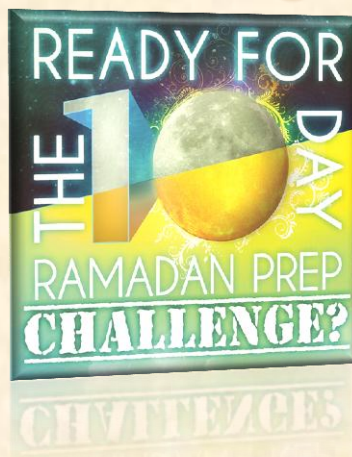


Salah 2.0

Sh. Abdul Nasir Jangda

Summarized by: Sister S.T.

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Al-salāmu ‘alaykum wa raḥmatullāh wa barakātuh.

My topic is *ṣalāh* (prayer). I generally wanted to talk about prayer and how to improve our prayer and secondly I want to relate it back to the month of Ramaḍān and how it factors in to what Ramaḍān is about.

I want all of the listeners to understand and fully grasp that *ṣalāh* is unfortunately treated as a very ritual form of worship and just going through the motions and reading certain things and following the technical procedure.

Ṣalāh is so much more than that. The technicalities of prayer are definitely important and should be learned and understood, but we know in our *dīn* that these type of mishaps or small technical oversights are things that Allāh forgives and overlooks, but the real essence of the prayer is the fact that when we pray, we are talking to Allāh. It is a dialogue and conversation between us and Allāh. It is us turning to Allāh to talk about whatever we need to talk about, as long as we need to talk about it, and to ask Allāh for whatever we need at that time and in that situation. This is the essence of prayer.

The way I like to simply explain it and break it down is that when you pray, you are talking to Allāh. While *ṣalāh* has a certain formality and there is a *fiqh* of *ṣalāh* (technicalities of prayer), we also need to bring a little informality to our prayer. What I mean by that is that too often when we pray, it is a very formal affair and formal procedure. “Let’s all read these things, and only do these actions, and think about these certain things,” whereas we need to create informality in prayer – in the sense of trying to establish a level of intimacy within prayer. Try to connect your heart with Allāh. Emotion should play a role in your prayer.

The very first thing that I wanted to talk about is in terms of improving the quality of prayer. There are a lot of technical terms, and we can call it *khushū’*. We are just going to use very simple terminology here to accommodate anyone and everyone who might be a part of the talk today. How do we bring *quality* within our prayer? One of the primary means of bringing quality into our prayer is understanding the meaning of what we read, say and recite within our prayer.

I want to practically share a few examples in regards to this. Get a piece of paper and grab a pen and feel free to take a few notes. Writing down and taking notes, even minimally is an important part of the process of seeking knowledge. There is a *ḥadīth* where the Prophet (*ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) said, “Trap knowledge by writing it down” and by using the tool of writing that Allāh has gifted and granted us.

Allāhu Akbar

The concept is that when you *understand* what you read, say and recite in prayer, it allows you to bring reflection and contemplation and pondering back into your prayer. It brings the element of emotion into the prayer and turns it into a very important factor. For example, when we start the prayer and transition from many of the positions within prayer, we say the phrase ‘Allāhu Akbar.’ We can say it is probably the most often repeated phrase by a Muslim because it is in the *adhan* 6 times, the *iqamah*, the *ṣalāh*, and when we hear a nice lecture or see something nice, we will say, “Allāhu Akbar.” We repeat it so often that we kind of take it for granted and don’t think about anything when we say it. But it is just “Allāhu Akbar?!” What does Allāhu Akbar mean? What is the translation?

Many of you might have said or been thinking: Allāh is the Greatest. While that is true and Allāh is the Greatest, that is not what Allāhu Akbar means. Any basic student of the Arabic language could tell you that *akbar* is the comparative and not the superlative. For example “Zayd is faster than Ahmad, but Khalid is the fastest,” ‘faster’ is the comparative and ‘fastest’ is the superlative. *Akbar* is the comparative.

Based on that, what we understand is that Allāhu Akbar means Allāh is greater. Let me explain what is going on here. If I was to say, “Zayd is faster than...” and don’t complete it, you are naturally waiting for me to complete the sentence and thought. Similarly, when we say Allāhu Akbar, Allāh left it blank. This is a very common occurrence in the Qur’ān. Whenever a statement demands an object and that object is not provided but the statement is left open on purpose, it is so that we can fill in the blank for ourselves and customize the message according to our own situations.

