

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

Move First, and Allah Opens the Way

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

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SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
FOUNDATIONS &
ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

Move First, and Allah Opens the Way

The believer does not wait for the door to open before walking. He walks, and Allah opens the door.

WHY THIS MATTERS

A Quiet Surrender We Never Named

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me begin the way our teachers taught us to begin, by advising my own soul first, and then advising you. I want to talk to you today about something that has slipped into our hearts so quietly that most of us have never even given it a name. It is not disbelief. It is not open sin. It is subtler and, in some ways, more dangerous than either, because we do not examine it. It sits in the corner of the heart wearing the clothes of humility, and we let it stay because it looks pious. I am talking about **a mindset of defeat that we have quietly accepted.**

Let me show you how it works, because you will recognise it the moment I describe it. When it comes to our own worship, we pray, but we pray with half a heart, and somewhere in the back of the mind a soft voice whispers, *it is fine, Allah will accept it anyway, Allah will make something of it regardless.* When it comes to our Ummah, we look at Gaza, and we look at the wounds of the Muslims across the earth, and that same soft voice whispers, *it is over here, this world is lost for us, but al-hamdu lillah we still have the Hereafter.* Now hear me carefully. Part of that is true and beautiful. Allah has indeed promised us reward in the Akhirah, and trials are real, and patience is noble. But we have taken a half-truth and let it rot into an excuse, and a half-truth in the heart can be more dangerous than a clear lie, precisely because we never put it under the light.

Let me ask you honestly. When did we decide, on Allah's behalf, that the ending in this world is a bad one? When did we sign a treaty of surrender that Allah never asked us to sign? The Companions of the Prophet ﷺ carried something completely different in their chests. They carried a conviction of victory in this life *and* the next. They believed that success was promised to this Ummah here, on this earth, before it was ever promised in Paradise. That conviction was not arrogance. It was the natural fruit of trusting the One who never breaks a promise. And I want you to walk out of this lecture having recovered a piece of that conviction, without ever imagining that a single atom of good escapes the record of your Lord.

Hamza and the Equation With No Defeat In It

Think with me about Hamza ibn Abd al-Muttalib, may Allah be pleased with him, the Lion of Allah, who fell as a martyr at Uhud. Uhud, on the surface, was a day of loss. The Muslims were struck, the Prophet ﷺ was wounded, and Hamza was killed and mutilated. If ever there was a day to whisper *it is over*, that was the day. Yet Hamza had no doubt at all. He did not doubt that Allah would grant victory to His Messenger ﷺ, that Makkah would one day be opened, that this Ummah would receive everything it was promised. He simply understood that his own portion had already come. He had won his victory in his own right, as a martyr, while the promise of Allah for the Ummah kept marching forward after him.

This is the meaning of what the believers used to say to themselves, *nasr aw shahada*, victory or martyrdom. Look at that equation, my brother, my sister, and find the defeat in it. There is none. If the believer's effort ends in success, he has his victory. If his effort and even his very life come to an end before the success arrives, then what Allah promised him personally is fulfilled, and what Allah promised the Ummah is still on its way. There is no square on this board that reads *loss*. So how did we, who claim to follow those same men, come to file our affairs under a heading that does not even exist in their vocabulary?

That is the wound we are treating today. And the medicine, as you will see, is not merely to feel better. It is to move. Because Allah has attached the unlocking of everything, the guidance, the clarity, the doors you cannot yet see, to one thing you and I can do right now: we act.

Nothing You Do For Allah Is Ever Wasted

Before we speak about striving, I have to remove a fear, because the mindset of defeat almost always grows from one hidden root: the terror that our effort is pointless, that we will pour ourselves out and nothing will come of it. Why bother, the voice says, when I will never see the fruit? My dear brother, my dear sister, Allah destroys that fear completely. He does not only reward the deed that succeeds. He records the intention behind it, the effort inside it, and the trail of good that ripples out of it long after you are gone, including the influence you will never live to see with your own eyes.

إِنَّا نَحْنُ نُحْيِي الْمَوْتَىٰ وَنَكْتُبُ مَا قَدَّمُوا وَآثَارَهُمْ وَكُلَّ شَيْءٍ أَحْصَيْنَاهُ فِي إِمَامٍ مُّبِينٍ

*Indeed, it is We who give life to the dead and record what they have sent forth and **the traces they left behind**, and all things We have enumerated in a clear register.*

Surah Ya-Sin (36:12)

Sit with that one word He chose: *atharahum*, their traces, their footprints, the marks their feet pressed into the world. Allah does not only write down what you did. He writes down the good that came after you and grew out of what you started. Every footstep toward goodness, every benefit that flows outward from one sincere act, is being recorded long after the one who began it has passed away. The teacher who taught one student who taught a thousand. The mother who whispered la ilaha illa Allah to a sleeping child who grew up to build masjid. All of it, traces, all of it, written.

