

Spreading the Revival in the Hearts of the Living

Revival of Religious Knowledge

By

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PART I

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To those who said, “Our Lord, make our hearts conscious of You and purify them, You are the best of those who purify the hearts. You are their Guardian and You are their Lord.”

To those who said, “By our Creator, we will not favor you over the evidence that we have received. You can do to us whatever you want; you can control our lives only in this world.”

To those who followed the straight path to connect with God.

In the Name of God Lord of Mercy Giver of Mercy

The Quarter of the Acts of Worship

Book 1: The Book of Knowledge

Contents

The Quarter of the Acts of Worship.....	3
Book 1: The Book of Knowledge.....	4
The Virtue of Knowledge, Learning and Teaching.....	12
Evidence from the Quran.....	12
Evidence from Prophetic Tradition.....	12
Evidence from Scholars.....	12
Logical Evidence.....	13
Classification of Knowledge.....	14
Knowledge as an Individual Duty.....	14
Knowledge as a Collective Duty.....	14
Secular knowledge.....	14
Religious Knowledge.....	15
The Knowledge of Benefit in the Hereafter.....	15
Explaining the Science of the Dealings of Everyday Life.....	16
Belief.....	16
Action.....	16
Forsaking (an Obligatory Duty).....	16
Examples of the Quotes of the Scholars.....	17
Examples of the sayings of Imam El-Shafie.....	17
Reasons for Disparaging Bad Science.....	18
Evolution of the Meanings and Objectives of the Branches of Knowledge.....	18
Jurisprudence.....	18
Science (Knowledge).....	18
The Belief in the Oneness of God.....	18
The Remembrance of God.....	19
Wisdom.....	20
How much Good is there in Good Knowledge?.....	20
Good Knowledge.....	20
Bad Knowledge.....	20

Knowledge of which a little is Good but too much of it is Bad	20
Reasons for Disagreements	21
Criteria for Engaging in Debate	21
The Ills of Debates	21
Codes of Ethics for the Learner and the Scholar	23
The Learner's Code	23
The Teacher's Code	24
The Duties of the Teacher	25
The Ills of Knowledge	26
The Traits of the Scholars who seek the Reward of the Hereafter	26
The First Trait	26
The Second Trait	26
The Third Trait	28
The Fourth Trait	28
The Fifth Trait	28
The Sixth Trait	28
The Seventh Trait	30
The Eighth Trait	30
The Ninth Trait	31
The Intellect (Aql): Its Noble Status, Nature, and Types	32
Book 2: The Articles of Faith	33
The Elucidation of How the Followers of the	34
Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) understood the Testament of Faith	34
The Meaning of the Belief that there is No deity except God	34
The Belief in the Transcendence of God	34
The Belief in God's Power and Existence	34
The Belief in God's Knowledge	34
The Belief in God's Decisiveness (Will)	34
The Belief that God Hears and Sees	34
The Belief that God Speaks	34
The Belief in the Actions of God	35
The Meaning of the Belief that Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger	35

The Progression in Learning and Ranking the Levels of Belief.....	35
Fundamentals of the Belief in the Oneness of God.....	36
The knowledge of the essence of God.....	36
The knowledge of the attributes of God.....	36
The knowledge of God’s actions.....	36
The knowledge of the things that have been accepted on authority of the Prophet (PBUH).....	36
Fundamentals of the Creed.....	37
Iman and Islam.....	37
Definitions of Iman and Islam from the Language Perspective.....	37
The Meanings of terms Iman and Islam from Sharia Perspective.....	37
The Implications of Iman and Islam from an Islamic Law Perspective.....	38
Does Iman Increase and Decrease?.....	40
What is the appropriate form of Expressing Faith?.....	40
Book 3: The Inner Dimensions of Purification.....	43
Virtues of Purification.....	44
Virtues of Ablution (Wudu).....	44
Book 4: The Inner Dimensions of Prayers and its Components.....	46
Virtues of Prayers.....	47
Humility in Prayer (Khushu).....	48
How to Make Prayers Full of Vitality.....	50
The Inner Actions.....	50
Ways to Fulfill the Inner Actions.....	50
The Most Effective Cure for the Mindless Heart.....	52
The Call to Prayer.....	54
Purification.....	54
Covering the Body.....	55
Facing the Qibla.....	55
Standing Upright.....	55
The Intention.....	55
Saying Allah is Great (Takbir).....	55
The Opening Supplication.....	56
Seeking Refuge with God from Satan.....	56

The Opening (Al-Fatiha).....	56
Recitation of Quran.....	56
Bowing (ruku) and Prostrating (sujood).....	56
Tashahud.....	57
Tasleem.....	57
After the Prayer.....	57
Quotes about Humility in Prayer (Khushu).....	57
The Duties of the Imam.....	58
Before the Prayer.....	58
During the Recitation.....	59
Regarding Performing the Prayer.....	60
Ending the Prayer.....	60
Book 5: The Inner Dimensions of Zakat (Alms).....	61
The Inner Dimensions of the Etiquette of Paying Zakat.....	62
Understanding the Purpose and Significance of Paying Zakat.....	62
The Belief in the Oneness of God.....	62
Purification.....	63
Gratitude.....	63
Paying Zakat Early.....	63
Observing Confidentiality in Giving Zakat.....	63
Giving Zakat Openly.....	63
Not Invalidating the Charity.....	64
Belittling the Charity.....	64
Spending out of the Best and Dearest of his Wealth.....	65
Seeking the Recipients Who is Most Deserving.....	65
On The Recipients, Criteria for Entitlement,.....	66
and Etiquette of Receiving.....	66
The Duties of the Recipient.....	66
Voluntary Charity (Sadaqah).....	66
Elucidation of Giving Charity in Secret or in Public.....	67
Reasons for giving charity in secret.....	67
Reasons for giving charity in public.....	67

Zakat and Voluntary Charity.....	69
Book 6: The Inner Dimensions of Fasting.....	70
Virtue of Fasting.....	71
The Inner Dimensions of Fasting.....	71
Categories of Fasting.....	71
Book 7: The Inner Dimensions of the Hajj.....	74
Virtues of Hajj and the Cities of Mecca and Medina.....	75
Virtues of Hajj.....	75
Virtues of Mecca.....	75
Virtues of Medina.....	76
The Inner Dimensions of Hajj.....	76
Understanding.....	77
Yearning.....	78
The Resolve.....	78
Severing the Ties.....	78
Preparing the Necessary Provision.....	78
Buying the Required Ride.....	78
Buying the Unstitched Dress.....	79
Starting the Trip.....	79
Crossing the Desert.....	79
Wearing Ihram and Pronouncing the Talbiyah.....	79
Entering Mecca.....	79
The First Sighting of the House.....	79
Circumambulation about the House.....	80
Touching the Black Stone.....	80
Clinging to the Covering of the Kaaba.....	80
Walking Back and Forth between Safa and Marwah (Sayi).....	80
Standing at Arafat.....	80
Stoning the Pillar.....	80
Offering the sacrifice.....	81
Visiting Medina.....	81
Book 8: The Etiquette of Reciting Quran.....	82

Virtues of the Quran.....	83
The Discernible Etiquette of Reciting Quran.....	84
The Physical State of the Reader.....	84
The Length of Recitation.....	84
Recitation Plan.....	84
Writing.....	84
Slow Recitation.....	85
Weeping.....	85
Sujood.....	85
Starting of the Recitation.....	85
Reading Loudly.....	85
Reciting in a Nice Voice.....	85
The Inner Dimensions of Reciting the Quran.....	86
Appreciating the Superiority of the Language of the Quran.....	86
Being in Awe of the Speaker.....	86
Presence of the Heart.....	86
Reflection.....	86
Understanding.....	87
Ridding Oneself of the Impediments to Understanding.....	87
Personalization of the Message of Quran.....	88
Emotional Involvement.....	88
The Promotion.....	88
Helplessness.....	89
Understanding and interpreting the Quran.....	89
Book 9: Remembrance of God and Supplications (Duaa).....	92
The Virtue of Remembrance of God.....	93
The Etiquette of Supplications.....	94
Book 10: The Adoption of Regular Spiritual Devotions.....	96
and Performance of Night Prayers.....	96
The Virtue of Adopting a Regular Program of Devotions.....	97
The Regular Spiritual Devotions.....	97
Spiritual devotions to be performed during the day.....	97

Spiritual devotions to be performed during the night.....	99
Types of Spiritual Devotions.....	100
The Worshipper.....	100
The Scholar.....	101
The Learner.....	101
The Professional.....	101
The Person in Authority.....	101
The Devotee Believer.....	102
Virtue of Night Prayers.....	102
Ways to Make the Night Prayers Easy.....	103
The Apparent Means.....	103
The Inner Means.....	103
Different Ranks for Performing Night Prayer.....	104
Spending the whole night praying.....	104
Spending half the night praying.....	104
Spending one third of the night praying.....	105
Spending either 1/6 or 1/5 of the night praying.....	105
Praying as much as one can.....	105
Praying two or four rakaa.....	105
The Blessed Nights and Days.....	105
The Blessed Nights.....	105
The Blessed Days.....	105

The Virtue of Knowledge, Learning and Teaching

Evidence from the Quran

The Quran says, “*God witnesses that there is no deity except Him, and (so do) the angels and those who have knowledge.*” (3: 18) “*Only those fear God, from among His servants, who have knowledge.*” (35: 28) “*Are those who know equal to those who do not know?*” (39: 9)

The Quran stresses the virtue of learning in the verse, “*And it is not for the believers to go forth (to battle) all at once; for there should be a group from each community who go out to gain understanding in the religion, so that they can teach their people when they return.*” (9:122)

Evidence from Prophetic Tradition

The Prophet (PBUH) said¹, “*The scholars are the heirs of the Prophet.*” He also said, “*God holds Quranic knowledge in high regard, so whoever thinks that secular knowledge is better than the knowledge he had acquired from learning the Quran has committed the sin of belittling what God has honoured;*” and he said, “*God opens up a path that leads to paradise for whosoever pursued a path for learning.*”

Evidence from Scholars

Imam Ali (RA) said to Kamil, “*Kamil, knowledge is better than wealth. The knowledge you acquire protects you, but you have to protect your wealth. Knowledge makes you in control but wealth controls you. Spending money decreases your wealth but sharing your knowledge enriches you.*”

Abu Al-Aswad (RA) said, “*There is nothing more honorable than gaining knowledge. Kings rule over people but scholars rule over kings.*”

Ibn Massoud (RA) said, “*Acquire knowledge before it vanishes. Knowledge will vanish when those who are able to teach it pass away. By the One Who controls my life, martyrs who were killed striving in the path of God would have liked to be brought back to life again to enjoy once more the honor that they had received from God. No one has ever been born a scholar, but scholarship is acquired through learning.*”

Some wise scholars said, “*I pity two kinds of people more than any other: a man who seeks knowledge but does not have the mental ability to grasp it; and a man who has the mental ability to grasp knowledge but does not seek it.*”

Abu Al-Dardaa (RA) said, “*Be one of three: a scholar, a learner, or a listener.*”

It has been said that the first step in the process of acquiring knowledge is to be silent in the presence of the teacher, the second step is to listen attentively to the teacher, the third is to memorize the lessons, the fourth is to act upon it, the fifth is to spread the acquired knowledge.

