah* (happiness and peace forever). If a trade is done according to the rules of Allah ﷻ, we depart with a bag containing a much larger profit. On the contrary, a careless deal may not bring any benefit but may lead to negative revenue.

My father, Mufti Muhammad Shafi (may Allah ﷻ grant him *Jannah*) once narrated an interesting story of a nawab (ruler) of Bengal in the olden times.¹ The nawab

1. Shaykh Usmani's father, Mufti Muhammad Shafi (1897 – 1976) was a prominent scholar from the Indian Subcontinent (and later migrated to Pakistan). He authored *Ma'ariful Qur'an*, one of the most widely read commentaries on the Holy Book. In 1951, he founded

Backbiting

In today's contemporary world, *Alhamdulillah*, we can fulfill the basic obligations to the Almighty, such as praying *ṣalāh* on time, keeping all fasts during Ramadan, and giving *zakat*. However, the biggest concern we encounter is submitting to the wishes of our *nafs* (the inner self). Every human has two major enemies: one is *Iblīs* (*shaytaan*), and the other is our *nafs*. They both push us towards sins, the obvious, and the hidden ones. The obvious ones include robbery, consuming alcohol, looking at haram, lying, backbiting, having haram relationships, and so on. The hidden sins are inside us, in the form of jealousy, pride, ostentation, love of acquiring inexhaustible wealth and fame.

Abu Hurayrah narrated that the Prophet ﷺ was asked, “O Messenger of Allah ﷺ, what is backbiting?” He ﷺ replied, “It is saying something about your brother which he would dislike.” He was asked again, “Tell me how the matter stands if what I say about my brother is true.” He ﷺ said, “If what you say of him is true, it is backbiting, and if what you say of him is not true, it is slandering.” (Sunan Abi Dawud 4874)

One of the most prevalent sins in our society is called *gheebah* (backbiting). It is also known in our society as gossiping, which is to talk about a matter related to a Muslim brother or sister in a way that if it was said in their presence, they would feel distressed. We all know that backbiting is a major sin, yet we are fully involved in

Overspending

There are wrongdoings that we are aware of and feel remorseful about, such as lying, backbiting, and so on. However, there are matters which are easily disregarded because of our ignorance, and lack of knowledge about their harm. Metaphorically, it is like an individual suffering from a disease, but he is unaware of his illness and therefore, does not seek medical help. As a result, the disease strengthens its roots, eventually taking over the body. One such disease in our society is called *israaf*, also known as squandering or overspending, and it is one of the biggest sins. Allah ﷻ mentions in the Qur'an:

إِنَّ الْمُبَدِّرِينَ كَانُوا إِخْوَانَ الشَّيْطَانِ

Surely squanderers are brothers of Shaitan
(Bani Isra'il 17: 27)

وَكُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا وَلَا تُسْرِفُوا

Eat and drink but do not be excessive
(i.e., do not go beyond bounds) (Al-A'rāf 7: 31)

The Prophet ﷺ refrained his ummah from wasting money and said, "Allah ﷻ does not like for you to waste wealth'.

There are three major forms of *israaf*. The first form is spending money on utterly forbidden and unlawful

The Real Wealth

The biggest blessing in this life is the *īmān* (faith) given to us by Allah ﷻ which is our real wealth. Many people have to sacrifice a lot to achieve strong *īmān*. During the time of the Prophet ﷺ, the Muslims faced cruelty and oppression from the disbelievers of Makkah. Later, the Muslims of Chechnya, Bosnia, and Central Asia also withstood oppression but remained steadfast on the path of Allah ﷻ.

Currently, Muslims in Palestine, Kashmir, Burma, and East Turkestan are facing tyranny with the strength of their *īmān*. When I visited Uzbekistan a few years ago, the locals informed me that during the Soviet war, praying *ṣalāh* was considered a crime.¹¹ Towns were destroyed, and families were brutally martyred if the Holy Qur'an was found in their houses. Yet, the Muslims of Central Asia protected their *īmān* with utmost bravery. They lost their loved ones, wealth, and properties but stayed relentlessly steadfast on their *dīn*. On the other hand, we are blessed by being born into a home in a society where we can practise our *dīn* without trepidation. And for this, we should always thank Allah ﷻ and be grateful to Him.