And underneath every trace lies the foundation, the intention, and here the Messenger of Allah ﷺ gave us the most famous words in all of Islam.

إِنَّمَا الْأَعْمَالُ بِالنِّيَّاتِ، وَإِنَّمَا لِكُلِّ امْرِئٍ مَا نَوَىٰ

*Actions are but by intentions, and every person shall have only **what he intended**.*

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 1 and Sahih Muslim: 1907 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

So long as you sincerely intend good, Allah writes it for you, whether or not it ever took shape in a deed, whether or not the outcome you longed for ever arrived. He rewards the intention. He rewards the effort. He rewards the effect and the impact, including the quiet, invisible good that has no number attached to it at all. Once your heart truly believes this, tell me honestly, where does the mindset of defeat

have left to stand? It has no ground beneath it. Your labour for Allah is never lost. It is being written even now, in this very moment, as you read these words with a heart that wants to change.

THE ENGINE OF IT ALL

The Verse That Unlocks the Next Step

Now we come to the heart of everything I want to give you today, and it is one of the richest verses in the entire Qur'an. Allah does not only reward the one who strives. He promises to guide him to the next step, to open a door he could never have opened with his own two hands. Listen.

وَالَّذِينَ جَاهَدُوا فِينَا لَنَهْدِيَنَّهُمْ سُبُلَنَا وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَمَعَ
الْمُحْسِنِينَ

*And those who **strive for Us**, We will surely guide them to Our ways. And indeed, Allah is with the doers of good.*

Surah Al-Ankabut (29:69)

The scholars of tafsir noticed something so subtle and so beautiful that once you see it you can never unsee it. Look at the order. The striving comes *first*. The guidance comes *after*. Allah did not say, We guide them and then they strive. He said, they strive, and then We guide them to Our paths. Do you see what that means, my brother, my sister? The very act of struggling for the sake of Allah is what unlocks the guidance to the next path, and the path after that, and the path after that.

And this guidance, the scholars explain, is not only reward waiting for you in the Hereafter. It is guidance in this life, right now. It is being shown righteous deeds you never previously noticed. It is openings you could not have planned. It is a clarity that descends upon the heart of the one who acts, that never descends upon the one who merely sits and theorises. Al-Qurtubi, may Allah have mercy on him, records in his tafsir that this guidance is built on a foundation of pursuit, and he quotes a principle that the early Muslims lived by.

They used to say: *Whoever acts upon what he knows, Allah will bequeath to him knowledge of what he does not yet know.* Man amila bima alima, awrathahu Allahu ilma ma lam yalam. Read that again slowly. It is a law of the soul as certain as any law of nature. Knowledge is not simply downloaded into a passive heart. It is *inherited*, handed down, unlocked, as a reward for acting on what came before.

Sit with this. When Allah places before you something you already know to be good, and you actually do it, it does not merely earn you sincerity and reward. It unlocks clarity. It unlocks creativity. It unlocks the next stage of the journey. If you are seeking sacred knowledge and living by each piece as you gain it, Allah opens the next lesson to your heart. If you are pouring yourself into dawah with everything Allah gave you to call with, Allah opens the next door in that dawah. There is a next step waiting for you, and it comes to you *precisely because* you were willing to act on what was already in your hand.

The Prophet ﷺ pointed to this exact law when he taught us how good things actually come to a person.

إِنَّمَا الْعِلْمُ بِالتَّعَلُّمِ، وَإِنَّمَا الْحِلْمُ بِالتَّحَلُّمِ، وَمَنْ يَتَحَرَّ الْخَيْرَ
يُعْطَهُ، وَمَنْ يَتَّقِ الشَّرَّ يُوقَهُ

Knowledge is only by learning, and forbearance is only by training oneself in forbearance.

Whoever pursues good will be granted it, and whoever guards against evil will be protected from it.