¹ Narrated by Abu Al-Dardaa and reported by Abu Dawood, Al-Tirmidhi, and Ibn Maja

Logical Evidence

Valuable things which people desire can be divided into three categories:

1. Some things are desired because they are a means for acquiring something else, like money. Money by itself is useless but God decreed that one could use money to buy things that people need.
2. Some things are desired because of their intrinsic value, like happiness in the Hereafter and the pleasure of looking at God's face. These things are held in higher regard than the things mentioned in category (a).
3. Some things are desired because they have an intrinsic value and they are also a means for acquiring other desirable things, e.g. physical health and knowledge. Knowledge has its own intrinsic value; in addition, it is a means for attaining high status in this life as well as happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

If knowledge is the best endeavor in life, then learning is a way to seek the best, and teaching is a way to spread the best. Human endeavors in life are either religious (spiritual) or worldly (physical). The spiritual aspect of human life does not flourish except based on a sound physical aspect. The physical aspect of human life is the farmland whose fruits are reaped in the Hereafter. It is a means to reach for God for those who consider this worldly life a sign of God and a temporary place of residence. The physical aspect of human endeavors will either make this worldly life good or bad. These material endeavors can be classified into three categories

1. Fundamental endeavors necessary for this world to function, these are
 - a. Farming to produce food
 - b. Construction to build houses
 - c. Tailoring to make clothes
 - d. Governance (leadership and administration) to organize communal life
2. Assisting activities that serve to achieve the fundamental endeavors like blacksmithing which is used to manufacture machines for farming, construction, and tailoring.
3. Activities which complete and provide the finishing touches for the fundamental endeavors, e.g. grinding and baking which complete farming; and cutting and sewing which complete tailoring.

The fundamental endeavors are the noblest among these categories and Governance (leadership) is the noblest within the category of the fundamental endeavors.

Leadership has four ranks. The first and highest is the leadership provided by the prophets (PBUT) which involves guiding people (both the scholars and the masses) in the public and private arenas of human activity. The second is the governance provided by kings, which involves guiding people (both the elite and the masses) in the arena of public affairs. The third is the leadership provided by the scholars, who guide the elite in the private arena of human activity. Common people are generally unable to benefit from this kind of leadership. The fourth is the leadership provided by the elders who admonish common people and guide them in the private arena of human activity.

The highest among these is the rank of the prophets then the scholars who are the heirs of the prophets.

Classification of Knowledge

Knowledge as an Individual Duty

This is the kind of knowledge that every individual should acquire. It is the knowledge that is needed for a person to be able to fulfill his/her religious duties. This is the knowledge that is referred to in the Prophetic Tradition², “*Seeking knowledge is an obligatory duty for each Muslim.*” The knowledge in this tradition refers to the practical knowledge that a Muslim needs in his/her daily life. This kind of knowledge can be acquired gradually as the different duties become applicable to him/her. As an example, when a person reaches the age of puberty it becomes incumbent on him/her to learn how to perform Ghusl (the ritual body wash after having incurred a major impurity). When a person reaches the age at which prayer, fasting, or pilgrimage becomes an obligatory duty, one must learn how to perform prayer, fasting, or pilgrimage, respectively.

Knowledge as a Collective Duty

This is the kind of knowledge that a Muslim community needs so that the life of the community can continue e.g. medicine, mathematics, etc. Each community should have a group of people who acquire this knowledge for the benefit of the community. If a Muslim community lacks people with any type of this knowledge, the whole community will be accountable.

High specialization in these sciences is a virtue, not a compulsory duty, because the life of the community can continue without it. However, it is useful to have such knowledge for development and progress.

Knowledge can also be classified as secular knowledge or religious knowledge.

Secular knowledge

Secular knowledge can be further divided into:

1. Good Knowledge: This is the kind of knowledge that is necessary for the continuation of the life of the community e.g. medicine, mathematics. Acquiring this knowledge is a collective duty or a virtue.
2. Bad Knowledge: This is knowledge which could cause harm e.g. magic and conjuring.
3. Permissible Knowledge: This comprises poetry and history and other similar sciences.

² Narrated by Anas and reported by Ibn Majah

Religious Knowledge

All types of religious knowledge are good. It comprises four branches:

The Fundamentals

This includes the knowledge of the Quran, the Sunnah (the Prophetic Tradition), the heritage of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), and the consensus of the Muslim nation.

The Secondary Knowledge

Secondary knowledge is knowledge generated from the fundamentals. It is an expansion and extrapolation of the fundamentals. Secondary knowledge can be further divided into:

- a. Knowledge which benefits people in this life. This knowledge is included in the books on jurisprudence. This knowledge is taught by scholars of jurisprudence. They are the scholars of this life.
- b. Knowledge which benefits people in the Hereafter. This is the knowledge which deals with the conditions of the hearts. It defines the good and bad traits for the hearts and the traits that please God and those which displease God.

The Introductory Knowledge

This is the knowledge of the mechanics of the religious knowledge. This includes the language, grammar, and similar knowledge. They are necessary for the understanding of the Book of God.

The Complementary Knowledge

This includes learning the recitation of Quran and its interpretation.

Note: The objective of the science of jurisprudence, a branch of the secondary religious knowledge, is to organize the life of people on earth. To illustrate this, let us take the example of people going to pilgrimage in a caravan. For people to perform pilgrimage successfully, they need to know how to perform pilgrimage, the leader of the caravan should know the route well, and the caravan should be protected against the dangers of the road.

The Knowledge of Benefit in the Hereafter

The knowledge of benefit in the Hereafter can be divided into two branches: the Science of Revelation, and the Science of Dealings of Everyday Life (The practical science.)

The Science of Revelation

This is the highest level of knowledge. It is the knowledge that the most truthful and those who come very near to God can gain. It is a light that illuminates the heart when the heart has been purified and cleansed of its ills. This light reveals the true nature of things; while before acquiring this knowledge a person would only know the names of these things. When a person acquires this knowledge, the person learns the true meaning of God, His actions, His attributes, and His wisdom. He learns the true meaning of prophethood, the angels, and the devils. He learns the difference between the touch of an angel and the touch of a devil. He learns the true meaning of the torment in the grave, the path, heaven, and hell. He learns the true meaning of meeting God and seeing His Honored Face.

This learning will take place when the cover is removed and the truth becomes apparent. The person will learn these things as if he is seeing them with his naked eye. The nature of humankind allows this to happen, but the problem is that the mirror of the heart is often covered with rust and spoiled with the ills of this worldly life. The objective of the knowledge of benefit in the Hereafter is to remove the rust and cure the ills of the worldly life which covers the heart and prevents it from knowing God, His traits and His attributes. This is made possible by purifying the soul, avoiding desires, and emulating the prophets in all their deeds.

The Science of the Dealings of Everyday Life (The Practical Science)

This science deals with the rules that govern the dealings that people engage in as a part of their daily interactions. These rules should be practiced after the concealed knowledge has been uncovered. It may take the form of a belief, an action, or forsaking something. The dealings pave the road to the science of revelation which is the objective of the seekers.

These dealings could be concealed or visible. The concealed practices deal with actions of the heart. These practices are either good like perseverance, gratitude, fear, hope, contentment, asceticism, God consciousness; or bad like fear of poverty, anger, discontentment, arrogance, and hatred. The Dealings of Everyday Life that are practiced openly can either be part of the day-to-day dealings or acts of worship.

Explaining the Science of the Dealings of Everyday Life

Belief

As an example, the first duty for a person to learn on the morning of the day he/she reaches puberty is the duty of pronouncing the Shahadah (Testament of the faith). The person should then understand its meaning. He/she does not have to prove that this is an obligatory duty, but it is sufficient for the person to realize that pronouncing the Shahadah is an obligatory duty through following the example of others. The Prophet (PBUH) accepted that from some of the Arabs of the desert (Bedouins) who pronounced the Shahadah by repeating it after they had heard it from the Prophet (PBUH).

Action

To illustrate this, let us elaborate on the same example given in the previous section further. If that person lives until it is time to pray Zuhr, then he/she should learn the principles of ritual purification and how to perform the prayers. The same rule applies when the times for fasting and pilgrimage and the other acts of worship are reached.

Forsaking (an Obligatory Duty)

A blind person is not obliged to learn about the things which are prohibited to look at. Similarly, a mute person is not obliged to learn about the things that we are prohibited to say.

It should be pointed out that those who breach the rules of the Science of this world (the Jurisprudence) will be punished by the rulers of the day, but those who breach the rules of the Science of the Hereafter will be punished by God in the Hereafter. One should be keen on

gaining and understanding the Science of the Hereafter. It is a concealed treasure that should be sought. Thousands of the companions of the Messenger of God (PBUH) died without learning theology, nor did they take up the duty of making religious decrees (Fatwa) but they excelled in the knowledge of the Hereafter. When Omar (RA) died, Ibn Masso'ud (RA) said, "Nine of the knowledge perished." Some objected saying, "Why do you say that while there are many of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) still living among us?" Ibn Masso'ud (RA) said, "I did not mean the Science of Jurisprudence, but I meant the knowledge of God." If you say that the scholars of theology are the ones who enjoy fame among people, then you should know that God bestows honor on people using a standard that is different from the standard that people use.

Many of the stories that are told about the five scholars of Jurisprudence (Imam Abu Haneefa, Imam Malik, Imam Al-Shafi'i, Imam Ahmed, and Sufyan Al-Thawri) show that in addition to their excellence in the Science of Jurisprudence, they were extremely knowledgeable in the Science of the Hereafter. However, most people followed them only to seek their knowledge of Jurisprudence.

Examples of the Quotes of the Scholars

Examples of the sayings of Imam El-Shafie

I did not have a full stomach for sixteen years, because having a full stomach makes the body heavy, hardens the heart, slows the thinking process, induces sleep, and weakens the person's will to perform acts of worship.

I never made an oath in the name of God.

He lies who claims that he can love both God and the worldly life at the same time

The following quotes provide lessons in the etiquette of debate:

I never wished that anyone of those I debated to be proven wrong. I always wish that those whom I speak to would be successful in their endeavors and they would be blessed by God's support.

I never cared whether the truth came from my tongue or from the tongue of the person I debated. I always respected and loved those who accepted the truth after I had proved it beyond doubt. I despise those who are too arrogant to see the truth.

Imam El-Shafie was asked once, "What is best of the three: Perseverance? Trial? Empowerment?" His answer was, "Empowerment is only given to prophets after they have been tried and persevered."

Imam Ahmed bin Hanbal said, "For forty years, I never prayed a prayer without making a supplication for Imam El-Shafi'i."

Imam Abu Haneefa used to spend half the night praying. One day he was walking and someone pointed at him saying, "This man spent the whole night praying." From that day on, Imam Abu Haneefa spent the whole night praying. He said, "I feel ashamed in front of God, that someone gives me an attribute that I do not actually have."

Reasons for Disparaging Bad Science

No knowledge can be disparaged of its own accord. Knowledge should be disparaged for the following reasons:

1. If it causes harm either for the one who gains it or for someone else.
2. If it is expected to cause a probable harm for the person who acquires it.
3. Wasting time in acquiring knowledge that is of no benefit, e.g. trying to learn the intricate details of a topic before learning its basic fundamentals, or trying to discover the secrets of the divine.

Evolution of the Meanings and Objectives of the Branches of Knowledge

You should know that religious science got mixed up with bad science because of the evolution of the meanings and objectives of certain areas of knowledge in the minds and practice of people. In what follows we mention five areas of knowledge which lost their original meanings. Their objectives and intents strayed away from the original objectives and intents as they were understood and practiced by the earlier righteous generations.

Jurisprudence

The early generations understood Jurisprudence to be the branch of knowledge which leads to the rewards in the Hereafter. Its objectives included the discovery of the ills that afflict the soul and spoil the deeds; and the recognition of how trivial the worldly gains are when compared with the rewards in the Hereafter. The later generations changed the objective of this knowledge to the study of the intricate details of religious decrees (Fatwa) and understanding the rationale behind each decree.

