

SIFAH LECTURE SERIES

Stealing the Reward of the Night

A practical lecture — knowledge you can act on

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SIFAH

SCHOOL OF ISLAMIC
FOUNDATIONS &
ADVOCACY FOR HUMANITY

Stealing the Reward of the Night

You long to pray at night but sleep keeps winning. Here are the daytime doors Allah opened so you can earn the reward of the night, even while you rest.

WHY THIS MATTERS

The Bed Wins Again

My dear brother, my dear sister, let me ask you something honestly, and let me ask it gently, because I know the answer will sting a little for most of us. How many nights have you laid your head on the pillow, pulled the blanket up to your chin, and whispered to yourself, *tonight I will wake up before Fajr and pray*? You set the alarm. You meant it. You felt, in that quiet moment, a genuine flicker of longing to stand before your Lord in the dark while the world slept. And then the alarm rang, and your hand reached out from under the covers, and before your mind had even fully woken, it had already silenced the sound and surrendered. Morning came, and with it a small, familiar ache: *I lost again. The bed won again.*

If that is you, I want you to know something right away, before we go one step further. You are not a hypocrite. You are not a failure. You are a human being with a heavy body, an exhausting day behind you, and a Lord who understands your weakness better than you understand it yourself. The night prayer, the Tahajjud, is among the most beloved and weightiest acts of worship in all of Islam. Allah praised its people directly in His Book. The Messenger ﷺ called it the most virtuous prayer after the obligatory prayers. The righteous who came before us guarded their nights the way the people of this world guard their gold. It is a lofty rank, and if you have been reaching for it and struggling, that struggle itself is beloved to Allah.

But here is what I want to spend the next half hour showing you, and I promise it will change the way you see your days. Allah, in His overflowing mercy, **did not lock the reward of the night behind a single door that only the strongest could open.** He scattered other doors throughout your ordinary day, small deeds within the reach of every single one of us, by which a believer can earn the reward of standing the whole night in prayer, even while his body rests in bed. This is not a loophole. It is a mercy. And it is one of the most beautiful expressions of how gently Allah deals with the weak among us, which, if we are honest, is all of us.

A Gift, Not a Substitute

Before I open these doors for you, I have to say clearly what must be said, and I want you to hold it in your heart for the whole lecture, because everything else depends on it. These deeds I am about to describe are **a gift, not a substitute**. They do not replace your obligations. They do not stand in for your belief in Allah and His Messenger, your five daily prayers, your fasting, your zakah, your Hajj. And they are not, not ever, an excuse to abandon the night prayer itself and comfort yourself that you have found an easier way.

Think of it like this. Imagine a strong swimmer crossing a wide river. That is the one who rises every night for Tahajjud. Now imagine a swimmer who is struggling, who keeps slipping under, who is doing his best but keeps losing the current. That is most of us. What Allah has done is throw extra ropes to the struggling swimmer, ropes tied to the far bank, so that even the one who cannot swim the whole way can still be pulled across. But here is the thing, my dear brother: *the rope is not permission to stop swimming*. It is help for the one who is genuinely trying. If you grab the rope and go limp and stop kicking altogether, you have misunderstood the gift entirely. So take these doors as encouragement, take them as mercy, but keep swimming. Keep reaching for the night. We will come back to this at the end, and I need you to remember it.

THE HOUR OF NEARNESS

Why the Night Is So Precious

But first, let me answer a question you might be asking. Why the night? Why did Allah attach such an enormous reward to these dark hours, and to the deeds that stand in for them? What is so special about the time when everyone else is unconscious? Let me tell you, and let me tell you in a way that I hope keeps you up thinking about it tonight.

The night is the hour of nearness. It is when the noise of the world falls silent, when the phones stop buzzing, when the marketplace closes and the deals are done and the arguments are over, and the door of the heavens opens for the one who calls. The Messenger ﷺ described something so extraordinary about the last part of every single night that it should break our hearts with longing every time we hear it. He described a descent of our Lord, in a manner that befits His majesty, and an invitation that goes out into the darkness. Listen to it, and imagine it happening tonight, while you sleep.

يَنْزِلُ رَبُّنَا تَبَارَكَ وَتَعَالَى كُلَّ لَيْلَةٍ إِلَى السَّمَاءِ الدُّنْيَا
حِينَ يَبْقَى ثُلُثُ اللَّيْلِ الْآخِرِ، فَيَقُولُ: مَنْ يَدْعُونِي
فَأَسْتَجِيبَ لَهُ، مَنْ يَسْأَلُنِي فَأُعْطِيَهُ، مَنْ يَسْتَغْفِرُنِي
فَأَغْفِرَ لَهُ.