11. During the Soviet regime, Islam was banned, and Muslims were not allowed to practise any Islamic ritual. *Ṣalāh* was also forbidden, and it is reported that Muslims were executed for praying *ṣalāh*, not just inside the mosques, but also for praying in their homes.

Mufti Muhammad Hasan, a renowned scholar, used to say, “*Imān* is the biggest wealth. Keep protecting it until you reach your grave, and you will be victorious in your *Ākhirah*, *Insha’Allah* ﷻ.” It is because *imān* is the deciding factor between our outcome in *Jannah* or *Jahannam*. Having *imān* means a person has protection from the never-ending wrath of the Hellfire. This is important because polytheists will not be able to escape from *Jahannam*. For someone with *imān*, no matter how sinful a person is, even though he may be punished initially for his sins, he eventually will be granted *Jannah* if he believed in the oneness of Allah ﷻ. Our Prophet ﷺ used to explain this concept using a beautiful example:¹²

Narrated by Abu Huraira: I heard Allah’s Messenger ﷺ saying, “My example and the example of the people is that of a man who made a fire, and when it lighted what was around it, moths and other insects started falling into the fire. The man tried (his best) to prevent them (from falling into fire), but they overpowered him and rushed into the fire.” The Prophet (ﷺ) added: “Now, similarly, I take hold of the knots at your waist (belts) to prevent you from falling into the Fire, but you insist on falling into it.” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 6483)

There are two pathways in front of us, one is the path of *Shaytaan*, and the other is the path of Rahman. The path of *Shaytaan* has worldly desires, including fame, wealth, and so on. The one that goes to the Rahman

12. The salvation lies in following the commands of Allah ﷻ, through the Sunnah of the Prophet ﷺ who was given the responsibility to teach us the *dīn* of Allah ﷻ.

Tahajjud

Qiyam al-layl (the prayer of the night) is a great blessing.¹⁵ It is neither *farḍ nor wājib*. Allah ﷻ has not mandated us to wake up at night and pray (if it was, I wonder how many of us would have been able to wake up and pray). *Tahajjud* is a Sunnah that strengthens our spirituality more than many other deeds. The blessings we get from praying *Tahajjud* are unimaginable.¹⁶

يَا أَيُّهَا الْمَرْمَلُ ① فَمِ الْبَيْتِ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا ② تَصْنَفَهُ أَوْ انْقُصْ مِنْهُ
قَلِيلًا ③ أَوْ زِدْ عَلَيْهِ وَرَتِّلِ الْقُرْآنَ تَرْتِيلًا ④

O you, wrapped up in clothes, stand at night (for prayer) except a little half of it, or make it a little less, or make it a little more; and recite the Qur’ān clearly with tartil (in a distinct and measured tone). (al-Muzammil 73: 1-4)

During the day, we are busy with everyday chores, and our minds are occupied with hundreds of thoughts. But in the depth of the night, during the last third, when we take time out to strengthen our connection with

15. Here, respected shaykh is talking about the *qiyam ul-layl* as well as *tahajjud*, however, the *bayān* is specifically on *tahajjud* prayer.

16. An important distinguishing factor between the prayer of *tahajjud* versus *qiyam ul-layl* is that *tahajjud* requires some sleep at night, as it means ‘to rise from sleep’ while *qiyam ul-layl* means to pray at night without having slept at any time of the night.

Allah ﷻ, we are endowed with special blessings and rewards.

Abu Huraira reported that the Prophet ﷺ said, “Our Lord Almighty descends to the lowest heaven in the last third of every night, saying: “Who is calling upon Me that I may answer him? Who is asking from Me that I may give him? Who is seeking My forgiveness that I may forgive him?” (Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 1145)

When one-third of the night is over, Allah ﷻ descends to the lowest Heaven. An opportunity is given to us to ask for *maghfirah* (forgiveness) and *aafiyah* (wellness). This announcement continues until the time of *Fajr*. Those who wake up to have a conversation with their Creator, in the form of *du‘ā’*, are blessed with abundant favours. It is a precious time kept by Allah ﷻ.¹⁷ The Prophet ﷺ used to encourage his companions to pray *Tahajjud*.