Science (Knowledge)

The early generations understood science to mean the science that leads to the knowledge of God, His signs, and His actions. The meaning of science for the later generations evolved into the knowledge needed to engage into debates about jurisprudence and religious law even though the debaters lacked the understanding of the interpretation of Quran and the fundamentals of the religion.

The Belief in the Oneness of God

The early generations understood the belief in the Oneness of God to mean that God is the originator of everything. They understood that the means, on their own, do not necessarily lead to the expected results. One of the fruits of this knowledge is putting one's trust in God. This knowledge evolved into the science of theology and debate. Theologians are now called the scholars of the belief in the Oneness of God.

The belief in the Oneness of God has a precious core that is wrapped inside a shroud having two thin layers, one on top of the other. People of this time ignored the precious core and focused only on the two thin layers that enshroud the core. They considered that these two layers are the essence of the belief in the oneness of God. The first layer consists of pronouncing verbally,

“There is no deity except God.” This is the statement that defies the statement of the trinity of God which the Christians believe in. However, such a statement can be made by a hypocrite who, deep in his heart, does not believe in of the veracity of the statement. The second layer is to believe in one’s heart that the statement is true. This is what most Muslims do. The theologians are the protectors of this layer against the evil of innovation.

The core on the other hand is to believe that God is the originator and the controller of everything. This belief consequently implies that the means and the tools, on their own, do not necessarily lead to the expected results. Those who have this belief worship only God and do not allow their whims and lusts to control them. Those who allow their whims and lusts to control them are worshipping their whims and lusts. They belittle themselves for mortals like themselves. They are the ones who are bankrupt. The example of these people is the one who stands up in the Morning Prayer saying, “*I directed my face, standing straight, towards the Originator of the heavens.*” This is his first lie for the day, if he did not direct his heart solely towards God. If he meant by this statement that he directed his face towards the Ka’aba that does not mean that he directed himself in the direction towards the Originator of the heavens and earth because God is boundless. If he meant that he directed his heart towards God, the real objective, how could he be truthful while his heart is attached to his worldly needs and desires?

The Remembrance of God

The sessions that were dedicated solely to the remembrance of God became sessions for fiction and storytelling, reciting poetry, excesses, and catastrophic behavior. Using storytelling to admonish people and to exhort them to be obedient to God is an innovation which we have been admonished not to practice. These stories are usually based on fiction and fiction involves telling lies. This is the premise of Satan, who lures people to the telling of fiction instead of telling the truth. Inducing people to become obedient to God is best done through telling the truth from the Quran and the Sunnah. Poetry can be used to admonish people and to warn them against committing sin. Poetry written to court lovers and to praise sin is forbidden. It entices people to commit sin.

Excesses involve innovations that have been introduced by some Sufis. They take one of two forms. The first form is the long discourses of expressing love to God which may end up with hallucinations e.g. people claim that they became united with God, they claim being able to see the unseen, and they claim that they are receiving revelations. The second is the uttering of meaningless words. These words could be meaningless to both the speaker and the listener alike; or it may be understood by the speaker, but he is unable to convey their meaning to the listener because of his ignorance. This is all harmful for everyone.

Jesus (PBUH) said, “*Do not do wisdom injustice by entrusting it to those who do not appreciate it and do not do injustice to those who are worthy of wisdom by keeping wisdom from them. Be like a kind physician who treats the illness with the appropriate medicine.*” It has also been said, “*Only ignorant people entrust wisdom to those who do not appreciate it and those who keep wisdom from those who deserve it have committed injustice. Wisdom has the right to be appreciated so give it to those who are worthy of it.*”

The catastrophic behavior includes the excesses that were mentioned above in addition to claiming hidden meanings for the Quranic verses which defy the obvious well-known

interpretations of the verses. An example of this is the claim that the word “Pharaoh” in the verse, *“Go to Pharaoh. Indeed, he has transgressed,”* (79:17) refers to the human heart. The human heart transgresses against its owner. Another example is claiming that the word “staff” in the verse, *“Throw down your staff,”* (28:31) refers to anything in which people put their trust in besides God.

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said³, *“Whoever interprets the Quran using only his knowledge will take his designated place in Hell fire.”* This applies to people who twist the meaning of Quranic verses to corroborate their opinions. This is a catastrophe, who can claim that this is a legitimate way to call to God? The same applies to those who fabricate prophetic traditions. This behavior is certainly forbidden.

Wisdom

Wisdom has been mentioned by God in the Quran, *“He gives wisdom to whom He wills, and whoever has been given wisdom has certainly been given much good. And none will remember except those of understanding.”* (2:269) The epitome of wisdom is to put the appropriate measure of a thing in its appropriate place and at the appropriate time. However, the usage of the term "a wise person" changed, and it is now used to describe the physician, the poet, and the astrologer.

How much Good is there in Good Knowledge?

Knowledge can be classified into three categories. These are

Good Knowledge

This is the knowledge that leads to knowing God, His traits, His actions, His laws regarding His creation, and His wisdom. This type of knowledge should be sought for its own merit and because it leads to happiness in the Hereafter. This knowledge can only be gained through striving.

Bad Knowledge

This type of knowledge is not associated with any benefit in the worldly life or in the Hereafter. Part of it will result in more harm than benefit like knowledge of magic and horoscope.

Knowledge of which a little is Good but too much of it is Bad

This is the kind of knowledge of which a little is sufficient. Trying to gain more knowledge beyond the sufficient amount is a waste of time. Examples of this are the sciences that come under the classification of collective duty. This is knowledge that needs only to be learnt by a small group of people. Do not let this knowledge take you away from the knowledge that leads to the reward of the Hereafter. A person who sacrifices his life to benefit others is stupid. It is like a person who is being attacked by venomous snake while he is trying to keep the flies from bothering someone else. When you have completed the task of purifying yourself and adopted the traits which enable you to abandon sin both in secret as well as in the open, then you can devote some time to acquire the kind of the knowledge which is considered to be a collective

³ Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al-Nassie and Al-Tirmidhi

duty. You should do that gradually, so start with the Quran, then the Sunnah, then the interpretation of the Quran, and so on.

Reasons for Disagreements

After the death of the Messenger of God (PBUH) the people were governed by his companions, those were the rightly guided Caliphs. They were knowledgeable in Jurisprudence. They were able to provide answers for whatever questions the people had. The people were able then to devote their time to the learning of the knowledge which will benefit them in the Hereafter. Their successors were not knowledgeable in Jurisprudence, so they hired scholars in Jurisprudence to answer people's questions. Some of the people from the second generation (Tabieen) were still living but they were not initially interested in giving fatwa however the Caliphs pleaded with them to accept positions whereby they can formally give fatwa (Qadi). People started to realize that learning can lead to worldly gains, so many started to seek knowledge as a way leading to fame and wealth. They sought to be employed by the Caliphs. The scene changed from a Caliph trying to recruit a scholar to a scholar who is seeking employment. The scholars became humiliated.

As time passed, another generation of rulers came to govern. These rulers were fond of listening to debates in theology. The study of theology flourished. Some scholars were not sincere in seeking the truth and were controlled by their whims and desires.

Criteria for Engaging in Debate

1. One should complete his share of individual duty learning before engaging in a debate which is a collective duty.
2. One should not engage in a debate and neglect attending to learning science that is considered a type of collective duty learning.
3. The debater should be knowledgeable enough to provide decrees based on his own knowledge and he should not be biased towards a specific school of thought. He should be able to see and espouse the truth irrespective of the school of thought that professed it.
4. Debates should be conducted about realistic topics.
5. Debates are best conducted in private rather than public milieu.
6. The objective of the debater should be the pursuit of the truth. Debaters should consider themselves a team rather than adversaries.
7. A debater should have ample time to explore all available evidence without interruptions from the other party.
8. Debates should be used as an opportunity for learning.

Important Note: Remember that Satan laughs at those who busy themselves in debates with other people and forget to debate Satan who controls their hearts and lures them to perdition.

The Ills of Debates

A man was given a choice between either to drink alcohol or to commit other indecencies. The man chose to drink thinking that this is the lesser evil however, when he drank, he became drunk

and he committed all other indecencies. Similarly, a person who is obsessed by the desire to win debates for the sake of gaining fame and glory, such a person harbors many bad traits, some of these traits are envy; arrogance; hatred; backbiting whether during the debate or after the debate; promoting himself; spying on fellow Muslims to use the secrets he uncovers when it is convenient; feeling happy for the misfortune that afflicts people and feeling sad for what makes people happy; hypocrisy; hating the truth when it will not benefit him; and showing off.

These are ten major evil traits. Add to this fighting, calling people names, slandering people and others. Those who enjoy these traits cannot be considered righteous people. There are other ten evil traits that branch off from the ones mentioned above. These are looking down on people, anger, hate, greed, love of wealth, love of fame, bragging, insolence, exultation, glorifying kings and seeking their company. In addition to others like vain talk; having hearts void of humility, mercy, and fear; heedlessness that cause people to forget how much of his prayer did he complete or who is he praying to.

You should know that all these evil traits go hand in hand with seeking knowledge for the sake of anything other than the sake of God. The knowledge can either destroy its seeker forever or make him live forever. The people who will receive the worst torment on the Day of Judgement are those who did not benefit from the knowledge they had. The same applies to those who are involved in admonishing people if their intent is to seek fame or wealth rather than seeking the pleasure of God.

If you say that allowing debate brings a great benefit to people because it induces them to seek knowledge (one reason knowledge progresses is that people seek fame). This may be true; yet those who seek knowledge for the sake of fame will not be saved from the punishment on the Day of Judgement. Their example is the example of a candle which burns to bring light to others. They will benefit others, but they will bring perdition upon themselves.

A scholar is one of three

1. Those who will cause their own destruction as well as the destruction of others. These are the ones whose declared intentions are the pursuit of worldly gain and pleasure.
2. Those who will cause their own destruction making others happy. These are the ones whose declared intentions are to seek the Hereafter, while their concealed intentions are the pursuit of worldly fame and the praise of people.
3. Those who will make themselves and others happy. These are the ones whose declared as well as concealed intentions are to invite the people to the way of God.

- 1.

Codes of Ethics for the Learner and the Scholar

The Learner's Code

1. The learner should purify his soul from the ills of bad traits and indecent manners. Prayers are not valid if one performed the right movements while the soul is wicked. Similarly, knowledge cannot be gained unless the inner self is pure.