Example 1: You are praying and the phone rings, and you say Allāhu Akbar – for you – in that situation – at that time – that would mean that Allāh is greater and more important than the phone.

Example 2: You are praying and your friend is waiting for you outside, Allāhu Akbar means Allāh is greater and more important to you than your friend.

Example 3: It is time for prayer and there is a football or basketball game on TV that you are watching, Allāhu Akbar means Allāh is greater than the game that is on TV and Allāh is more important than that entertainment, so on and so forth.

Whatever your situation is, you fill in the blank and customize it for yourself. This provides you with something to reflect on and something tangible you can think about in regards to Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta’āla*) and you experience an emotion and reflection that yes, Allāh is more important to you and greater than what is at hand.

When you properly, thoroughly and deeply understand that Allāh is greater and more important than whatever is distracting you at that moment. It allows you to experience that emotion and this is where the quality and focus and concentration in prayer comes from.

Sujūd

The next example I want to share with you is *sujūd*. Think about, ponder and grasp what the position of *sujūd* is like and what it is about. In *sujūd*, we put our face on the ground. We do it so



often that we take for granted what that means. What is the most respected and noble part of the human body? It is our face. It is what we take care of and how we identify ourselves and how we present ourselves to people and how we smile. Our face is our honor and our dignity. We take our face, which is the most honored and noble part of our body, and put it on the ground where a minute ago someone was walking by with their feet. In fact, a minute ago someone might have been walking by with their feet and now I'm putting my face on the ground. *SubhānAllāh*, think about that. That is the lowest possible position a human being can put him or herself in.

Really and fully grasp this. Outside of prayer and doing *sajdah* to Allāh, would we ever put our face on the ground? We wouldn't! It is only in front of Allāh that we do that. I want you to even take this a little bit further. If you got into a physical confrontation or fight with someone and they beat you up and then they took your face and smashed it against the ground, wouldn't that be the most humiliating and disgraceful moment of your life? Absolutely. But *subhānAllāh* I now want you to think about this fact: we willingly put our noble and respected face on the ground, not once but dozens of times a day in front of Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'āla*) because it humbles us. It is how we humble ourselves before Allāh. We remind ourselves where we came from and where we are going to go back to. It brings us all the way down to the very ground and reminds us to be humble before Allāh (*subhānahu wa ta'āla*) and humble in general.

Now I want you to think about the words we say in *sujūd*. When we go into *sajdah*, we say, "*Subhāna Rabbi Al-A'la*. [How absolutely perfect and magnificently flawless is my Lord, Allāh who is the highest and most noble and most exalted.]" While we are putting ourselves in the lowest position possible, we are attributing the *highest* position of exaltation to Allāh. Normally we read what we read in *sujūd* and go through the motions and the ritual and process, but when you know what it means and think and reflect upon it, it becomes a completely different experience.

The next time you get a chance to offer *ṣalāh*, think about these reflections and ponder on them and see the level of quality and the difference that it brings to your prayer.

I now want to connect the two concepts together: *ṣalāh* and Ramaḍān. I want to cover another supplication that is recited or could be recited within the prayer, which I find to be very inspiring and motivational and powerful.

A Special Du'ā'

The Prophet (*ṣallallāhu 'alayhi wa sallam*) taught us to say within our prayer:

اللَّهُمَّ إِنِّي ظَلَمْتُ نَفْسِي ظُلْمًا كَثِيرًا وَلَا يَغْفِرُ الذُّنُوبَ إِلَّا أَنْتَ ، فَاعْفِرْ لِي مَغْفِرَةً مِنْ عِنْدِكَ وَارْحَمْنِي، إِنَّكَ أَنْتَ الْغَفُورُ الرَّحِيمُ

Allāhumma inni ḡalamtu nafsi ḡulman kathīra wa la yaghfiru dhunūba illa anta fāghfirli maghfiratan min 'indika warḡhamni innaka anta Al-Ghaḡfūr Al-Raḡīm.