Source: at-Tabarani, Sahih al-Jami: 2328 · **Authenticity:** Hasan (al-Albani)

Knowledge comes through seeking knowledge. No scholar ever became a scholar by sitting in an empty room saying, O Allah, teach me, and then doing nothing. He pursued, and he pursued, and every time he learned he acted, and then Allah opened his heart to a deeper fiqh, a wider horizon, an understanding he did not have the week before. Good character is exactly the same. The person of beautiful akhlaq did not simply make a dua and wake up gentle. He trained himself, he acted on what the Prophet ﷺ taught, and Allah opened for him the next degree of it. And then the Prophet ﷺ states the law with total clarity: whoever earnestly pursues good is given it, and whoever earnestly guards against evil is shielded from it. The next step is tied directly to what you do, right now, with what Allah has already shown you.

From Being Guided to Being Made Firm

There is a second verse that completes the picture beautifully, because Allah does not merely guide the one who strives and then leave him. He *increases* him in guidance, and He hands him the very taqwa he needs to keep going.

وَالَّذِينَ اهْتَدَوْا زَادَهُمْ هُدًى وَآتَاهُمْ تَقْوَاهُمْ

And those who are guided, He increases them in guidance and grants them their righteousness.

Surah Muhammad (47:17)

The scholars found two kinds of guidance hidden in this short verse. There is *hidaya* in knowledge, that you come to know what is right. And there is *rushd*, a higher guidance in action, that Allah opens for you the very next deed that pleases Him and then plants your feet firmly upon it. The one who acts on the first is given the second. Allah unlocks the ability. Allah unlocks the understanding. And in the communal sense, He grants a taste of victory to the servant who serves Him sincerely.

Let me draw you a comparison you will feel immediately. Think about how the world pursues success. Read any story of worldly achievement, any biography of a self-made man, and you will find the same obsession. The same refusal to quit. The same knocking on every single door until one of them finally gives way. They say, if you want it badly enough, you will find a way. And often, they do. But here is the ceiling over their heads: a purely worldly person is trapped inside worldly means alone. He is chasing a material end with material methods, and when the material runs out, he has nothing left.

The believer who strives for Allah is not trapped like that. He knocks on every door of effort that a human being can reach, just like the worldly striver, and then, when human doors run out, Allah opens for him doors that no ladder could ever reach. That is the difference between the two. The worldly striver reaches the edge of the possible and stops. The believing striver reaches the edge of the possible and then watches his Lord expand the edge itself. So why, my dear brother, my dear sister, are we the ones who quit first, when we are the only ones with an unlimited Helper behind us?

How the Best of This Ummah Lived This Verse

Look at Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, the man the Prophet ﷺ called al-Faruq, the one who distinguishes truth from falsehood. Consider the sheer genius he brought to the leadership of this Ummah. His ability to discern the right course. His organising of good across a young state that was expanding faster than any state in history. Where did that come from? A great deal of it was Allah unlocking in the heart and mind of Umar the next step, the creative solution, the just institution, because whatever good Allah placed before him, Umar seized it and applied it to the absolute best of his ability. He was the man knocking on every door, stubborn to get it right, refusing to miss out on one drop of what Allah had promised.

You see the same spirit in the man who was his heir in character, Umar ibn Abd al-Aziz, may Allah have mercy on him. He inherited a state riddled with injustice and brokenness, and he did not sink into a defeated mind. He rolled up his sleeves and improvised astonishing good for the Ummah in a reign measured in mere months, so much good that people still speak of it fourteen centuries later. And he understood this exact law so precisely that he put it into words we should engrave on our hearts. He said, in effect: *What kept us from much of the knowledge we lacked was our own failure to act upon the knowledge we already had.*

Read that line again, because it is the diagnosis of our whole condition. When they failed to act on the good they already knew, the door to the next good stayed shut. And the moment they acted, Allah taught them what they did not know. This is nothing other than what Allah Himself declared: *be mindful of Allah, and Allah will teach you.* The teaching is on the other side of the action. It always has been.

And look at the resolve this conviction produces on the battlefield. When the Muslims at al-Qadisiyyah saw the war elephants of the Persians thundering toward them, an obstacle most armies would have fled from in terror, the response was not despair. The historians tell us they refused to be paralysed. They looked at those monstrous beasts and said, in effect, they have elephants, so we will make elephants. They fashioned coverings for their own mounts to make them resemble the beasts and to steady the horses against the sight of them. They stayed the course. They used every single means available. And Allah opened the victory. That, my brother, my sister, is not recklessness. It is the refusal of a believing heart to accept defeat while even one door remains unknocked.