The Messenger of God said⁴, *“The angels do not enter a house while there is a dog in the house.”* The heart is a house, and it is the landing of the angels and their home. The bad traits like anger, lust, hatred, envy, arrogance, exultation are dogs that bark. How will the angels enter a house in which these dogs are barking? Do not make your heart to look like a heart while in reality it is a dog. Ibn Massoud (RA) said, *“It is not important how much knowledge you have, what is important is the amount of light that this knowledge brings to your heart.”* Some scholars said, *“Knowledge is to fear God,”* quoting the Quran, *“Only those fear God, from among His servants, who have knowledge. Indeed, God is Eminent, All-Forgiving.”* (35:28)

2. The learner should reduce the amount of his involvement in the matters of daily life; such involvement distracts the learner from learning. He should detach himself from family and homeland and devote himself completely to the process of learning. Knowledge will only lend itself to you when you lend yourself to it, *“God has not made for a man two hearts in his interior.”* (33: 4)
3. The learner should neither treat his teacher arrogantly, nor issue commands to him. The learner should listen to the teacher's instructions the way an ignorant ill person listens to a kind experienced physician. Only the humble can gain knowledge. Some people seek knowledge only at the hands of the celebrities among the scholars. This reflects deep ignorance on the part of these people. Our objective is to gain salvation and happiness. Whoever is fleeing the savage attack of a fierce lion does not care whether the person who guides him to safety is a celebrity or not. The learner should not follow his own opinion, but he should follow the teacher's guidance. The error of the teacher is less dangerous than the learner's correct opinion. The advice of the scholar which is based on his experience may sound absurd to the learner; however, it is of great benefit. We need to ask about things we do not know; however, that should be within the limits that the teacher sets. Asking about things that are beyond our understanding is bad. Al-Khidr commanded Prophet Moses (PBUH) not to ask questions before he was ready to receive the knowledge. The teacher is aware of the level of knowledge that the student has reached.
4. A novice learner should not explore the different opinions that deal with the answers to a certain question whether it is a question about matters that deal with the worldly life science or the science of benefit in the Hereafter. This will only create confusion in his mind. He should excel in the school that his teacher has approved; then he can explore other different opinions. He should avoid teachers who do not follow a single school but explore different schools. The harm of these teachers outweighs the benefit that they

⁴ Narrated by Abi Talaha and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

deliver. A blind person cannot lead blind people. That is explained by what a teacher said, “Whoever saw me in the beginning of my career became a saint, and whoever saw me at the end of my career, became a sinner.” A teacher at the end of his career reaches a state of knowledge which makes him relate the actions of the individual to the caliber of his inner soul. His physical actions become limited to the obligatory duties. This may be perceived as negligence and laziness on his part while he is in fact totally engaged in the best deeds of all: the continuous remembrance of God. An example which illustrates this point is as follows: a person who thinks that since the huge amounts of unclean objects which are thrown in the sea do not defile the sea water, then throwing a small unclean object in a cup will not defile the contents of the cup. The poor person does not realize that the sea with its strength is able to remove the impurity from the water and transform the object into a pure object, while the small amount of impurity will change the condition of the contents of the cup and render it impure.

5. The learner should seek all types of good knowledge. He should at least get an idea of the contents and objectives of each of the different sciences. Having done that, he could seek to delve deeply in one or more of these sciences if he has a chance to do so.
6. The learner should prioritize his learning; seeking to learn the most useful first. Life is short. He should devote most of his time to study the two branches of knowledge which will benefit him in the Hereafter: The Science of Dealings of Everyday Life and the Science of Revelation. The objective of the Science of Dealings of Everyday Life is to get to the Science of Revelation, and the objective of the Science of Revelation is to get to know God.
7. The learner should not move from one kind of knowledge to another until he has perfected the first.
8. The learner should be aware of the means to gain the noblest of knowledge. The criteria of nobility are the nobility of the fruit of this knowledge and its authenticity. Examples of the fruits of the different sciences are the fruit of the religious sciences is the reward in the Hereafter, and the fruit of the medical sciences is the protection of people’s health in the worldly life. In this respect religious sciences are nobler than medical sciences.
9. The objectives of the learner should be to improve the condition of his inner self and beautifying it with virtue; to seek God’s contentment; and to gain the reward on the Day of Judgment. His objective should not be to seek a worldly gain.
10. The learner should recognize which sciences lead to his objectives. This way he can prioritize.

The Teacher’s Code

You should know that an individual deals with his knowledge like he deals with his money. A person earns his money, he saves it to be independent, he spends it for his own benefit, or he spends it generously on others. Similarly with knowledge, a person who gains knowledge can save his knowledge so he does not need to ask anyone else, he can use his knowledge to benefit himself in this life and in the Hereafter, or he could use it to educate others. A teacher, like the person who generously spends on others, attains the highest rank. The person who gains knowledge, acts according to his knowledge, and benefits from his knowledge by educating others is a person that deserves to be called a great person in kingdoms of earth and heaven. He is like the sun, a source of light unto itself, and one that illuminates others as well. He is like the

perfume that not only has a pleasant smell but also imparts its fragrance to whatever it touches. The person who teaches others but he himself does not act according to his knowledge is like a book which provides knowledge to others, but it does not benefit from the knowledge it has. He is like the needle which sews clothes for people but unable to cover itself and the candle that gives light to others while it burns itself down.

The Duties of the Teacher

1. The teacher must treat his students kindly, as if they were his own children.
2. The teacher should follow the example of the Messenger of God (PBUH); he should not charge a fee for his teaching. He should teach for the sake of God and seeking His reward. He should not think that he is doing the students a favor by teaching them, even though they should be grateful to him. He should be actually grateful to them that they gave him their hearts to plant his knowledge, a deed that draws him nearer to God. Their hearts are like a piece of land that one gave you to cultivate plants for yourself. The benefit that you get from the land is greater than the benefit that the landowner will get.
3. The teacher should be sincere in his advice to the learner. He should not allow the learner to pass from one level to another unless he deserves to pass. The teacher should always remind the learner that the objective of learning is to become closer to God.
4. The teacher should use euphemism in pointing out the bad behavior of the learner. He should not attempt to blame or openly criticize the learner. Open criticism tends to remove the barrier of respect between the teacher and the learner, provokes disagreement, and may push the learner to stubbornly refuse the advice. This is one of the delicate functions of the teacher.
5. The teacher should not brainwash his student into thinking highly of the subjects that the teacher is teaching while disregarding other subjects.
6. The teacher should know his audience and teach the students according to their individual levels of understanding.
7. The teacher should not belittle the slow learner by indicating that the learner is unable to delve into deeper knowledge. This will confuse and demoralize the student.
8. The teacher's knowledge should be reflected on his behavior. Knowledge is hidden, it can only be appreciated by insight; but actions are visible, they can be appreciated by sight. Those who have sight are more than those who have insight. A teacher, who commands his students not to perform a certain action and turns around and performs it himself, does not only break a religious rule but he will also be the laugh of people. His actions will be an incentive for people to commit the forbidden deed.

The Ills of Knowledge

It has been pointed out before, that the scholars who did not benefit from their knowledge will be subjected to the most severe punishment in the Hereafter.

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁵, *“Do not seek knowledge so that you can boast among the scholars, debate with the ignorant, or become a celebrity; whoever does that will be destined to Hell fire.”*

Al-Khalil ibn Ahmad Al-Farahidi said, *“Man is one of four: a man who has knowledge and is aware that he has knowledge is a scholar that deserves to be followed; a man who has knowledge but is unaware that he has knowledge is a sleeping man so wake him up; a man who has no knowledge and he is aware that he has no knowledge is a man who is seeking guidance so guide him; and a man who has no knowledge but he is unaware that he does not have knowledge is an ignorant man so avoid him.”*

Do not think that not seeking wealth is enough for you to join the ranks of the scholars who are seeking the reward of the Hereafter. Fame is more harmful than wealth. Enjoying fame is very dangerous. Some scholars said, “You should not preach in public if you feel the desire to preach in public. Only when you have no desire to preach in public should you preach.” The trial posed by the desire to preach in public is harder than the trial posed by the love of wealth and children. Sahl said, “Knowledge is one of the attractions of life, only those who behave according to their knowledge hope for the reward of the Hereafter. All deeds will be in vain except the sincere deeds. All people are dead except the scholars. All the scholars are drunk except those who behave according to their knowledge. All the scholars who behave according to their knowledge are conceited except those who are sincere. Those who are sincere live in fear until they know how the end of their lives will be.

The Traits of the Scholars who seek the Reward of the Hereafter

The First Trait

They do not seek worldly gains but pursue the road which leads to the reward of the Hereafter. You should know that the worldly life and the Hereafter are like two women married to the same man. Each of them is only happy when the other is unhappy.

The Second Trait

Their words are exemplified by their deeds. When they issue a command, they should be the first to implement it. Umar ibn Al-Khatab (RA) said, *“Three things destroy the faith, one of them is the sin of a scholar.”* Ibn Massoud (RA) said, *“There will come a time when the sweetness of the heart turns into salt; neither teacher nor student will benefit from knowledge. The hearts of the scholars will be like salty soil that will not benefit from rain. This will happen when the hearts of the scholars will yearn to the pleasures of the worldly life; they will love this worldly life more*

⁵ Narrated by Jaber and reported by Ibn Majah

than they love the Hereafter. God will then remove the springs of wisdom from their hearts and will extinguish the lamps of guidance in their hearts. At that time the scholars will claim that they are conscious of God while their deeds reflect their transgression. The tongues will be fluent, but the hearts will be barren. By God, the only God, this only happens because the objectives of the scholars in teaching and the students in learning will not be purely dedicated to seeking God's reward. Their objectives will be aimed at something else other than God's reward."

Abu Huazifah (RA) said, *"You are living at a time in which you will face perdition if your action misses even one tenth of what you know. There will come a time in which people will attain salvation even if they only act according to one tenth of what they know. This is because there will be many who do not act."*

It has been narrated that Shaqiq Al-Balkhi asked his student Hatem Al-Assam, *"For how long you have accompanied me?"* Hatem said, *"I have been in your company for thirty years."* Shaqiq asked, *"What did you learn during this time?"* Hatem answered, *"I learned eight lessons."* Shaqiq said, *"We are from God and to Him we will return. I spent all my life teaching you and you only learnt eight lessons?"* Hatem said, *"My teacher, I only learnt eight lessons, and I do not like to lie."* Shaqia said, *"Tell me what these lessons are."*

Hatem said, "I observed people, I found that each person loved someone; they stayed together until death separated them. So, I decided to make the righteous deeds my beloved, so when I die, they will accompany me in the grave. I reflected on the verse, *"But as for he who feared the position of his Lord and prevented the soul from (unlawful) inclination, then indeed, Paradise will be his refuge."* (79:40-41) Knowing that God's words are the truth, I worked hard to prevent my soul from inclining to the unlawful. My soul became a steady obedient servant to God. I observed the people and found that they cherish their valuable possessions dearly and they protect them; and I reflected on the verse, *"Whatever you have will end, but what God has is lasting."* (16: 96) so I entrusted my valuable possessions to God for safe keeping. I observed people and I found that they value wealth, love, status, and family. I thought about it and discovered that these have no value. Then I reflected on the verse, *"The most noble of you in the sight of God is the most conscious of Him."* (49: 13) So I worked hard to become conscious of God so that I attain a noble status in the sight of God. I observed people and saw how they fight with each other and slander each other. I realized that this is because they envy each other. I reflected on the verse, *"It is We who apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world."* (43: 32) I realized that that provision has been decided by God. So, I abandoned the feelings of envy and did not compare myself to the others. This saved me from the enmity of people. I observed people and saw how they oppress each other and they fight each other. I went back to the verse, *"Satan is indeed your enemy so take him as your enemy."* (35: 6) So, I made Satan my only enemy. I tried my best to be careful of him after God has told me that he is my enemy. No one of the people became my enemy. I observed people and saw how people humiliate themselves for a piece of bread and they may commit a forbidden act to get it. I remembered the verse, *"And there is no creature on earth but that upon God is its provision."* (11: 6) I realized that I am one of God's creatures whom He promised to provide for, so I worked hard to fulfil my duty to God, and I entrusted Him to satisfy my needs. I observed the people and I found that they all put their trusts in mortals like them. They entrust their lands, trades,

factories, health to human beings like them. I remembered the verse, “*Whoever puts his trust in God, God will be sufficient for him.*” (65: 3) I put my trust in God; He is sufficient for me.”

