

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful

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Striving to please God

[94:7-8] Whenever possible you shall strive. Seeking only your Lord.

Why should we strive? Let's reflect on this.

[4:95-6] Not equal are the sedentary among the believers who are not handicapped, and those who strive in the cause of GOD with their money and their lives. GOD exalts the strivers with their money and their lives above the sedentary. For both, GOD promises salvation, but GOD exalts the strivers over the sedentary with a great recompense. The higher ranks come from Him, as well as forgiveness and mercy. GOD is Forgiver, Most Merciful.

Higher Ranks, then, is one answer. For both the strivers and the sedentary, God promises salvation, but God says, they're not equal. You know in university, you can pass the course getting a "C", but would you rather get an "A+" or a "C"? What would you tell your kids to work for? If it matters in this world, imagine the differences in the Hereafter!

Now, we're not saying "just passing" isn't a big deal. It certainly is (3:185).

[3:185] Every person tastes death, then you receive your recompense on the Day of Resurrection. Whoever misses Hell, barely, and makes it to Paradise, has

attained a great triumph. The life of this world is no more than an illusion.

You pass, you still get your degree. You still make it to Paradise. But given a choice, which would you rather choose? Economy or First Class? You can compare in Quran in Suras 55 and 56. The rewards for anyone who attains Paradise are wonderful, but in High Heaven, it's full of provisions within reach, with springs flowing. In the Lower Heaven, wells must be pumped and provisions collected.

Let's look at 17:78-79 using another example related to college: students love opportunities for extra credit; it gets them closer to that "desired grade". You can do the basics to pass: making Salats and reading Quran once a day. Or you can also meditate for extra credit and read Quran at night (17:78-80, 73:20) to come ever closer and closer to God. (One understanding of meditation is it's a broad term that encompasses remembering and worshiping God.)

[17:78-80] You shall observe the Contact Prayer (Salat) when the sun declines from its highest point at noon, as it moves towards sunset. You shall also observe (the recitation of) the Quran at dawn. (Reciting) the Quran at dawn is wit-

nessed. During the night, you shall meditate for extra credit, that your Lord may raise you to an honorable rank. And say, "My Lord, admit me an honorable admittance, and let me depart an honorable departure, and grant me from You a powerful support."

[73:1-10] O you cloaked one. Meditate during the night, except rarely. Half of it, or a little less. Or a little more. And read the Quran from cover to cover. We will give you a heavy message. The meditation at night is more effective, and more righteous. You have a lot of time during the day for other matters.

You shall commemorate the name of your Lord, to come ever closer and closer to Him. Lord of the east and the west; there is no other god besides Him. You should choose Him as your advocate. And remain steadfast in the face of their utterances, and disregard them in a nice manner.

Striving helps keep us guided. Like other traits of the righteous, striving is interlinked with righteousness. God says that those who strive, God guides them.

[29:69] As for those who strive in our cause, we will surely guide them in our paths. Most assuredly, GOD is with the pious.

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Striving leads to success. You can watch cartoons or you can do your homework. But if you want to succeed in this world, you'll do your homework. So also, if we want to succeed in the Hereafter, God says to strive.

[5:35] O you who believe, you shall reverence GOD and seek the ways and means to Him, and strive in His cause, that you may succeed.

[9:88] As for the messenger and those who believed with him, they eagerly strive with their money and their lives. These have deserved all the good things; they are the winners.

Striving helps with the testing process.

We will be tested through this life to see where we come out; whether we're striving to be an "A" student or a "C" student. And striving and steadfastness seem linked in the testing process. It's a quality of the true believers or better believers (3:142, 9:16, 16:110).

[47:31] We will certainly put you to the test, in order to distinguish those among you who strive, and steadfastly persevere. We must expose your true qualities.

Better Believers Strive in the Cause of God

[9:41-42] You shall readily mobilize, light or heavy, and strive with your money and your lives in the cause of GOD. This is better for you, if you only knew. If there were a quick material gain, and a short journey, they would have followed you. But the striving is just too much for them. They will swear by GOD: "If we could, we would have mobilized with you." They thus hurt themselves, and GOD knows that they are liars. ... [9:44] Those who truly believe in GOD and the Last Day do not ask your permission to evade the opportunity to strive with their money and their lives. GOD is fully aware of the righteous.

To improve ourselves. We each sin daily. Even the messengers of God committed sins (48:1-2). We have to repent, seek God's forgiveness and keep trying to do better. Every day, we try to be better than the day before with God's help. And

if we slip up today, we try again tomorrow. Since the prophets and messengers are worried about their necks (21:28), we certainly don't want to take anything for granted. God willing, we work hard (90:4) and take all the striving opportunities we can.

[21:28] He knows their future and their past. They do not intercede, except for those already accepted by Him, and they are worried about their own necks.