"O Allāh, most definitely I have wronged myself excessively and none can forgive sin except You, so forgive me a forgiveness from Yourself and have mercy upon me. Surely, You are The Most-Forgiving, The Most-Merciful"

The word that is used in "I have wronged myself" is from the same root as the word *ḡulm*. *ḡulm* typically means oppression. *ḡulm* in classical Arabic means to misappropriate something and put

something where it does not belong. That is why *shirk* is referred to as *zulmun azeem* because you misappropriate Allāh's right to be worshipped. Oppression is called *zulm* because you misplace or abuse people's rights. Sinning or doing wrong is also referred to as *zulm* because we misappropriate the blessings Allāh has given us of time, energy, and resources which were meant to be used in the obedience and worship of Allāh but are used for the disobedience of Allāh.

O Allāh, most definitely I have wronged myself. The word repeats itself. *zulman kathīran*. This is a grammatical function in the Arabic language. It is basically the classical Arabic equivalent of the exclamation mark. When we want to emphasize the meaning by putting an exclamation mark, in classical Arabic in verbal sentences you would use this.

Zulman – I not only wronged myself but I have done horrible things. *Kathīran* – an abundance of them, repeatedly, I am a repeat offender. The first part of the supplication is admitting the fact that I have done lots of wrong things. It is a very severe admission of guilt. If you think about that conceptually, the first step in the process of rehabilitation is accepting first and foremost that the person has a problem.

In the first part of the supplication, we accept the fact that we have a problem, and the problem is that we continuously keep doing wrong and keep messing up and wronging against ourselves.

Wa la yaghfiru dhunūba illa anta: The next part of the supplication says that: There is absolutely no one who can forgive sins except for You. I want to explain a couple of things here. The word *dhunūb* in the Arabic language is the plural of the word *dhanb* and comes from the root meaning tail. What does a tail have to do with sins? When people habitually commit a sin, they often conveniently create a dual reality for themselves and that is that they commit the sin and when they are done, they walk away and go back to normal life and disassociate from whatever activity they were engaging in previously. That type of convenient reality or delusion is created by the sinner to make it easier to go on and live life the way they are living it. Think about the tail of a cat or a mouse. Wherever the cat or mouse runs, what follows it everywhere it goes? The tail. The only way to stop the tail from following the animal is to cut it off. Similarly, when we commit a sin, the sin follows us everywhere we go, and the only way to make it stop following us is to cut it off or sever it, which is what we call repentance. The word is being used here very powerfully and teaches us a very valuable lesson.

Think about this conceptually: no one can forgive sins except for You. I will give you an analogy and example. If you get a knock at your door at 1 am and open the door and a friend or relative is standing at the doorstep and you ask him what is going on and if everything is ok, and they say that they have nowhere else to go but here. The question is this: the person is obviously coming because they want you to let them in, but why didn't they start by saying that they need a place to stay or some money? Why did they start by saying, "I have nowhere else to go"? To show their desperation. They are saying, "Don't turn me away."

In the supplication, when we say "*Wa la yaghfiru dhunūba illa anta,*" we are showing our desperation to Allāh that we have no one else to turn to. We first admitted guilt, and then we are saying "Oh Allāh, there is no one else I can go to or talk to, who can forgive my sins. Oh Allāh, please do not turn me away."



Fāghfirli: Forgive me.

Maghfiratan: This is a bigger form of the word *ghafarah*. It is a more sophisticated form of the word. There is a very simple rule in Arabic morphology and studying the Arabic language, and that is: when you have a bigger word, when the number of letters increase, the meaning also increases. *Maghfiratan* doesn't just mean forgiveness. It means complete and total forgiveness and wiping the slate clean and starting anew.

Fāghfirli maghfiratan is forgive me a complete and total forgiveness. We don't ask Allāh based on who we are or our sins, but we ask Allāh based on who He is and His ability to forgive.

Min 'indika: This is an expression in classical Arabic meaning 'as a special favor from You.' Here we also state that we are not entitled to this forgiveness and don't think that we deserve this forgiveness, rather, "Oh Allāh, grant us this forgiveness and wipe our slate clean as a special favor from You." We are not deserving and not entitled to this.

Warḥamni: And have mercy on me. Throughout the Qur'ān, and supplications when the Attributes of Allāh are mentioned in the Qur'ān, there is a very deep-rooted connection between forgiveness and mercy. That is why the two Attributes of Allāh mentioned together more often are *maghfirah* (forgiveness) and *raḥīm* (mercy). The reason why these are often mentioned together is a beautiful reason. When you are wronged by me and then I apologize and try to make it up to you, even if and you forgive me, nevertheless, the next time you are around me, you will have your guard up a little bit more and you will be a little bit more cautious around me because I have wronged you in the past.