Shaqiq said, “*Hatem, may God grant you success. I looked into the Torah, the Bible, the Psalms, and the Quran and I found that the foundation of all goodness and religion are based on the eight principles which you mentioned. Whoever applied these principles has followed the four Books. Only the scholars who seek knowledge that will benefit them in the Hereafter are interested in these branches of knowledge. The scholars who are more interested in the worldly life ignore these branches of knowledge, the knowledge that God gave all the prophets (PBUT); and seek the branches of knowledge which led to fame and wealth.*” Al-Dahak ibn Muzahim said, “*I have seen people who were only interested in learning God consciousness but now all they are interested in learning is theology.*”

The Third Trait

They should not be inclined to indulge in eating fine food, nor should they be inclined to live in luxurious homes. Imam Ahmed ibn Hanbal asked Hatem Al-Assam, “*How can one attain salvation from the worldly life?*” He said, “*You cannot attain salvation unless you are able to practice four principles: to forgive people for their ignorance, to protect people from your ignorance, to give them from whatever you have, and to be not interested in what they have.*”

While it is not forbidden to enjoy the permissible pleasures of life, indulgence in these pleasures is addictive; it is difficult to break away from such addictive pleasures. The continuous enjoyment of the pleasure may lead to committing sins like fawning and engaging in vain argumentation. It is better to avoid this.

The fear of God is one of the important traits that the scholars who seek God’s favor should have. The essence of fearing God is to avoid things that may lead to danger. Such scholars should avoid at all costs being in the king’s court. They should neither seek an audience with the king nor should they keep the king’s company if they were asked to.

The Fourth Trait

They should be careful in issuing fatwa and try to avoid it when they can. Ibn Massoud (RA) said, “*He who issues a fatwa every time he was asked to is crazy.*” He also said, “*The scholar’s salvation is in saying, ‘I do not know,’ because if he issued the wrong fatwa it will lead to his perdition.*” Ibrahim ibn Adham said, “*There is nothing more troublesome for Satan than a scholar who knows when to speak and when to keep silent. The Satan would say, ‘Look at him, his silence is more troublesome than his speech.’*”

You should know that scholars only talk a little, only ignorant people talk much.

The Fifth Trait

Their interest should be focused on learning the knowledge of the inner self, keeping an eye on the heart, and the knowledge that lead to the benefit in the Hereafter.

The Sixth Trait

They should be keen on strengthening their certitude. Certitude is the capital of religion. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁶, “*Certitude is the whole faith.*” Certitude can take one of two meanings:

The Theologian’s Definition of Certitude (Yaqeen)

Certitude is to have no doubts. There are four cases to be considered when a decision needs to be made regarding whether a matter is true or false. These are

1. The probabilities of the two outcomes are the same. This is when a person is doubtful whether the matter is true or false. As an example: if you were asked whether God will punish a specific person who is unknown to you, you will not be inclined to answer by either yes or no. Both answers are equally probable.
2. You may be inclined to believe in one of the two outcomes and in the meantime, you realize that the other outcome is also possible. As an example: if you were asked whether God will punish a man whom you know to be a righteous person, you will be inclined to say, “no,” while you know that the other outcome is also possible.
3. You may be inclined to believe that there is only possible outcome, and you completely discard the possibility of the second outcome. However, when you hear an opposite argument and you know more facts you may find that it is possible for the outcome you discarded to occur. This is called a belief that is close to certitude. An example for this is the fact that the adherents of a school of thought believe that the views of their school of thought are correct and that their Imam always makes the correct fatwa. They do not accept any claim that their Imam may make a mistake.
4. The true knowledge that is based on evidence is certitude; provided that the evidence is unequivocal, and its truth is proven without any doubt. This knowledge may be obtained using reflection, an innate disposition of the intellect, or the senses.

The theologians do not allow degrees of certitude e.g. strong certitude or weak certitude; because for them, there are no different degrees for the doubt.

The Definition of Certitude given by the Scholars of Jurisprudence and Sufis

This is the opinion of most of the scholars. Certitude is not defined based on a probability or doubt. Certitude is attained when one is inclined to believe in a certain truth and this belief becomes entrenched in the mind and controls the behavior of the person. Sometimes it is said, “*This person has a weak certitude in the inevitability of death,*” while it is known there is no doubt in the inevitability of death. Or it is said, “*This person has a strong certitude in getting his provision,*” while it is known that he may not get his provision. There is no doubt that all people are certain of the inevitability of death, but some people do not prepare themselves for death as if

⁶ Narrated by Ibn Masoud and reported by Al-Baihaqi and Al-Khateeb

they were not certain of its inevitability; while some are convinced with the inevitability of death to the extent that they think of nothing else. That makes them always busy preparing for death. These have strong certitude.

Having understood these definitions, you should know that there are three issues regarding certitude:

1. Strength and weakness: The strength of certitude is measured by how much control the certitude has on the heart.
2. Seen and Unseen: Certitude about the unseen is more difficult to attain than attaining certitude about visible things.
3. Plentiful and Scarcity: Having more knowledge and stronger evidence regarding a specific matter makes it easier to be certain of that matter.

From Where and How to Seek Certitude?

Certitude can be attained by looking at the world through the prism of the belief in the oneness of God. God is the Creator who created the means to achieve every end. The material means have no power in themselves, but it is the power of God which controls the means and makes them lead to the ends. The most important aspect of certitude is to trust in God and accept and submit to His commands.

Another aspect of certitude is to trust in God regarding the provision. The Quran says, “*And there is no creature on earth but that upon God is its provision.*” (11: 6) One should have the certitude that he will receive the provision that God has decreed from him. This makes him seek provision with dignity.

One should have certitude regarding God’s reward and punishment. The heart should be filled with the belief that, “*Whosoever does an atom’s weight of good, will see it; and whosoever does an atom’s weight of evil will see it.*” (99: 7-8).

One should have the certitude that God continuously observes His servants. One should always be engaged in improving the state of the inner self, purifying it, and making it beautiful for God to see. This is more important than having better looks for the people to see. This level of certitude leads to shyness, fear, humility, submission, and other good traits. These traits lead to higher levels of acts of obedience.

The Seventh Trait

They should feel sad and broken. They should refrain from talking much. Their looks, their clothes, their movements, their speech, and their silence should reflect their humility. Their looks should evoke the remembrance of God in the minds of whoever sees them.

The Eighth Trait

They should depend on their insight and the knowledge they gain through the purity of their hearts, rather than on books or on imitating others. The only one to be imitated is the one who brought the legislations (PBUH). We imitate the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) because they acted upon the knowledge they received from the Prophet (PBUH). Some of the deeds of the others are good and some are bad. He who feels it sufficient to memorize what he hears from

others is only a keeper of knowledge, not a scholar. A person who only memorizes knowledge without delving into its inner dimensions and the rationale behind it does not deserve to be called a scholar. He whose heart has been uncovered and illuminated by the light of guidance will be followed and imitated by others and has no need to imitate them.

The Ninth Trait

They should be very careful about innovations, even if a group of scholars has approved it. They should not be deceived by what has been fabricated after the time of the companions.

Notes:

1. Ibn Umar (RA) said, *“We lived in a time when we used to learn faith before learning Quran. When a sura is revealed, we focus first on learning the things that are forbidden and the things which are permissible; the commands and the injunctions; and the important concepts that we should stop at. I have seen people who learn Quran before they learn faith. They recite the whole Quran from beginning to end and they do not know what it says about the things which are forbidden and the things which are permissible; they do not know any of its commands and injunctions; and they do not know the important concepts that they should stop at. They only throw its words as if they were throwing bad dates.”*
2. It is said that five of the traits of the scholars of the Hereafter can be gleaned from five verses in the Quran. These traits are
 - a. They are in awe of God, *“Only those awed by God, from among His servants, are those who have knowledge.”* (35: 28)
 - b. They are humble, *“And indeed, among the People of the Scripture are those who believe in God and what was revealed to you and what was revealed to them, humbly submissive to God.”* (3: 199)
 - c. They are Modest, *“And lower your wing to the believers.”* (15: 88)
 - d. They have good character, *“So by mercy from God, you were lenient with them.”* (3: 159)
 - e. They are ascetic, *“The reward of God is better for he who believes and does righteousness.”* (28: 80)
3. Ibn Massoud (RA) said, *“This is a time in which it is best to hasten in doing things (that one knows are good). There will come a time when it will be best to wait and make sure before doing anything. This is a time when it would be difficult to see clearly what is right and what is wrong.”* He also said, *“This is a time in which the whims are controlled by knowledge. There will come a time in which knowledge will be controlled by the whims.”*
- 4.

The Intellect (Aql): Its Noble Status, Nature, and Types

The word intellect has four meanings, like for example the word eye has several meanings. We will explain the different meanings:

1. Intellect is the trait which differentiates a human being from and an animal. This is what makes the human being able to learn and to think.
2. Intellect is the instinctive knowledge by which a child can differentiate between what is possible and what is impossible. Like the knowledge that two is more than one and that a person cannot exist in two places at the same time.
3. Intellect is the knowledge that is gained through experience. An experienced person is usually called a “mature” person.
4. Intellect is the ability to appreciate the consequences of certain behavior and to control the whims which calls for satisfying the immediate lust. A person who has this kind of control is a sane person.

Faith is part of the initial natural disposition of humankind. Humankind can be divided in two groups:

1. Those who turned away and forgot; these are the disbelievers.
2. Those who reflected and remembered; they are like a person who forgot that he was carrying a certificate but then remembered it. This is why God said, “*So, they may remember.*” Calling this remembrance is not strange because one can remember an image that he had in his heart then he forgot it; or one can remember an image which was imbedded in his psyche when he was first created.

The soul is like a knight, and the body is like a horse. A blind knight is much dangerous than a blind horse. To summarize, he who does not have a piercing inner self insight will only learn the superfluous religious knowledge.

Book 2: The Articles of Faith

The Elucidation of How the Followers⁷ of the Tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) understood the Testament of Faith⁸

The Meaning of the Belief that there is No deity except God

The Belief in the Transcendence of God

God is free of any limiting property. He is not limited by having a body or a shape, “Nothing is like Him.” He established Himself on the Throne as He mentioned. He is not limited by measure, space, or time. He does not need to rest, nor is He subject to change of state or location. He is above the Throne but is not supported by the Throne. The Throne and the angels who carry the Throne are supported by His subtle power. Everything is in His grasp. He is above everything; His are the highest of ranks. However, at the same time, He is close to everything that exists. He is closer to His servant than his own jugular vein. He is a witness over everything.

The Belief in God’s Power and Existence

God is Living, Powerful, Compeller, and Dominator. He does not suffer a lack of power or ability; and does not need sleep or rest. He does not perish.

The Belief in God’s Knowledge

God is Omniscient. His knowledge encompasses everything.

The Belief in God’s Decisiveness (Will)

Everything in the universe occurs by God’s will and by His decision. What He wills shall be, and what He does not will shall not be.

The Belief that God Hears and Sees

God sees everything without having eyes and hears everything without having ears, just as He knows without having a heart and punishes without having limbs.

The Belief that God Speaks

God speaks in a way different from the way His creatures speak. He gives commands, issues threats, and makes promises. His speech does not need physical tools to produce it, nor does it need a physical medium to transmit it. He revealed His Books (the Quran, the Torah, the Bible, and the Psalms) to His Messengers (PBUT). The Quran can be read; it is written; and it has been memorized. Moses (PBUH) heard God’s words without a sound being produced, the same way the righteous will see God in the Hereafter without having physical shape or form.

The Belief in the Actions of God

Everything in existence, except God, has been created by God. God has created the creation in the most perfect and best form. He is Just in His judgments and Wise in His actions.

⁷ Ahl Al-Sunnah is translated as the Followers of the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH).

⁸ Al-Shahadah is translated as the Testament of Faith.