Abdullah ibn Umar ﷺ narrates his story:

In the lifetime of the Prophet ﷺ, whosoever saw a dream would narrate it to Allah’s Messenger ﷺ. I wished to see a dream that I could share with him. Once I saw in

17. The *Qur’an* has mentioned the characteristics of the servants of *Rahmaan*, one of which is that they get up at night and perform the *salah* of *Tahajjud*. (al-Furqān 25: 64) *Tahajjud* is a source of great spiritual energy. The Prophet ﷺ said, “You must perform the night prayer for it is the habit of the righteous who came before you; it brings you closer to your Lord, it expiates your evil deeds, and prevents you from sinning.” (Tirmidhi 3549)

unit in our time. The only way to liberate oneself from worldly temptations and unnecessary extravagance is by remembering Allah ﷻ and the Day of *Qiyamah*. *Halal* earning brings contentment to the heart that flourishes with the *dhikr* of Allah ﷻ.

How do we bring the *dhikr* of Allah ﷻ into our lives? There are various techniques explained and practised by our Prophet ﷺ. One that was stressed specifically is the constant supplication in the daily routine. For example, starting the day with a *du'a*:

الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ الَّذِي أَحْيَانَا بَعْدَ مَا أَمَاتَنَا وَ إِلَيْهِ النُّشُورُ

Praise is to Allah Who gives us life after He has caused us to die and to Him is the return.
(Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhari 6324)

Sleep is a minor form of death because the soul is taken when a person sleeps. Every morning, Allah ﷻ gives us another chance to rectify our matters. The second part of the *du'a* (رُؤُسُنَا لِمِثْلِهِ) means that we all will be returning to Allah ﷻ. The first lesson this *du'a* gives us upon waking up, is about our guaranteed departure from this world, when we will return to Allah ﷻ. What we do in the day should revolve around the concept of *du'a* recited upon waking up.

Second, when entering the bathroom, recite:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنَ الْخُبْثِ وَالْخَبَائِثِ

The Contentment of Gratitude

Shaddad ibn Aws رضي الله عنه was a companion of our Prophet ﷺ who also became the narrator of the famous *Hadith* on *sayyidul istighfar*. It is a *du'ā'* regarded by the Prophet ﷺ as one of the best supplications to ask for forgiveness.⁴⁴ One day, when the Prophet ﷺ was close to depart from this world, *Shaddad* was sitting closer to him. He was in deep grief thinking about the beloved Prophet ﷺ. He said, "O Prophet ﷺ, this world now feels worthless." The Prophet ﷺ replied, "Shaddad ibn Aws, you will see the conquest of *Shaam* (present day Syria) and *Bayt al-Maqdas* by the Muslims, and you will get to work there as well."⁴⁵ The Prophet ﷺ further added, "O Shaddad! If you see the people amassing gold and silver, then say these statements a lot:

44. Sayyidul Istighfar is considered as the master *dhikr* of *tawbah*. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The most superior way of asking forgiveness from Allah ﷻ is, "O Allah ﷻ, You are my Lord. None has the right to be worshipped but You. You created me and I am your slave, and I am faithful to my covenant and my promise as much as I can. I seek refuge with You from all the evil I have done. I acknowledge before You all the blessings You have bestowed upon me, and I confess to You all my sins. So, forgive me, for nobody can forgive sins except You." The Prophet ﷺ then added, "If somebody recites it during the day with firm faith in it, and dies on the same day before the evening, he will be from the people of Paradise; and if somebody recites it at night with firm faith in it, and dies before the morning, he will be from the people of Paradise." (Bukhari 6306)

45. It is reported that as predicted by the Prophet ﷺ, *Shaddad ibn Aws* witnessed the victories of Muslims and lived through the time of all four caliphs and has his resting place in Jerusalem.