Once we betray someone, there is a certain trust that goes away and a certain precaution taken after that point. When we sin, we betray Allāh. He has created us and given us everything that we have and continues to provide for us and nourish us and maintain us, and He has given us literally every blessing that we have. When we sin, we betray and disobey Allāh. *SubḥānAllāh*, when we disobey Allāh, we not only ask for forgiveness but for mercy.

Mercy in the Arabic language is symbolic of bringing two things closer together. The womb of the mother in classical Arabic is called *raḥim*. It is a means of establishing the closest and most merciful relationship that any two human beings in the world share, which is a mother with her child.

When we disobey Allāh, we not only ask for forgiveness but for mercy. "O Allāh forgive me and bring me closer to You by Your Mercy." *SubḥānAllāh*, Allāh is the only One capable of this. This is one of the unique things about Allāh that when we disobey Allāh, He not only forgives us, but we become closer to Him through the process of *tawbah* and repentance and forgiveness, than we were before we committed the sin. Allāh loves us more after we sin and ask for forgiveness. This is the Mercy and Benevolence and Kindness and Generosity of our Lord. We ask for Allāh's Mercy.

innaka anta Al-Ghafūr Al-Raḥīm: "Most definitely You, and only You are constantly forgiving and constantly merciful." Notice the repetition. At the beginning of the supplication, we said, "I have wronged myself excessively and repeatedly." We need Allāh's constant forgiveness.



This is a very powerful and beautiful supplication. Try to make an effort to learn this supplication in preparation for the month of Ramaḍān, and read this in your prayer. This supplication is read when you are in the final sitting of the prayer after the salutations on the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam), the *darūd Ibrahimiyy*. Make an effort to learn this supplication now that you know the in-depth meaning of it and can read it with the proper reflection and understanding *inshā’Allāh*.

The last food for thought that I want to give you on this supplication is that the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) taught this supplication to Abu Bakr (*raḍyAllāhu ‘anhu*) and told him that he needed to read this supplication in his prayer every time he prayed. *SubhānAllāh*, look at the level of forgiveness being asked for and the level of admission of guilt and desperation being shown within this supplication. Abu Bakr was prescribed and recommended by the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) to read this in his prayer. If Abu Bakr (*raḍyAllāhu ‘anhu*) was being told by the Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) to read this in his prayer, then where do you and I stand?

Inshā’Allāh use this as a catalyst and motivation and platform and foundation to continue discovering the beautiful, profound meaning of what we recite in our prayers.

The Heart – Clean It of Filth & Fill It with Good

After having discussed this improving the *ṣalāh* - the prayer, I wanted to relate this back to the month of Ramaḍān. I want to talk about the spiritual implication of prayer and the structure of Ramaḍān. Something that we don’t understand very well about the month of Ramaḍān is that it cures the heart. Ramaḍān is a time to cure the heart and clean it and purify our souls and our hearts. The heart is a container. There are numerous *aḥādīth* that tell us the heart is like a container. Purifying the heart is similar to purifying a container.

Let’s say you have a bowl or cup and have some dirt in there. You want to drink cool, pure water out of this cup or this bowl. What is the very first thing that you have to do before you can drink water out of it? You have to empty it out and dump the dirt somewhere. Our hearts are full of a lot of unfortunate things, whether it be certain sins or attachment to certain sins or jealousy or hatred or enmity or lust. We have to clean it out and wash it out. This is what fasting is about. We literally deprive ourselves and deny ourselves those things that are permissible for us. Eating *ḥalāl* food and drinking *ḥalāl* things are permissible. Engaging in physical intimacy with one’s own spouse is permissible and *ḥalāl* for us. We deprive ourselves of these permissible things to empty out the heart and train the *nafs*.