The Meaning of the Belief that Muhammad (PBUH) is His Messenger

God sent Muhammad (PBUH) with His Message to all Arabs and non-Arabs, to humankind, and to the jinn. This Message replaced all previous messages except that which has been assimilated in the new message. God has given Muhammad (PBUH) a higher rank among the prophets of God (PBUT). God made him a leader of humankind. For faith to be complete, a person must pronounce his belief in the two parts of the testament of faith, *“I believe that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad is His servant and Messenger.”*

The Progression in Learning and Ranking the Levels of Belief

You should know that a young child should be exposed to the Articles of Faith which we have explained earlier. The child should first memorize these articles in the first instant. Understanding the articles will happen gradually as the child grows up. The process will then consist of the following steps: memorization; understanding; then belief in the truthfulness of the articles of faith, certitude, and acceptance. The child does not need a proof to support the belief, because it is one of the blessings of God that He opens the young hearts to accept faith (Iman) without proof. Islamic law requires lay people only to express their unequivocal acceptance of the truth of the doctrine.

In the beginning, a child’s faith may be vulnerable to change when subjected to strong opposing arguments. Therefore, it is important to strengthen the faith in the heart of the child until it becomes well entrenched in his psyche. Strengthening the faith is achieved not through teaching the child the art of debate or theology, but through

1. Reciting the Quran and the study of its interpretation,
2. Reading the Prophetic Traditions and its interpretation,
3. Performing a daily routine of worship,
4. Keeping the company of the righteous and following their example.

Reciting the Quran and understanding the meaning of its verses will expose the child to the evidence that attests to its authenticity. The prophetic tradition will complement the Quran. The daily worship routine will flood the heart of the child with its light. Finally, listening to the teachings of the pious will contribute to the strengthening of faith in the heart of the child. The above-mentioned actions are like watering and tending a plant. The seed that has been planted at first through memorization will grow into a good tree having firm roots and branches reaching into the sky with the help of the plan mentioned above.

The child should be protected against the infringement which debate and speculation can cause. These arguments will be extremely confusing; they will do the child more harm than benefit. A child growing up according to this plan will have the faith that will avail him of salvation in the Hereafter; since he will have the faith of the people of the truth.

Fundamentals of the Belief in the Oneness of God

The belief in the Oneness of God is established based on four fundamentals:

The knowledge of the essence of God

The knowledge of the essence of God is established based on ten fundamental principles. These are the knowledge and belief that God is existing; God is ancient; God is eternal; God does not have a form that occupies a specific volume; God does not have a body that consists of components; God does not occupy a specific position; God has no orientation; God is exalted and is established on His Throne the way He wanted; God is exalted above being seen in this life but will be seen in the Hereafter; and God has no partner.

The knowledge of the attributes of God

The knowledge of and the belief in the attributes of God based on ten fundamental principles. These are God is All- Powerful; God is Omniscient; God is eternally living; God is Decisive; God is All-Seeing and All- Hearing; God speaks without uttering words; God's speech is eternal and ancient; God's Knowledge is ancient and eternal; God's will is ancient; and God has knowledge, life, power, will, speech, hearing, and sight.

The knowledge of God's actions

The knowledge of and the belief in God's actions based on ten fundamental principles. These are that each and every thing that happen in this universe is His action and His creation; the fact that He is the creator of all people's actions does not contravene the fact that people earn their actions; the fact that people earn their actions does not contravene the fact that it is God's will that creates people's actions; it is out of God's grace that He created people and made them responsible for their actions; God may burden people beyond their capacity; God has the right and ability to punish people without a sin committed on their part; God does what He wills; obeying God is obligatory on people by the virtue of His command; God can send messengers to guide people to the way of salvation; and God sent Muhammad (PBUH) as the seal of the prophets and supported him with miracles and with the Quran which abrogated all previous messages;

The knowledge of the things that have been accepted on authority of the Prophet (PBUH)

The knowledge of and the belief in the things that have been accepted on authority of the Prophet (PBUH) based on ten fundamental principles. These are the belief in the resurrection; the belief in being questioned by the angels in the grave (Munkar and Nakeer); the belief that the torment in the grave is a fact; the belief in the balance; the belief in the bridge erected over Hellfire; the belief that God created paradise and Hellfire; the belief that Abu Bakr, Umar, Othman, and Ali (RA) were the most deserving Muslim leaders after the Prophet (PBUH); the excellence of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) is according to their order as qualified Imams; the belief that in addition to being a mature Muslim a Muslim leader should satisfy five criteria: masculinity, caution regarding religious matters, knowledge, proficiency, being a descendent of Quraish; an

Imam should not be removed from the office if his removal will cause sedition and chaos, even if he does not meet the two criteria of being cautious in religious matters and having knowledge.

Fundamentals of the Creed

Iman and Islam

There is a difference of opinion among the scholars about whether Iman and Islam are the same or not; and if they are not the same, are they independent of each other?

The views are

1. Iman and Islam are one and the same.
2. Iman and Islam are two distinct and independent things.
3. Iman and Islam are two closely connected things.

Definitions of Iman and Islam from the Language Perspective

Iman is accepting the truthfulness of something, as demonstrated by the verse, “*But you would not believe us.*” (12:17) The heart is the place for acceptance, and this acceptance is expressed by the tongue.

Islam is submission. It involves submitting one’s will and discarding stubbornness and rebellion. It is expressed by the heart, the tongue, and the senses.

Linguistically, Islam is more comprehensive than Iman. Iman is a highly specialised level of Islam. Iman is the most honored component of Islam. Unequivocal acceptance of the truth (Iman) cannot be attained unless the person has submitted (Islam), while submission does not necessarily require an unequivocal acceptance of the truth.

The Meanings of terms Iman and Islam from Sharia Perspective

The words Islam and Iman came in the Quran and the Prophetic Traditions in three different contexts. Iman and Islam are synonymous; Iman and Islam are two different things; Iman and Islam overlap each other.

Synonymous: The Quran says, “*So We brought out whoever was in them of the believers. And We found not within them other than a single house of the Muslims.*” (51: 35-36)

Different: The Quran says, “*The Bedouins said, ‘We have believed.’ Say, ‘You have not believed; but say, ‘We have submitted,’ for faith has not yet entered your hearts.’*” (49: 14)

Overlapping: It has been narrated that the Messenger of God (PBUH) was asked, “*What is the best deed?*” He said⁹, “*Islam.*” He was then asked, “*Which part of Islam is the best?*” He said, “*Iman.*” This is an indication of both the overlapping of the two terms as well as the difference between them. This is closest to the linguistic usage because Iman is an action and it is the best action. Islam is acceptance with the heart, the tongue, or the senses; the best Islam is the acceptance by the heart and that what we call Iman.

⁹ Narrated by Amr ibn Anbassah and reported by Ahmed and Al-Tabarni.

The Implications of Iman and Islam from an Islamic Law Perspective

There are two rules which govern these two terms. One applies to this life and the other applies to the Hereafter.

The one that applies to the Hereafter is that a believer will not stay in Hellfire forever, according to the Prophetic tradition¹⁰, “*A person in whose heart the weight of an atom of faith (Iman) will be brought out of Hellfire.*” The scholars differed as to what kind of Iman that is meant by this tradition. There are three different views

1. some said it is acceptance by the heart;
2. some said it is acceptance by the heart and expressing that acceptance with the tongue;
3. some said it is acceptance by the heart, expressing the acceptance with the tongue, and acting accordingly.

We can settle this dispute by saying that there are a number of cases that should be considered:

The First Case: Certainly, the final abode of whoever believed with the heart, expressed his belief with the tongue, and acted according to this belief is Paradise.

The Second Case: Those who accepted faith with the heart and pronounced that acceptance with the tongue, but their actions did not always reflect that acceptance; sometimes they acted according to the accepted faith and sometimes they committed minor and major sins. According to the Mu'tazilah, they are called transgressors: neither believers nor disbelievers. They will be punished eternally in Hellfire. The evidence which they quote to support their opinion is the verse, “*And there is none of you except he will come to it.*” (19:71) We disagree with this view. Their argument is based on generalities. Their evidence contravenes the specific statements of the Quran and the prophetic tradition. The Quran says, “*Indeed, God does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills.*” (4: 48) And the saying of the Messenger of God (PBUH)¹¹, “*A person in whose heart there is the weight of an atom of faith (Iman) will be brought out of Hellfire.*” The Quran also says, “*Indeed We will not allow the reward of those who did good deeds to be lost.*” (18: 30) How can one sin invalidate a well-established faith?

The Third Case: Those who accepted the faith with their heart and pronounced this belief with their tongue, but they did not act upon this belief. The scholars differed about the fate of this group. Some say that the actions of a person are part of his belief so without actions the belief is incomplete. We can ask about the fate of a person who accepted Islam with his heart and pronounced his acceptance with his tongue, then died? Will such a person be destined to Hellfire? Then we follow this up with another question. If this person accepted Islam with his heart and pronounced his acceptance with his tongue and lived till it was time for prayer, but he did not perform this prayer then he died. What would be the fate of such a person? If they argue that since he continued to live for a period of time after he had accepted Islam with his heart and

¹⁰ Narrated by Abu Said Al-Khodry and reported by by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

¹¹ Same as 4.

pronounced it with his tongue but did not act according to it, then he will go to Hellfire. We can then ask how long should the time be between his acceptance of Islam and his death be so that he would end up in Hellfire? Or how many missed prayers are enough to send him to Hellfire?

The Fourth Case: What about a person who accepted Islam with the heart and died before he was able to pronounce it with the tongue or act according to it? Do we say that he died a believer and it is between God and him? There are different opinions regarding this. Those who consider pronouncing faith with the tongue a necessary part of the faith would say that he died before fulfilling the necessary conditions for Iman. We say that this is false considering the prophetic tradition,¹² “*A person in whose heart the weight of an atom of faith (Iman) will be brought out of Hellfire;*” and the fact that the conditions required for Iman were outlined in the Messenger’s (PBUH)¹³ response to Gabriel’s (PBUH) query about Iman. These conditions were the belief in God, the angels, the Books, and the Day of Judgment.

The Fifth Case: A person who accepted Islam with his heart and had the time to learn the testament of faith and was aware of the necessity of pronouncing it as part of the faith but did not actually pronounce it. We will say that this person is a believer and he will not be destined to eternal punishment in Hellfire. Iman is the unequivocal acceptance. The tongue is the body part that expresses Iman. Iman should exist in the heart before it can be expressed by the tongue. The fact that it was not pronounced by the tongue does not necessarily mean that it did not exist in the heart. The Messenger (PBUH) said¹⁴, “*A person in whose heart the weight of an atom of faith (Iman) will be brought out of Hellfire.*” The Murjaah said that such a person is a believer and will not be admitted to Hellfire in the first place based on the verses, “*And whoever believes in his Lord will not fear deprivation or burden.*” (72:13) and “*Every time a company is thrown into it, its keepers ask them, ‘Did there not come to you a warner?’ They will say, ‘Yes, a warner came to us, but we denied and said, ‘God did not send down anything.’”*” (67: 8-9) Their opinion is that only those who denied the message will be admitted to Hellfire. But this is false because the Messenger (PBUH) said¹⁵, “*A person in whose heart the weight of an atom of faith (Iman) will be brought out of Hellfire.*” How can one be brought out of Hellfire, if he was not already inside it? God says, “*Indeed, God does not forgive associating partners with Him, but He forgives what is less than that for whom He wills.*” (4: 48) Using the exception in the verse indicates that there is a difference between the two groups. There are three general verses which we cite in response to their argument. “*And whoever disobeys God and His Messenger- then indeed, for him is the fire of Hell; they will abide therein forever.*” (72: 23) “*Unquestionably, the wrongdoers are in an enduring torment.*” (42: 45) “*And whoever comes with an evil deed – their faces will be overturned into the Fire.*” (27: 90) Therefore, using generalities is not enough to establish their points of view and we have to take recourse to the specifics.

¹² See 5.