This is why, when the Prophet ﷺ described the people of this Ummah who would always be granted victory and clarity upon the truth, he described them not merely as pious, but as a group that endures and is not deterred.

لَا تَزَالُ طَائِفَةٌ مِنْ أُمَّتِي ظَاهِرِينَ عَلَى الْحَقِّ، لَا
يُضُرُّهُمْ مَنْ خَذَلَهُمْ، حَتَّى يَأْتِيَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَهُمْ كَذَلِكَ

*A group of my Ummah will remain upright upon the truth, victorious. **Those who fail them will not harm them**, until the command of Allah comes while they are in that state.*

Source: Sahih Muslim: 1920 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Notice what gives them their steadfastness. They have clarity, and they have victory upon the truth, and one reason they are granted that victory is that they are utterly undeterred, not by those who betray them, not by the obstacles standing in front of them. They believe they will be granted good, and so they stay the course, never intimidated by what lies ahead, because they know they are striving for the sake of Allah, and so Allah keeps opening doors for them. Let me tell you a secret about arriving anywhere worthwhile: half of arriving is the simple conviction that, with Allah's help, you can arrive at all.

THIS IS ABOUT YOU

The Test Placed In Your Own Hands Today

It would be a betrayal of this whole lecture if we left this verse buried in the seventh century, admired like a relic behind glass. So let me pull it into your living room. Allah is speaking to *you*, in your home, with the means He has actually given you, not the means you wish you had. The mindset of defeat hides today behind a long, respectable-sounding list of excuses, and every single one of them dissolves the moment you hold it up against this verse.

How can I help the Ummah from the comfort of my home? I am not a shaykh. I am not a daiyah. I live here, or I live there. I have this job, this family, this responsibility, this limitation. My dear brother, my dear sister, read the verse again. Did Allah ask you to be a scholar? He did not. He asked you to *strive*

with what is in your hand, and He promised, on His own name, that He will guide you to the next path from wherever you are standing. The condition is not credentials. The condition is that you move.

STEP ONE

Act Upon the Good You Already Know

Let me ask you a question, and please do not rush past it. What is the good that you already know you should be doing, and are not? Be honest, because you know the answer immediately. Maybe it is a prayer you keep praying late, when you know full well it should be on time. Maybe it is a tongue you know you should be guarding. Maybe it is a skill, a profession, a platform, a circle of friends, a measure of wealth, that you know in your heart could serve this deen, and so far it has served only you.

The promise of the verse begins the very moment you act on the good already in front of you. Do you understand how liberating that is? You do not have to wait for clarity before you move. Most of us have it backwards. We say, once Allah shows me my purpose, once I have clarity, then I will act. But the verse says the opposite. You move, sincerely, upon what you already know, and the clarity is sent down upon you *as you move*. Sincerity breeds clarity. Clarity breeds creativity. And Allah opens a door to a contribution you could never have imagined while you were still standing still, waiting for a sign.

STEP TWO

Strive Exactly Where Allah Has Placed You

You are studying something right now, some field, some degree, some trade. Then ask yourself the question that changes everything: how can this very field be turned toward the good of my Ummah? And do not stop at the question, act on the first honest answer that comes to you. You earn a living in some profession. Then ask how that position, those contacts, that income, can become a source of benefit, and knock on that door today, not next Ramadan, today.

You are carrying, right now, a device in your pocket that can reach more human beings in a single afternoon than the greatest scholars of the past could reach in an entire lifetime. Let that sink in. Then ask yourself what good you could put in front of others through it, instead of drowning your precious, irreplaceable hours in a stream of content that benefits neither you nor anyone else. The one who keeps asking, over and over, *what can I do for Allah with what Allah has given me*, and then actually does the next small thing, will find Allah teaching him the answer step by step, exactly as He promised. I have seen it in others. You have seen it. Now it is your turn to be the proof.

Refuse the Whisper of Hopelessness

And now I have to warn you, gently but firmly, about a voice. It is the voice that says the Ummah is finished, that nothing can be done, that we will simply collect Jannah somehow at the end without lifting a finger here. That voice can sound so calm, so accepting, almost wise. But the Prophet ﷺ spoke about it in the harshest terms.

إِذَا قَالَ الرَّجُلُ هَلَكَ النَّاسُ فَهُوَ أَهْلَكُهُمْ

When a man says the people are ruined, he is the most ruined of them himself.