*Our Lord, Blessed and Exalted, descends every night to the lowest heaven when the last third of the night remains, and He says: **Who is calling upon Me, that I may answer him? Who is asking of Me, that I may give him? Who is seeking My forgiveness, that I may forgive him?***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 1145 and Sahih Muslim: 758 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Every night, my dear brother, my dear sister, that invitation goes out. Every night the King of the heavens and the earth turns His attention to the lowest heaven and asks, with a tenderness we cannot fully grasp, *is there anyone? Anyone who wants to talk to Me? Anyone who needs something and will just ask? Anyone who wants to be forgiven?* And most of the world sleeps through it. Most of humanity misses the greatest invitation in existence because they are lost in dreams. So when Allah, in His generosity, grants you a share of that reward through a simple deed of your day, understand what He is really handing you. He is handing you a portion of the most precious time that exists, a slice of that blessed hour, even as your body rests. Do not let the smallness of the deed fool you about the size of the gift. Now let me open the doors.

The Two Prayers That Bracket the Night

The very first door, and this one astonishes me every time, is a door many of us already walk through several times a week without ever realizing the treasure that was in our hands as we did it. It is the two prayers that stand like guards at either end of the night: Isha and Fajr. These are the two prayers that ask something of us. They ask us to leave the warmth and comfort of the evening to go out into the dark for Isha, and to tear ourselves from the deepest sleep to go out into the dark again for Fajr. And precisely because they are heavy, the Messenger ﷺ tied them directly to the reward of the entire night.

مَنْ صَلَّى الْعِشَاءَ فِي جَمَاعَةٍ فَكَأَنَّمَا قَامَ نِصْفَ اللَّيْلِ،
وَمَنْ صَلَّى الصُّبْحَ فِي جَمَاعَةٍ فَكَأَنَّمَا صَلَّى اللَّيْلَ كُلَّهُ.

*Whoever prays Isha in congregation, it is as though he prayed **half the night**, and whoever prays Fajr in congregation, it is as though he prayed **the entire night**.*

Source: Sahih Muslim: 656 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Stop and truly absorb this, because I fear we hear it and move on too quickly. The man who prays Isha with the congregation, and then goes home, and sleeps soundly in his bed all night, and rises and returns for Fajr with the congregation, is recorded in the sight of Allah *as though he stood the whole night in prayer*. He slept. He rested. His head was on the pillow through the darkest hours. And yet the reward written for him is the reward of the one who never lay down at all. There is no easier road to the reward of Tahajjud on this earth than these two prayers in congregation. None.

And here is the part that should make every believing man reflect deeply. These are the exact two prayers the hypocrites of the Prophet's time found heaviest. The Messenger ﷺ said that no prayers were more burdensome upon them than Fajr and Isha, and that if they only knew the reward that was waiting in them, they would come to the masjid even if they had to crawl on their hands and knees. Think about that image. Crawling. And the believer? He simply walks. He crosses the dark for Isha, and he rises and crosses the dark again for Fajr, and in that small, quiet victory over his own comfort, Allah hands him

what others chase through an entire night of standing. My dear brother, if you can reach the masjid, never take these two prayers lightly again. In them is a night of worship given to the one who simply answered the call twice.

THE SECOND DOOR

Let the Qur'an Keep You Company

The second door is the Book of Allah, and this one is for everyone, man and woman, at home or anywhere. A believer who lets the Qur'an fill even a small sliver of his night is lifted into a rank far, far beyond the few minutes it cost him. The Messenger ﷺ set a beautifully small and reachable measure for it.

مَنْ قَرَأَ بِمِائَةِ آيَةٍ فِي لَيْلَةٍ كُتِبَ لَهُ قَنُوتُ لَيْلَةٍ.

*Whoever recites a hundred verses in a night, it will be recorded for him as **the devotion of an entire night**.*

Source: Musnad Ahmad · **Authenticity:** Sahih

A hundred verses. Do you know how long that takes? About ten minutes. Ten minutes of unhurried recitation. Now let me hold up a mirror, and forgive me for it, because I hold it up to myself first. How long did you spend last night, lying in bed, scrolling? Thumb moving up the screen, video after video, headline after headline, most of it forgotten by morning? For most of us it was far more than ten minutes. What if you took just ten of those minutes, the ones you were going to waste anyway, and gave them to the words of your Lord? You would rise recorded among the devout, the people of the night, and you would have lost nothing but the mindless scroll.