¹³ This is a long tradition in which Gabriel (PBUH) came to The Prophet (PBUH) and asked him about the meaning of Islam, Iman, and Ihsan; then asked him about the Hour. It has been narrated by Abu Huraira and reported by Al-Bukhari

¹⁴ See 6

¹⁵ See 8

Iman is achieved with the heart, the tongue, and the senses. It is like a human being who has a head and limbs. A person without a head is not considered a human being; but a person who lost a limb or two is still considered a human being.

The Sixth Case: A person who says, “*There is no deity except God and Muhammad is the Messenger of God;*” but does not believe in his heart that the statement is true. Unquestionably, this person’s eternal abode is in Hellfire. However, during his life we take his word at its face value.

Does Iman Increase and Decrease?

Iman is the unequivocal acceptance with the heart. So how can it increase and decrease? The earliest Muslim generations (Al-Salaf) agreed that Iman may increase or decrease. We accept what they said. However, we need to understand the correct meaning of their words and support our understanding with strong evidence. We must note that things increase when an external component is added to them. As an example, the value of the prayer does not increase by adding more bowings (ruku) or prostrations (sujood); but it increases by being humble (khushu) in the prayer. A human body increases when one grows a beard or gains weight. Similarly, Iman exists then it can either increase or decrease, “*As for those who believed, it has increased them in faith.*” (9: 124) “*It is He who sent down tranquility into the hearts of the believers that they would increase in faith along with their (existing) faith.*” (48: 4) The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said¹⁶, “*Faith has seventy something components.*” From this it is clear that deeds are like acceptance; they increase and decrease.

What is the appropriate form of Expressing Faith?

The earliest Muslim generations used to say, “*I am a believer, God willing (Insha Allah).*” How can they say this, and it is known that the use of the exception form in a statement casts doubt on its validity? And to doubt one’s faith amounts to disbelief. When asked if they were believers, they would be very careful not to respond in a way that affirmed that they were certain they were believers. Sufian Al-Thawry said, “*Whoever said, ‘I am a believer in the sight of God,’ has uttered a lie. And whoever said, ‘I am a true believer,’ has made an innovation. Rather, one should say, ‘Say, “We have believed in God and what has been revealed to us.”’*” (2: 136) There is a difference between saying, “*I am a believer,*” and saying, “*I believed in God.*” Al-Hassan was asked, “*Are you a believer?*” He answered, “*God willing (Insha Allah).*” He was then asked why he said, “*God willing.*” His response was, “*I worry that God may say I lied, if I say I am a believer. I would then be punished*” He also said, “*I worry that God may not have liked some of my deeds and He decided to punish me by not accepting all my deeds.*”

Using the expression “*God willing (Insha Allah)*” is appropriate for the following reasons:

- Not using the term “*God willing*” may imply that the person is promoting himself.
- Using the term “*God willing*” is good manners. It is an expression of the belief that everything is done by the will of God. God said, “*You will surely enter the Holy Mosque,*

¹⁶ Reported by Al-Bukhari, Muslim and Al-Tirmidhi.

God willing, in safety.” (48: 27) “*And never say of anything, ‘Indeed, I will do that tomorrow,’ except (when you add) ‘God willing.’*” (18: 23-24) However, the expression “*God willing*” has evolved. Today people use it in the context of expressing their hope that something will happen; which is an incorrect usage of the term.

- Using the term “*God willing*” does not mean there is doubt in the existence of Iman in the heart of the person, but it is an expression of the doubt that the person has attained the rank of true believers as they are mentioned in the Quran, “*Those are the true believers.*” (8: 4) True faith is diminished by hypocrisy. Hypocrisy is a hidden trait; it is difficult to be certain of its absence. True faith is attained by performing acts of obedience to God and doing good deeds, God said, “*The believers are only the ones who have believed in God and His Messengers and do not harbour any doubts but strive with their properties and their lives in the cause of God. It is those who are truthful.*” (49: 15)

The scholars said that those who think that they attained a state which is immune to hypocrisy are the most vulnerable to become hypocrites. Al-Hassan said, “*Hypocrisy is when the words do not reflect the feelings and the outward appearance does not reflect the inner self.*” A man said to the companion Hudhayfah (RA), “*I worry that I might be a hypocrite.*” Hudhayfah (RA) said, “*Had you been a hypocrite you would not have worried about being one.*” Ibn abi Maleekah said, “*I have seen a hundred and fifty of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH), each one of them was worried that he might be a hypocrite.*”

These stories tell us about the dangers of the hidden aspects of hypocrisy. Even Umar (RA) was worried that he might have been a hypocrite. He used to ask Hudhayfah (RA) whether the Prophet (PBUH) mentioned his name among the hypocrites.

There are two types of hypocrisy. The first is the kind of hypocrisy that drives a person out of the religion to become a disbeliever. The second is the kind that leads to Hellfire for a period of time. The latter was the type that the above-mentioned Muslims were worried about.

- Using the term “*God willing*” reflects the fear of the believer of his state at the end of life. A person does not know his situation at the time of death and whether he will be a true a believer or not. The endings are of utmost importance. This is like asking a person who is fasting at noon time if he is fasting; his response will be yes. But if the person breaks his fast before sunset, then his fasting becomes void. It would have been better for the person’s response to be, “*Yes, I am fasting, God willing.*” One of the scholars said, “*If I was given the choice to between attaining martyrdom at the house door and dying as a Muslim at the room’s door; I would choose dying as a Muslim at the room’s door because I cannot guarantee what will happen to my heart regarding the belief in the Oneness of God during the passage from the room’s door to the house door.*”

Even if a person was asked, did he fast yesterday? He should use “*God willing (Insha Allah),*” in his answer since he does not know whether God has accepted his fast or not.

Notes

Some of the Fundamentals that should be accepted unequivocally are:

- Abu Bakr, Umar, Othman, and Ali (RA) are the legitimate heads of the Muslim state after the death of the Messenger of God (PBUH). It is true that the Messenger of God (PBUH) did not name a successor to govern the Muslims after him but these four were nominated and approved by the companions of the Prophet (PBUH). The decision of the companions was based on their true understanding of the revelation and the teachings of the Messenger of God (PBUH). The conflict between Ali and Muawiyah (RA) was based on a difference of opinion between the two. Each of them tried his best to do what he thought to be in the best interest of the Muslim nation. Ali (RA) wanted to delay the retribution against the men who murdered Othman (RA) until he was able to gain control to avoid creating a chaotic situation; while Muawiyah (RA) thought it is best to have a swift retribution against the murderers as a deterrent against further bloodshed. Muawiyah (RA) did not want to usurp the leadership for himself.
- The criteria for choosing Muslim Heads of State: The head of the state should be a Muslim, mature, male, qualified, and descendent of the tribe of Quraysh. If there are more than one person who satisfy these criteria, then the one who can garner more pledges of allegiance would be the chosen head of state. Those who received a smaller number of pledges should not challenge the people's choice. Those who do not acquiesce to the result are transgressors. Even if the person chosen as a head of state was not known for his piety and religious knowledge, it is better to appoint him to avoid chaos and sedition.

Book 3: The Inner Dimensions of Purification

Virtues of Purification

The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said¹⁷, “*Purification is half the faith.*” It would not be logical to understand that the Messenger of God (PBUH) meant that we should ensure the cleansing of the external body only while leaving the inner self filthy and corrupt. Consequently, purification has four ranks

1. Purification of the body from all impurities.
2. Purification of the senses from sins and evil deeds.
3. Purification of the heart from evil traits and manners.
4. Purification of the inner self from anything that prevents it from connecting to God.
This is the rank of the prophets and the righteous people.

The physical effort involved in each rank is only half the effort that is needed to achieve complete purification of that rank. As an example, the ultimate objective of the purification of the inner self is to discover the Majesty and Greatness of God. The true knowledge of God will not reside in the inner self until the heart has been cleansed of all that fills it except for what connects it with God. God said, “*Say, ‘God.’ Then leave them in their (empty) discourse, amusing themselves.*” (6: 91)

No mortal can combine between the true knowledge of God and the love of the worldly life in his heart. God did not create mortals with two hearts. The ultimate goal of the purification of the heart is to fill it with good manners and true beliefs. A person will not be able to fill his heart with good manners and true beliefs until he has cleansed his heart of all evil manners and corrupt beliefs. Thus, removing the filth and dirt is half the effort. The other half is to fill the heart with the good manners and true beliefs. This explains the meaning of the saying, “*Purification is half the faith.*”

Similarly, the purification of the senses; consists of two halves. The first half of their purification is to prevent them from committing sins and evil deeds and the second half is to make them busy with performing acts of obedience to God. These are the ranks of faith arranged in order. No one will be able to achieve a rank unless the previous ranks have been achieved. Purification of the body is a prerequisite for purification of the senses. Purification of the senses is a prerequisite for purification of the heart and purification of the heart is a prerequisite for purification of the inner self. Thus, the earliest Muslim generations (Al-Salaf) reached guidance through the purity of their hearts more than through the purity of their bodies.

Virtues of Ablution (Wudu)

The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said¹⁸, “*Whoever perfected his ablution and then prayed two rakaat of prayer during which nothing of the matters of the worldly life*

¹⁷ Narrated by Abi Malek Al-Ashaari and Reported by Muslim

¹⁸ Narrated by Othman ibn Affan and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

crossed his mind, he will be cleansed of his sins as if he had been reborn.” In another version he said, “Whoever perfected his ablution and then prayed two rakaa of prayer during which he did not lose his focus on the prayer, all his previous sins will be forgiven.” He also has been quoted to have said¹⁹, “Would you like me to tell you about one thing which you do so that God forgives your sins and raises your rank? Perfecting ablution, even if it were difficult to do, walking to the Mosque, and waiting at the mosque for one prayer after another; this is how one defends the faith.” He repeated the last sentence three times.

The Messenger (PBUH) has been quoted to have said²⁰, *“When the Muslim servant washes his mouth during ablution, the sins will come out through his mouth; when he blows his nose during ablution the sins will come out through his nose; when he washes his face the sins will fall down from his face and from around his eyes; when he washes his hands the sins will come out from under his finger nails; when he washes his feet the sins will come out from under the nails of his toes. He will get extra reward for walking towards the mosque and praying.” Umar (RA) said, “Perfect ablution protects you from Satan.” Mujahid said, “Try as hard as you can to make ablution, to remember God, and to seek His forgiveness before going to bed because if you die during your sleep, you would be resurrected in that condition.”*

You should know that a scholar will not achieve the rank of an heir to the Prophet (PBUH) until he has gained the understanding of all aspects of Sharia. If he makes this achievement, he will be only one rank below the rank of prophethood. This is the difference between the one who has the wealth and his heir. The one who owns the wealth worked hard to gain this money while the heir simply receives the money after its owner has passed away. Only prophets can understand these concepts, their mystery, and their hidden meanings. The scholars who are the heirs of the prophets receive this knowledge through the prophets.

¹⁹ Narrated by Abu Hurirah and reported by Muslim.

²⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurirah and reported by Muslim.