Source: Sahih Muslim: 2623 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

The scholars explained that this is a warning against the one who spreads hopelessness, who looks down on the people and declares the cause lost. And why is he himself the most ruined? Because that very despair has stopped him from striving at all. He has taken himself out of the game and then blamed the game for being over. Do not let that voice into your heart, my dear brother, my dear sister. Despair is not humility. Despair is not tawakkul. Despair is a door that shaytan holds wide open precisely so that you never strive in the first place, so that the guidance promised to the striver never reaches you, because you never became a striver.

Real trust in Allah looks nothing like sitting down. The believer trusts Allah, and then he ties his camel. He plants the seed, and then he leaves the harvest to the One who sends the rain. He knocks on the door, and then he leaves the opening to the One who holds every key. Between the despair that never tries and the complacency that assumes reward without effort, there walks the believer, working with what he has and trusting his Lord with the rest. Be that believer.

The Lantern of the One Who Strives

So before you close this and return to your day, I want you to turn the gaze inward, honestly and without harshness. Ask yourself three questions, and let them travel home with you. First: what good has Allah

already shown me that I have simply not acted upon? Second: where have I told myself, with that soft and defeated heart, that my effort would not matter, when Allah Himself has sworn to record every footstep and every trace? And third: what is the one door, just one, that I could knock on this week, sincerely, trusting that Allah will open from behind it something I cannot yet see?

These questions are not meant to crush you with guilt. They are the lantern of the one who strives, the traveller who walks forward through the dark trusting that each honest step lights the next. He cannot see the whole road. He was never asked to. He was only ever asked to take the step in front of him, and to trust that the One who lit this step will light the next.

And remember always the promise that ties it all together. Allah said, *be mindful of Allah, and Allah will teach you, and Allah is Knowing of all things*. Be mindful of Him. Act upon what He has shown you. And He Himself, the Lord of the worlds, becomes your teacher, opening to you a clarity and a creativity that no planning of your own could ever have produced. This is the engine of the entire matter. So do not wait for the door to open before you begin walking. Walk, and watch your Lord open the way.

وَاتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَيُعَلِّمُكُمُ اللَّهُ وَاللَّهُ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ

*And be mindful of Allah, and **Allah will teach you**. And Allah is Knowing of all things.*

Surah Al-Baqarah (2:282)

☰ Your Action Plan: Move First

Don't just read — choose what you will act on this week.

1 Name the good you're avoiding, then do it

Write down the one good you already know you should be doing and are not, whether it is a prayer on time, a guarded tongue, or a neglected duty. Then act on it before the day ends. The clarity comes after the movement, never before it.

TODAY

Make it last: once you begin today, keep it every day after — until it becomes a permanent habit for life.

2 Turn your field toward the Ummah

Ask how your study, profession, contacts, income, or platform could serve this deen, and take the first concrete step on the first honest answer that comes. Do not wait for a grand plan; the next step is unlocked by the last one.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

3 Knock on one door and refuse to quit

Choose a single door of benefit, an email, a message, an offer of help, a small project, and knock on it with sincerity. Like the Companions at Qadisiyyah, use every means you have and leave the opening to Allah.

THIS WEEK

Make it last: once this first week is done, don't stop — carry it on as a lifelong habit.

4 Reclaim your phone for good

Before scrolling, ask what benefit you could put in front of others through the device in your pocket that reaches more people in an afternoon than a scholar of old reached in a lifetime. Post, share, or send one thing that helps someone.

DAILY

Make it last: keep it daily until it becomes second nature — a habit for the rest of your life.

🚩 The 7-Day Move First Challenge

For seven days, take one concrete step toward good every single day, no matter how small, and refuse to let the whisper of hopelessness stop you. Each night, write one line: what did I do for Allah today, and what door will I knock on tomorrow? Watch how, as you act on the good you know, Allah begins to show you good you did not know. The seven days are only the ignition; the goal is to become, for the rest of your life, a person who moves first and trusts his Lord to open the way.

Make it stick – and make it last

- ✓ **Write it down.** Put your chosen action on a sticky note on your mirror, desk, or fridge – somewhere you cannot miss it.
- ✓ **Print this plan** and tick each action off as you do it.
- ✓ **Set a daily reminder** on your phone or calendar so it never slips your mind.
- ✓ **Keep a one-line journal** each night – did I do it today? how did it go? – and watch your streak grow.

Don't aim for one good day or week – aim to keep it for life. A habit only counts once it outlives the challenge.