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي أَسْأَلُكَ الثَّبَاتَ فِي الْأَمْرِ، وَ الْعَزِيمَةَ عَلَى الرَّشْدِ،
وَأَسْأَلُكَ مُوجِبَاتِ رَحْمَتِكَ وَ عَزَائِمَ مَغْفِرَتِكَ، وَ أَسْأَلُكَ شُكْرَ
نِعْمَتِكَ، وَحُسْنَ عِبَادَتِكَ، وَأَسْأَلُكَ قَلْبًا سَلِيمًا، وَ لِسَانًا صَادِقًا،
وَأَسْأَلُكَ مِنْ خَيْرِ مَا تَعْلَمُ، وَ أَعُوذُ بِكَ مِنْ شَرِّ مَا تَعْلَمُ،
وَأَسْتَغْفِرُكَ لِمَا تَعْلَمُ، إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ عَلَّامُ الْغُيُوبِ

“O Allah ﷻ, verily I ask of You for the strength of perseverance of obedience on the *dīn*, and determination in practising the *dīn* and goodness. And I ask of You for that which obligates Your mercy and resolutions for Your forgiveness. And I ask of You for the capability to be thankful for Your blessings and to worship You in a correct and good way. And I ask of You for a heart which is purified in belief and free from desires and a truthful tongue. And I ask of You for the best of what You know, and I seek refuge with You from the evil of what You know, and I seek forgiveness for that which You know. Indeed, You are the One who knows the unseen.”

The above *Hadith* highlights a crucial point. When people around us are occupied with worldly luxuries, we must direct our focus towards asking Allah ﷻ for perseverance by saying, “O Allah ﷻ, bless me with perseverance in performing good deeds, and perseverance to do them regardless of anyone distracting me or making fun of me and that I keep doing it to please you.”

Generally, we find it easier to initiate a good deed. For example, we may feel energetic and motivated to begin praying extra *nafl* prayer or *dhikr* someday.

Humanity

For centuries, when a student starts learning a *Hadith*, the first Hadith that is taught is called *Hadith of Rahma* (mercy), also known as *Hadith-ul-Musalsal bil Awwaliyyah*. It is as follows:

الرَّاحِمُونَ يَرْحَمُهُمُ الرَّحْمَنُ

Those who have mercy, The Rahman will have mercy on them. (Musnad Ahmad)

ارْحَمُوا مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ يَرْحَمَكُم مَّن فِي السَّمَاءِ

Have mercy on those who are on the earth and the one in the sky will have mercy on you. (Musnad Ahmad)

In the above *Hadith*, the Prophet ﷺ mentioned that whoever has mercy on others will also benefit from the mercy of Allah ﷻ. Having compassion for everyone includes the whole of humanity, irrespective of their level of *taqwa* (piety) or even faith. Everyone deserves mercy. The method of humanitarianism may be different, but there must be no repugnance towards any person or community. Hatred is for the *kufir* (disbelief and infidelity), not for the individual who is involved in it. Those involved in *kufir* are like people suffering from a disease. They deserve our sympathy and prayer for *hidāyah* (true guidance), and not our anger.

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THROUGH THE LENS OF IMAN

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In our current times, it is easy to get distracted by the temptations of the material world. The never-ending competition of acquiring fame and ostentation may blur one's purpose in life. Acquiring the knowledge of deen is important when aiming to reorient life matters. One of the best ways to do that is to find the company of those who remind us of Allah.

Through the Lens of Iman is a compilation of enlightening and thoughtful speeches of Shaykh Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani. This short book aims to draw our attention to the ordinary matters of everyday life and how one can increase one's consciousness according to the teachings of the Qur'an and Sunnah.

Mufti Muhammad Taqi Usmani is a leading Islamic scholar and jurist who has authored more than a hundred publications on various topics, including Islamic finance, Hadith, Qur'anic sciences, and the tafsir of the Qur'an. His speeches are known for their simplicity of language and relatable symbolizations from everyday life.


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