Once you have emptied out the cup and rinsed it out, if you want to quench your thirst, you have to fill it with water. In Ramaḍān, we fast and empty out the cup, but if we really want to improve ourselves with lasting improvement and benefits, we have to fill up the cup with something and quench the spiritual thirst we have. This is the second component of the month of Ramaḍān, which is prayer and recitation of the Qur’ān. Too often when we talk about *ṣalāt’l-tarawīḥ*, the first question asked is, “Is it *farḍ*?” No one will tell you that it is *farḍ*. There is a very explicit and clear *ḥadīth* where the Prophet says that he did not want it to be *farḍ* on his *ummah*.

As soon as we hear that *tarawīḥ* is not *farḍ*, we say that we are going to fast and do what we have to do, and that’s it. I want to recommend to you that Ramaḍān is not a time to look at the bare minimum but is a time to excel. *SubhānAllāh*, what a tragedy if we are looking for the bare



minimum during Ramaḍān, then what is going to happen after Ramaḍān is gone and the blessing of Ramaḍān is gone and the *shayāṭīn* are unleashed? This is something to really think and ponder on. Ramaḍān is a time to excel and to try to be the best that we can be and do the most that we can do so that we have something left over to show for.

Prayer at night and the recitation of the Qur’ān is the filling of the cup. Don’t deprive yourself. You’ve emptied the cup all day long, fill it. I understand that there are certain practicalities of life. Life happens and life comes up. Having said that, at a minimum, pray something and read some Qur’ān. If you can’t fill it up all the way to the brim, fill it up halfway.

Our Goals & Intentions

The last and final thing I want to share is a very important component of the *ṣalāh* is one of the prerequisites to prayer according to many *fuqahā’*, and that is *niyyah* (intention). It is a requirement in prayer to make an intention. Based on that, we understand that similarly in all other acts of *‘ibādah*, fasting has an intention as well. According to many of the *fuqahā’* and scholars, the intention for fasting is a requirement and prerequisite for fasting. The Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) told us, *إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ* “Actions are based on the intentions.” The benefit of this *ḥadīth* is that the letter ب *ba* can also serve the meaning of benefit, consequence, or result. The actions are the outcome of the intentions. The actions will benefit according to the intentions.

What I am trying to say is that we should make an intention for the month of Ramaḍān in general. If we go into the month of Ramaḍān with the intention of completing 29 or 30 fasts, then Ramaḍān will have come and gone and we will have gotten whatever we intended to get out of Ramaḍān, which was 29 or 30 fasts. If I made the intention that I wanted to give a little in *zakāh* and *ṣadaqah* and read a little Qur’ān here and there, then Ramaḍān will have gone and that is what I will have gotten out of it. I’m not saying it is a bad thing, but I’m pretty sure we can all agree we are looking for something more out of the month of Ramaḍān.

The Prophet (ṣallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam) said, “Allāh has no need for us to deprive ourselves of food and water.” The purpose of fasting is to improve ourselves and better ourselves and our character and *akhlāq*. Similarly, our goal in the month of Ramaḍān is not to fast a certain number of days or to read a certain amount of Qur’ān or to give a certain amount of money in charity, but our purpose is to better and improve ourselves. Have something to show for it. In order to achieve that, you have to make that intention.

The way I recommend you make the intention practically is to take a piece of paper and write a few basic things that are problems that you have and want to improve about yourselves. Maybe it’s cussing and swearing or lying or wasting time or disrespecting your parents or not being generous or kind enough. Whatever your issue or problem is, write it down. Write down what you would like to improve about yourself, and make the intention to fix these things about yourself. Have the tangible, practical goal in front of yourself. Utilize the tools that the month of Ramaḍān provides like fasting, *tarawīḥ*, recitation of the Qur’ān, charity, the congregation, unity, the entire environment of Ramaḍān.



Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) tells us in a *ḥadīth qudsi*: “I deal with My slave according to His expectations from Me.” So, write down high goals, have high intentions, expect to achieve great things this Ramaḍān. Allāh will not disappoint us and we will see the tangible and practical improvement by the time Ramaḍān is gone *bi idhn illāh*!

May Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) allow us all the ability to practice everything we have said and heard. May Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) allow this month of Ramaḍān to be a month of benefit for us. May Allāh (*subḥānahu wa ta'āla*) give us the ability to make the best of our prayers and allow us to pray as the Prophet (*sallallāhu ‘alayhi wa sallam*) used to pray.

Sh. Abdul Nasir Jangda – Day 5 @ RamadanPrep.com

With special thanks and du‘ā’s for Sister S.T.

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