And the mercy here goes even wider, because Allah knows sleep may still take you before you finish. The Prophet ﷺ taught that the one who sleeps through his usual night portion and then recites it between Fajr and Dhuhr is written down as though he recited it in the night itself. Missed your portion? Read it in the morning and it still counts. And for those days when even ten minutes feels beyond you, there is a portion so short that not one of us has an excuse to leave it: the last two verses of Surah al-Baqarah.

مَنْ قَرَأَ بِالْآيَتَيْنِ مِنْ آخِرِ سُورَةِ الْبَقَرَةِ فِي لَيْلَةٍ كَفَّتَاهُ.

*Whoever recites the last two verses of Surah al-Baqarah at night, **they will suffice him.***

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 5009 and Sahih Muslim: 807 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

Imam an-Nawawi explained that the phrase *they will suffice him* carries a whole cluster of meanings, and that the hadith likely intends all of them at once. They suffice him in reward, as the standing of the night. They suffice him as a shield against Satan through the night. They suffice him against every kind of harm. Two short verses, my dear brother, recited from the pillow with your eyes already growing heavy, and you are granted the reward of the night and a fortress of protection until morning. I ask you plainly: who among us, understanding this, would let such a treasure slip through our fingers night after night? Make it the last thing you say before sleep, every single night, and never let your head touch the pillow without it again.

AN ANNUAL DOOR

Standing the Nights of Ramadan

There is a door that swings wide open once every year, in the most blessed of months, and so many of us pass right by it in the second half of the night when we have already gone home to bed. In Ramadan, the Tarawih prayer behind the imam is far more than a nightly ritual we perform in the early evening. Many of us pray a few units and then quietly slip out the back to rest, and we think we have done our part. But listen to the glad tiding the Messenger ﷺ gave to the one who simply stays.

مَنْ قَامَ مَعَ الْإِمَامِ حَتَّى يَنْصَرِفَ كُتِبَ لَهُ قِيَامُ لَيْلَةٍ.

*Whoever stands in prayer with the imam until he departs, **the standing of a whole night is recorded for him.***

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 806 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Do you see the gift being handed to you here? Whoever prays the Tarawih behind the imam from beginning to end, staying until the imam finally leaves, is written down as having stood the entire night in prayer, even though he is home and fast asleep before midnight. This means that every single Ramadan, Allah offers you a whole month of recorded nights, thirty nights of standing, through a prayer you offer in congregation in the early part of the evening while you are still fresh and awake. Thirty nights. So this coming Ramadan, my dear brother, my dear sister, do not be among those who rush for the door once the imam reaches the tenth unit. Stay with him. Stay until he departs. Do not walk away and leave a full night of standing behind you on the prayer mat.

THE THIRD DOOR

The Worship That Never Sleeps

Now here is a door that does not ask you to wake up at all, because it is woven into every single waking hour of your life. It is your character, your akhlaq, the way you treat the people around you. And I want you to sit with how remarkable this is. The Messenger ﷺ told us that a believer, simply by the beauty of his manners, climbs to the rank of the one who fills his nights with prayer and his days with fasting.

إِنَّ الْمُؤْمِنَ لَيَدْرِكُ بِحَسَنِ خُلُقِهِ دَرَجَةَ الصَّائِمِ الْقَائِمِ.

Indeed, a believer attains, by his good character, the rank of one who fasts by day and stands in prayer by night.

Source: Sunan Abi Dawud: 4798 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

What a door this is, and it is open at every single moment. Your patience when someone provokes you and you swallow the words you were about to fire back. Your gentleness with your children at the end of a long, draining day when your nerves are frayed. Your honesty in a business dealing when a small lie would have made you a little more money. Your forgiveness of the person who wronged you and does not even deserve it. Your genuine, warm smile in the face of a brother you pass in the street. Every one of these is quietly building for you the reward of the worshipper of the night. The one who masters his character is worshipping Allah in the marketplace, in the kitchen, in the traffic jam, in the office, in every conversation, long after the people of the night have folded up their prayer mats and gone to sleep.

And do you understand the deep wisdom in why Allah would place good character on the same scale as the night prayer? Let me tell you, because it is beautiful. The one who stands at night is fighting a war against his own body and his own sleep. And the one who holds beautiful character is fighting a war against his own ego, his own anger, his own pride. Both are a jihad against the self. Both are heavy upon the soul. The man who bites his tongue when every fibre of him is screaming to lash out is fighting the exact same inner battle as the man who drags himself out of a warm bed into the cold dark to pray. So Allah, in His perfect justice, joined them in reward, and gave the person of good character a share in the very same crown. This means your bad temper is not a small thing, and your gentleness is not a small thing. It is worship, or the loss of it, all day long.