[17:21] Note how we preferred some people above others (in this life). The differences in the Hereafter are far greater and far more significant.

We don't want to delay or put off striving either (3:114, 57:10, 57:21-22). We don't know how much time we have left. Satan will whisper to us to make the wrong choice, "There's a game on Friday night, why not skip the Quran study?" Or, "There's a feeding the poor activity, but wouldn't you rather be surfing the Internet?" God says to race towards righteousness and forgiveness. If it were a billion dollars in this world, would we be eager to get it or would we procrastinate or avoid it all together?

[57:10] Why do you not spend in the cause of GOD, when GOD possesses all wealth in the heavens and the earth?

Special Honor

Distinguished from the rest are those among you who spend before the victory and strive. They attain a greater rank than those who spend after the victory and strive. For each, GOD promises salvation. GOD is Cognizant of everything you do.

Preoccupation With This Life Condemned

[57:20] Know that this worldly life is no more than play and games, and boasting among you, and hoarding of money and children. It is like abundant rain that produces plants and pleases the disbelievers. But then the plants turn into useless hay, and are blown away by the wind. In the Hereafter there is either severe retribution, or forgiveness from GOD and approval. This worldly life is no more than a temporary illusion.

The Intelligent Alternative

[57:21] Therefore, you shall race towards forgiveness from your Lord, and a Paradise whose width encompasses the heaven and the earth. It awaits those who believed in GOD and His messengers. Such is GOD's grace that He bestows upon whomever He wills. GOD is Possessor of Infinite Grace.

[3:114] They believe in GOD and the Last Day, they advocate righteousness and forbid evil, and they hasten to do righteous works. These are the righteous.

Striving doesn't mean we have to give up this world. But it does mean **we make God the #1 priority**. If we make a choice—we choose God. And we bring God into whatever we enjoy in this world. We invest our money and time in striving (49:15, 61:11) including spreading the message in little or big ways or doing charitable acts. We do this for God, not because people will be pleased.

[22:78] You shall strive for the cause of GOD as you should strive for His cause. He has chosen you and has placed no hardship on you in practicing your religion—the religion of your father Abraham. He is the one who named you "Submitters" originally. Thus, the messenger shall serve as a witness among you, and you shall serve as witnesses among the people. Therefore, you shall observe the Contact Prayers (Salat) and give the obligatory charity (Zakat), and hold fast to GOD; He is your Lord, the best Lord and the best Supporter.

The Most Profitable Investment
[9:111-112] GOD has bought from the believers their lives and their money in exchange for Paradise. Thus, they fight in the cause of GOD, willing to kill and get killed. Such is His truthful pledge in the Torah, the Gospel, and the Quran—and who fulfills His pledge better than GOD? You shall rejoice in making such an exchange. This is the greatest triumph. They are the repenters, the worshipers, the praisers, the meditators, the bowing and prostrating, the advocators of righteousness and forbidders of evil, and the keep-

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Criticism feeds the ego

“Let the refining and improving of your own life keep you so busy that you have little time to criticize others.”

H. Jackson Brown Jr.

Do we sometimes let criticizing others overtake us? Whether it's criticism of a friend, colleague, or even someone you don't know that well, it can be easy to judge others for their faults, without reflecting on our own. When we criticize another person, we are essentially casting judgment. We must be careful when judging because satan can invite us to feel superior in the process. This process is usually led by the ego and in my experience, where the ego is involved, frustration usually follows.

The question to ask is why do we feel the need to feel superior in the first place? Of the righteous and GOD loving, and inspiring people that I have met over the years, I've found they have shown an air of humility. They didn't need to criticize others to make themselves feel better. Why feed the ego or try to put down others?

[9:58] Some of them criticize your distribution of the charities; if they are given therefrom, they become satisfied, but if they are not given therefrom, they become objectors.

[9:79] Those who criticize the generous believers for giving too much, and ridicule the poor believers for giving too little, GOD despises them. They have incurred a painful retribution.

It can be so easy to look at others and pick apart their faults, but what does this really achieve? Or is it simply a diversion away from our own self-development and personal growth?

I see that there can be something addictive about pulling to pieces someone else's worst faults and all the negative aspects of their personality, but how is this really helping them?

[6:69] The righteous are not responsible for the utterances of those people, but it may help to remind them; perhaps they may be saved.

[6:70] You shall disregard those who take their religion in vain, as if it is a social function, and are totally absorbed in this worldly life. Remind with this (Quran), lest a soul may suffer the consequences of its evil earnings. It has none beside GOD as a Lord and Master, nor an intercessor.

[87:9] Therefore, you shall remind; perhaps the reminder will benefit.

What's more, when we criticize others it's likely that we do so without knowing the full story. We won't know why other people behave in such a way, what childhood situations may have contributed to their behavior and what other factors are involved. So, we're essentially judging based on misinformation. For this reason, it may be best to reserve judgment, or instead to offer support, or simply keep quiet and get on with the job of perfecting our own lives.

