

## Drawing Near to Allah Thru Disability

I am a person blessed beyond measure because I have been given a gift. And that gift is parenting a child with a disability. It is a challenging yet very rewarding experience.

When a parent is given a diagnosis for their child, life changes inexorably. You experience many emotions: sorrow, loneliness, self-doubt, and anger. You learn to manage the physical reality of caring for your child's daily needs and medical concerns. At times, you may find yourself without support and bereft of understanding. Inevitably, you take on many roles as a parent to a special needs child. You may have to become an advocate for your child's rights, a negotiator at IEP (Individual Education Plan) school meetings, a researcher into biomedical treatments, a nurse, a psychologist, therapist, teacher, parent, and more.

Looking from the outside in, it may seem to be a very distressing and hopeless situation. You may ask yourself, "How can Allah (SWT) bring such heartache and pain to an innocent one? Why does Allah (SWT) choose someone for this?" But in the process of raising and caring for my child, I realized that parenting a child with a disability was a blessing in disguise.

In every way I have been brought closer to Allah (SWT). I am constantly reminded of how miraculous and precious our faculties to breathe, talk, hear, move our limbs, and understand truly are. I witness Allah's (SWT) sovereignty in every small step my child makes toward shifa. I am brought closer to Allah (SWT) when I experience the humility of human imperfection, and the growth of love and compassion in my heart. I am being tested in these moments, entrusted with a rare responsibility for the rest of my lifetime. I am lucky to have become the parent of a human being who I hope and believe will one day be in Jannah, healed in his body, close to the prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and in the light of Allah (SWT).

These are our special children. Though Allah (SWT) has given them challenges, he has also given them gifts of a rare insight, innocence, and quiet intelligence. I have found in my child, and other children like him, a spirituality, courage, grace, and maturity beyond his years. I could not have hoped for a more kind, endearing child.

With these thoughts in mind, I wish to address our community. **The month of April is Autism Awareness Month. Autism is a neurodevelopmental disorder that affects 1 in every 60 children.** There will be a concerted international effort around the globe for awareness and activism by organizations such as Autism Speaks, ISNA, and many others. We will have walks and fundraisers in Cincinnati.

At ICGC we have a special needs classroom—one of the first of its kind in any masjid in the nation—where we will be celebrating our unique and talented kids with special needs. We will also be having an Autism Awareness Day where we hope we can shed some light on the disorder. This month, please make a dua for all our children and support those who live with a disability or handicap. We increase our faith in our Rabb when we love those who Allah has loved and given the greatest burdens. According to hadith, the prophet Muhammad (PBUH) once said

“God the Merciful shows mercy to merciful people. Show mercy to those on earth so that God shows mercy on you.” (Abu Dawud)

We hope you join us in celebration of these amazing individuals. Together, as a community, we can improve their lives and build bridges towards greater understanding and acceptance.

Muslim Parent of a Special Needs Child