THE FOURTH DOOR

Carrying the Weak on Your Shoulders

The fourth door is service to the ones the world tends to forget: the widow who lost the one who used to provide for her, and the orphan who lost the shelter of a father. The Messenger ﷺ raised the one who strives for them to a rank that, honestly, should leave us stunned when we hear it.

السَّاعِي عَلَى الْأَرْمَلَةِ وَالْمِسْكِينِ كَالْمُجَاهِدِ فِي سَبِيلِ
اللَّهِ، أَوْ الْقَائِمِ اللَّيْلِ الصَّائِمِ النَّهَارِ.

*The one who strives on behalf of the widow and the poor is like the one who **fights in the path of Allah**, or like the one who stands in prayer by night and fasts by day.*

Source: Sahih al-Bukhari: 5353 and Sahih Muslim: 2982 · **Authenticity:** Muttafaqun Alayh (agreed upon)

And I want you to notice something: this is not some distant, dramatic, heroic deed reserved for great people. Look around your own life. Perhaps there is a widowed aunt in your extended family who no one really checks on anymore. Perhaps there is an elderly neighbour who has no one to carry her groceries up the stairs or drive her to an appointment. Perhaps there is an orphan whose school fees you could quietly cover, or a struggling single mother whose electricity bill you could pay without ever telling a soul. By

tending to her needs, you gain the reward of the warrior striving in the path of Allah, and the reward of the one who stands the whole night, all at once.

And if that relative is from your own family, you gather even more, because you are also keeping the ties of kinship, a bond the Prophet ﷺ told us actually extends a person's life and increases his provision. Do you see it? One quiet act of kindness to a forgotten person, and Allah gathers reward upon reward upon reward into your single, ordinary hand. The night prayer, the striving, the kinship, the mercy, all of it, from one phone call, one visit, one bag of groceries left at a door.

THE FIFTH DOOR

Every Step to Jumu'ah

The fifth door is the very gathering you attend every week, the one so many of us treat as a duty to be caught at the last possible second rather than a treasure to be reached early. The Friday prayer is not merely a box to be ticked. For the one who prepares for it properly and comes early, every single step he takes is weighed against a reward so vast it is hard to believe.

مَنْ غَسَلَ يَوْمَ الْجُمُعَةِ وَاغْتَسَلَ، ثُمَّ بَكَرَ وَابْتَكَرَ، وَمَشَى
وَلَمْ يَرْكَبْ، وَدَنَا مِنَ الْإِمَامِ فَاسْتَمَعَ وَلَمْ يَلْغُ، كَانَ لَهُ
بِكُلِّ خُطْوَةٍ عَمَلُ سَنَةٍ، أَجْرُ صِيَامِهَا وَقِيَامِهَا.

*Whoever washes and performs ghusl on Friday, then comes early, draws near to the imam, listens and stays silent, will have **for every step the reward of a year, the reward of its fasting and its night prayer.***

Source: Jami at-Tirmidhi: 496 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Let the size of this settle into your chest. Not the reward of a single day of fasting and night prayer for each step. Not a week. Not a month. The fasting and the night prayer of an *entire year* for every single

step taken toward the masjid on Friday, by the one who washed himself, came early, sat close to the imam, listened attentively, and kept silent. Now do something for me right now, wherever you are. Count in your mind the number of steps it usually takes you from your car, or your front door, to your place in the prayer line. Twenty steps? Forty? Sixty? Now multiply each one by a year of fasting and standing. Have you ever in your life earned so much for something so small?

And it does not even stop there. In another narration the Messenger ﷺ described the one who comes in the first hour as one who offered a great sacrifice, a camel, in the path of Allah. The one who comes in the next hour, a cow. The next, a ram, and so on down to a hen and an egg, as the hours slip by. And all the while the angels are standing at the doors of the masjid with their pages open, writing down the names of who entered first, and who came after, and who came after that, until the moment the imam stands to speak, and then the angels fold away their records and come in to listen to the reminder. So the one who treats Jumu'ah as a treasure to be reached early is piling reward upon reward before the khutbah has even begun. How much of this, my dear brother, have you and I let slip through our fingers simply because we walked in as the iqamah was already being called?

THE MOST TENDER DOOR

When Sleep Steals Your Sincere Intention

And I have saved the most tender mercy of all for last, because this one is for the person I described at the very beginning of this lecture. The one who tried, and failed. The one who set the alarm with a full heart, meant every bit of it, and still woke up in the morning defeated, aching with that quiet sense of loss. How often has that been you? You went to bed genuinely intending to rise for Tahajjud, and sleep simply overpowered you and stole the whole night away. You woke up feeling you had missed out on something. But listen, and let this heal that ache, because the Messenger ﷺ revealed that Allah does not let a sincere intention go to waste.