If you think about it, criticism is negative thinking in action. When we focus on the negative qualities of other people, we are allowing negative thoughts to enter the brain. The more you criticize, the more comfortable your mind becomes with negativity and the more this starts to spill over into other areas of your life. Before you know it, you're a negative human being and an objector; not a submitter.

If you know that negative thinking is something that you struggle with, this could be a good opportunity to make a concerted effort to criticize less and train your mind to only focus on helpful, positive thoughts instead of negative ones.

How often does criticism lead to real solutions? And how often do we approach the offenders with an impartial offering that will actually help their situation? Or do we simply judge behind backs?

At this point it's important to make clear the difference between criticism and impartial observation. Criticism usually takes the form of negative analysis of another person's behavior and is rarely useful, whereas impartial observation includes a neutral analysis of another person's behavior and often comes with solutions, with

GOD's help. Another key differentiator is that criticism carries with it an air of superiority and emotional undercurrents (such as anger and frustration), whereas impartial observation remains neutral and humble in approach. We know that there is no fear or grief with GOD.

[3:159] It was mercy from GOD that you became compassionate towards them. Had you been harsh and meanhearted, they would have abandoned you. Therefore, you shall pardon them and ask forgiveness for them, and consult them. Once you make a decision, carry out your plan, and trust in GOD. GOD loves those who trust in Him.

May GOD help me and us to criticize others less and to opt for impartial observation, but only where we feel a solution can be offered. May GOD help us work on our own personal growth, God willing, and attempt to leave reproach behind.

The thing is, nobody's perfect. We all have our own challenges to work on and what we really need is a helping hand from those around us, not talking behind backs. Plus, if you have ever met someone who is truly comfortable in their own skin, then you'll know that they practice humility. And this is something far more beneficial to work on, instead of criticism.

Adapted from <http://simplelifestrategies.com/6-steps-to-reduce-the-negative-effects-of-criticism/>

Rizwan

[Ed's note: the author made minor revisions after publication]

* * * * *

Kill Your Ego

[2:54] Recall that Moses said to his people, "O my people, you have wronged your souls by worshiping the calf. You must repent to your Creator. You shall kill your egos. This is better for you in the sight of your Creator." He did redeem you. He is the Redeemer, Most Merciful.

**2:54 It is the ego that led to Satan's fall. It is the ego that caused our exile to this world, and it is the ego that is keeping most of us from redemption to God's Kingdom.*

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ers of GOD's laws. Give good news to such believers.

In summary, *God tells us we should strive.* It's a recommendation because it's good for us. We may still make it if we don't. But it's a commandment because God knows it's best for us. It's the logical thing to do for our own good (29:6).

[29:6] *Those who strive, strive for their own good. GOD is in no need for anyone.*

[9:44] *Those who truly believe in GOD and the Last Day do not ask your permission to evade the opportunity to strive with their money and their lives. GOD is fully aware of the righteous.*

[2:207] *Then there are those who dedicate their lives to serving GOD; GOD is compassionate towards such worshipers.*

Faiz

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AN ATTITUDE OF GRATITUDE

You shall remember Me, that I may remember you, and be thankful to Me; do not be unappreciative. [2:152]

When I awaken and my body aches, I am grateful for another day to worship God.

When my oven stopped working just before a big holiday, I was grateful that He gave me food to eat.

When my car broke down and I didn't have money to get it repaired, I was still grateful that I didn't have any place to go.

When my computer broke down and I had no way to get it repaired, I was grateful for library access.

When times get rough and I want to cry, I am grateful because I can pray.

When people call and brag and boast, I am grateful for everything I do have and that's a fact.

When money is late and bills are overdue, I am so glad I can call and explain the situation, knowing God will provide.

I am grateful for my home, family, food, transportation and most of all that I have God in my life.

My Lord strengthens my heart and inspires me to be appreciative. I am grateful. Thank God.

Eula

Letter to Food Pantry

This is a beautiful letter from someone who benefits from our food pantry each week (all thanks due to God; 2:272, 76:9, 94:7-8). With all he's going through, he took the time to reach out to support us in these times of disquiet in the world regarding "Islam". We never know how we will touch other lives, and how those lives will touch us. Praise God.

There are people who make your day... and there are people who make your life. You all seem so often to do both. I want to let you all know you're in our prayers. I imagine you may be overwhelmed because you've all been dealing with so much lately, and maybe you're wondering how things are ever going to work out. And I just want to remind you that although life brings many changes, God's love for us remains constant. He's always there guiding us through decisions and helping us do the hard things; always restoring in us a sense of hope and peace, no matter what we're facing. And the most beautiful thing about God is that the more we need Him, the closer He is. That's how I know He is especially close to you now. Thank you!