مَنْ أَتَى فِرَاشَهُ وَهُوَ يَنْوِي أَنْ يَقُومَ فَيُصَلِّيَ مِنَ اللَّيْلِ،
فَغَلَبَتْهُ عَيْنُهُ حَتَّى أَصْبَحَ، كُتِبَ لَهُ مَا نَوَى، وَكَانَ
نَوْمُهُ صَدَقَةً عَلَيْهِ مِنْ رَبِّهِ.

Whoever goes to his bed intending to rise and pray in the night, then his eyes overcome him until morning, what he intended is recorded for him, and his sleep is a charity given to him from his Lord.

Source: Sunan an-Nasa'i: 1787 · **Authenticity:** Sahih

Reflect, just reflect, on the sheer generosity of this. The servant intended good. His weak body failed him. And what does Allah do? He does not merely forgive the man for missing the prayer. He *records him as having prayed what he intended to pray*. And then, as if that were not enough, He takes the very sleep that defeated the man, the thing that felt like his failure, and He turns it into a charity, a gift, descending from the Lord of the heavens to His servant. Your defeat becomes a present from Allah. This is the God we worship, my dear brother. The One who rewards you for the good you longed to do but could not manage. The One who catches you when you fall and calls the fall a gift.

So do you understand what this means practically? It means you should never again lay your head down without the sincere intention to rise for the night. Never. Because even on the nights that sleep wins, and there will be many, the intention itself is written in your favour, and your sleep is turned into charity. You cannot lose. Make the intention every single night, and either you wake and pray and win, or sleep takes you and you still win. There is no losing hand in this game once the intention is there.

A REMINDER CARRIED HOME

Do Not Trade the Real Thing Away

And now, my dear brother, my dear sister, I have to bring you back to the promise I made at the very beginning, because I know exactly what the human heart is capable of doing with good news. There is a

danger in a lecture like this. There is a real risk that someone hears all these beautiful, easy doors and quietly, in the back of his mind, closes the door of the night prayer forever, thinking, *wonderful, now I never have to wake up again, I have found the shortcut*. Please do not let that person be you.

Remember the rope and the swimmer. These substitutes are a mercy for our weakness, not a reward for our laziness. There is a sweetness in standing before Allah in the depth of the night, when He descends to the lowest heaven and asks who is calling upon Him so that He may answer, that nothing on this earth can replace. The daytime deeds earn you the reward, and that reward is real and immense, but they do not give you that private meeting, that intimate conversation in the dark when it is just you and your Lord and no one else awake in the world. That taste is reserved for the one who actually gets up. So keep reaching for it. Even two short units once a week. Even five minutes just before the adhan of Fajr. Go to bed every night with the firm intention to rise, take whatever slice of the night Allah gives you, and trust completely that if sleep defeats you, the One who records intentions has already written your reward in full. Use the doors, all of them, but never, ever stop knocking on the door of the night itself.

☰ Your Action Plan: Earn the Night

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

1 Guard Isha and Fajr in congregation

For the men who can reach the masjid, treat these two prayers as sacred appointments. Pray Isha with the jama'ah and return for Fajr, and you have earned the reward of standing the entire night while you slept in between.

DAILY

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

2 Seal every night with al-Baqarah's last two verses

Never let your head touch the pillow again without reciting the final two verses of Surah al-Baqarah. Two short verses for the reward of the night and a shield of protection until morning.

EVERY NIGHT

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

3 Make the sincere intention to rise, no matter what

As you lie down, firmly intend to wake for the night prayer. If you rise, you win. If sleep defeats you, the intention is recorded and your sleep becomes a charity from your Lord. You cannot lose.

EVERY NIGHT

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

4 Carry one forgotten person's burden

Find one widow, one orphan, or one struggling relative this week and quietly ease their load with a visit, an errand, or a hidden gift, and gain the reward of the warrior and the worshipper of the night.

THIS WEEK

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

🚩 The 7-Day Earn the Night Challenge

For the next seven nights, do three things without fail: recite the last two verses of al-Baqarah from your pillow, make a sincere intention to rise for Tahajjud, and pray at least Isha and Fajr on time. On at least two of those nights, actually get up, even for two short units, and taste the sweetness of the hour when your Lord descends and asks who is calling upon Him. Then, on the seventh day, walk to Jumu'ah washed and early, counting your steps as years of worship. Do not let this be a single week. Let these seven days be the birth of a habit that carries you, insha'Allah, for the rest of your life.

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.