Book 4: The Inner Dimensions of Prayers and its Components

Virtues of Prayers

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said²¹, *“The prayers atone for the sins that are committed in the times between them, as long as major sins are avoided.”*

He (PBUH) also said²², *“Attending Isha and Fajr prayers at the mosque is what discriminates between us and the hypocrites. They are unable to do it.”*

He (PBUH) also said²³, *“God does not count the good deeds of those who meet Him without having performed his prayers.”*

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said²⁴, *“Whoever neglected intentionally to perform his prayers broke Muhammad’s (PBUH) covenant.”*

He (PBUH) said²⁵, *“God does not look on the Day of Judgment at a servant who does not stand up completely upright between the ruku and sujood.”* He (PBUH) said²⁶, *“I was almost about to ask someone else to lead the prayer so that I can go and burn the houses of those who do not attend the prayers at the mosque.”*

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said²⁷, *“God will give immunity against hypocrisy and against Hellfire for whoever prays forty prayers in congregation without missing the opening Takbir.”*

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said, *“Satan weeps when a servant of God prostrates himself to God as he recites a verse that includes a prostration (Recitation sujood). Satan will say²⁸, ‘Woe to me, this servant was commanded to prostrate himself to God and he obeyed the command; he will be admitted to paradise. I was commanded to prostrate myself, but I disobeyed; I will be punished in Hellfire.’”*

Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“Whoever hears the call to the prayer and does not go to pray, is not interested in his own welfare and he will not receive anything good.”* It has been narrated that the members of the earliest Muslim generation used to console whoever missed the opening Takbir of the prayer for three days. They used to offer condolences to whoever misses the congregation prayer for seven days.

Uqbah Ibn Muslim (RA) said, *“God loves most a servant who loves to meet God. A person is nearest to God when he is in a state of prostration.”*

²¹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and Reported by Muslim

²² This is a Morsal hadeeth, narrated by Said ibn Al-Mussiab and reported by Malik .

²³ Narrated by Anas and reported by Al-Tabarani in his book, Al-Awsat.

²⁴ Narrated by Um Ayman and reported by Ahmad and Al-Baihaqi;.

²⁵ Narrated by Abu Hirairah and reported by Ahmed.

²⁶ Narrated by Abu Hirairah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

²⁷ Narrated by Anas and reported by Al-Tirmidhi.

²⁸ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Muslim.

Abu Hurairah (RA) said, *“The nearest a person is to God, when he is in the state of prostration. One should take advantage of this opportunity and say many supplications when one is in a state of prostration.”*

Humility in Prayer (Khushu)

God says, *“Believers, do not approach prayer while you are in a state of intoxication, until you know what you are saying.”* (4: 43) How many individuals who are not drunk but are mindless of what they say during their prayers?

The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said²⁹, *“Each time you pray, pray as if you are bidding farewell;”* bidding yourself farewell, bidding your whims farewell, bidding life farewell and going to meet your Lord. The Messenger (PBUH) has also been quoted to have said³⁰, *“A person will only go farther away from God if he prays but continues to commit sins and indecencies.”*

Khalaf ibn Ayoub was asked, *“Why do not you wave the flies away when they annoy you while you are praying?”* He said, *“I do not want to get used to something that will invalidate my prayer.”* He was asked, *“How can you endure the annoyance?”* He said, *“I came to know that the transgressors endure the beating of the Sultan so that it would be said that they are perseverant and they brag about it; would a fly make me move around while I am in front of my Lord?”*

It has been narrated that Hatem Al-Assam was asked about his prayer. He said, *“When it is the time for prayer, I perform ablution well and I sit in the place where I am going to pray until all my body parts are ready for the prayer. Then, I stand up for prayer making the Kaaba between my eyebrows, the Sirat (the bridge that passes over Hell and leads to paradise) under my feet, paradise on the right side, Hellfire on the left side, and the angel of death behind me. I have the mindset that this is my last prayer. I stand up filled with fear and hope. I make a clear Takbir, and I recite Quran nicely, I bow modestly, and I prostrate in humility. When I sit, I sit on my left hip using the left foot as my seat and I align the right foot along my thumb. I sincerely dedicate my prayer to God, but I am not sure if it has been accepted or not.”*

Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“Praying two rakaa in complete devotion is better than spending the whole night praying absent mindedly.”*

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said³¹, *“Many a person only gets the physical effort out of his prayer.”* He (PBUH) also said³², *“Only the part of the prayer during which the person was mindful of his prayer will count.”*

²⁹ Narrated by Abi Ayoub and reported by Ibn Majah.

³⁰ Narrated by Ibn Massoud and reported by A-Tabarani.

³¹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Nasaie.

³² Narrated by Aamar ibn Yaser and reported by Ahmed.

The conclusion is that the prayer is a private communication with God. How can a heedless person conduct such a communication? Paying Alms is a challenge; fasting weakens the body and controls the desires; and people struggle to perform pilgrimage rites. Thus a person may benefit from paying Alms, fasting, and performing pilgrimage even if he performed these rites absent mindedly. However, prayer only involves the remembrance of God, recitation of the Quran, standing, bowing, and prostrating.

Remembrance of God is a private communication and a personal dialogue with God. It is a translation of the person's feelings and emotions. This cannot be accomplished unless the person is fully aware of what he is saying. Bowing and prostrating are acts intended to reflect the person's reverence of God and exalting Him. One cannot exalt God without being mindful of his act. If the person performs these acts in an absent-minded state, these actions will become simply mechanical movement hollow of any meaning. How can such mechanical movements assume the importance attached to the prayer which makes it the pillar of the religion, and the distinction between belief and disbelief?

If you say that making the presence of the heart and being mindful during the prayer are conditions for its validity, then you have contravened the consensus of the scholars; since they only require that the person be mindful at the time of the opening takbir as a condition for the validity of the prayer. The answer to this is that you should remember what we mentioned earlier in the Book of Knowledge. The scholars deal with the apparent form of the rituals. They have no way of knowing what is in the inner self of the person. A prayer performed by a person who is not mindful of it, may fulfill the apparent criteria but will not avail the person anything in the Hereafter. The rules of jurisprudence address the apparent requirements of the rituals. They are not concerned of their value in the Hereafter.

In addition, you cannot claim that all the scholars agreed on this rule. It has been reported by Abu Taleb Al-Makki that Sufian Al-Thawri narrated that Bisher Ibn Al-Hareth said, "*The lack of humility (Khushu) in the prayer invalidates it.*" Al-Hassan has been quoted to have said, "*A prayer performed absentmindedly leads its performer to punishment.*" Muadh Ibn Jabal (RA) said, "*If you intentionally attempted to recognize the persons standing on your right and your left during the prayer, your prayer will be invalid.*" The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said³³, "*Sometimes a person will only earn the reward of one-sixth or one-tenth of his prayer. One can only earn the reward for the part of the prayer during which he was mindful of his prayer.*" We hope that the person who prays absentmindedly and the person who does not perform prayer at all will not be treated the same. At least, the former performed the ritual physically and he was at one time mindful of his prayer.

³³ Narrated by Ammar ibn Yaser and reported by Abu Dawood, Al-Nisaie , and Abu Haban.

The conclusion is being mindful during the prayer is the essence of performing the prayer. The least one can do is to be mindful at the time of the opening takbir; without this small part the whole prayer would be lost. Mindfulness brings life to the prayer; the more we are mindful during the prayer the more alive our prayer will be.

How to Make Prayers Full of Vitality

The Inner Actions

There are six actions that can be performed by the inner self to bring life to the prayer: presence of the heart, understanding, exalting God, being in awe of God, hoping in God's mercy, and feeling ashamed of our shortcomings.

1. Presence of the heart (being mindful): The mind (heart) should be completely focused on what is being recited. The actions and the words should be closely connected. The thoughts should not be wandering around. Understanding the meaning of what is being recited could help in becoming mindful.
2. Understanding: Understanding the words being recited helps one to become mindful. One may be mindful of the uttered words but not mindful of their meaning. What we mean here is the need to be mindful of the meaning of the words being recited. People have varying abilities in understanding the meaning of the Quran and the words which express the praise of God. Very often one comes to understand the subtle meaning of words of the Quran during his prayer; meanings that never occurred to him before. This is the meaning of the phrase, "*prayer forbids the committing of sin and indecent acts,*" the subtle meanings that one understands while praying indeed induce the person not to commit sin and indecent acts.
3. Exalting God: This is the next step after being mindful and gaining understanding.
4. Being in Awe of God: Being in awe of God emanates from exalting God. Awe involves fear that emanates from exalting God but it is not like being afraid of anything else.
5. Hope in God's Mercy: The servant should entertain the hope that God will accept his deeds and will reward him for it.
6. Feeling Ashamed of the One's Shortcomings: The servant should be aware of his shortcomings in expressing his gratitude to God and neglect of fulfilling one's duties.

Ways to Fulfill the Inner Actions

There are six actions which help in fulfilling the inner actions which ensure the vitality of the prayers. These are

1. Presence of the Heart: The way to become mindful (maintains the presence of heart) during prayers is attained through vigorously motivating the mind to abandon distracting thoughts and to focus on the prayer. A mind which is vigorously motivated will pay its fullest attention to the prayer. The motivation should arise from being certain that the Hereafter is better and everlasting while this worldly life is worthless and transient.

Prayer is the gate to the Hereafter. Prayer is a communication with the King of kings; the only reason for being absent minded in prayer is the lack of faith. One should work hard on strengthening one's faith.

2. Understanding: Understanding is attained by reflecting on the meaning of the verses being recited and resisting vigorously any distracting thoughts. In addition, one should remember the connection between prayer and the Hereafter. We tend to remember often what we love most. Remembering who we love overwhelms the heart. Therefore, those who love anything other than God will be easily distracted by foreign thoughts during their prayer.
3. Exalting God: Exalting God is rooted in two fundamental concepts: the greatness and majesty of God and the meanness and evanescence of the human self. Human beings are servants of God. Knowing these facts generates humility and submission to God as an expression for exalting God. Both of the two elements, realizing the greatness of God and appreciating the vulnerability of mortals, are necessary for the servant to properly exalt God.
4. Being in Awe of God: Being in awe of God is rooted in the knowledge of the limitless power and authority of God. God controls everything. God's kingdom will not be affected even if He destroyed the entire human race.
5. Hoping for God's Mercy: Hope in God's mercy is rooted in the knowledge of God's kindness, generosity, limitless bounty, and the truthfulness of His promise to admit those who pray to paradise; being certain of God's truthfulness and kindness leads to the hope in His mercy.
6. Feeling Ashamed of One's Shortcomings: Feeling ashamed of one's shortcomings arises from the fact that mortals do not fulfill their religious obligations fully and consequently they do not express their gratitude to God properly. Knowing the ills of our souls enhances the feeling of shame, while we know that God is fully aware of all what is hidden within ourselves.

In the above, we mentioned the inner actions that revitalize our prayers and the means for achieving these actions. The common base of all these actions is a strong faith which generates the certitude which overwhelms the heart. The submission of one's heart is commensurate with the amount of certitude that one feels. This explains what Aisha (RA) said when she stated, "*We used to converse with the Messenger of God (PBUH) and he would talk to us until it was time to pray, at which time he would behave as if we were strangers to him.*"

Using the above-mentioned criteria, one can classify people into two categories. The first category includes those who are heedless in their prayers, who perform their prayer absent mindedly. The second category includes those who are fully absorbed in their prayers; those whose hearts are completely devoted to their prayers. Some people in the latter category even become completely unaware of what is happening around them while they are praying. An example of these people was Muslim Ibn Yassar (RA) who was praying in the mosque when one

of the Mosque's columns collapsed. People gathered around the collapsed column while Muslim continued his prayer totally oblivious to what was going on around him. Many of these people would never know who was standing in prayer beside them. This is a normal phenomenon. Ask a person who just came out from an audience with a king to describe what the court looks like; most probably he will fail to answer. His concentration on the meeting with the king will render him oblivious to the surroundings.

Each one will be rewarded according to his deeds. Thus, the reward that a person gets for a prayer is commensurate with the degree of his apprehension, humility, and exaltation of God. God looks at the hearts not at the movements. Some of the companions (RA) of the Messenger of God (PBUH) said, "*People will be gathered on the Day of Resurrection in a state of serenity and calm similar to their state of serenity and calm which they used to have while praying.*" This is certainly true. A person will be resurrected on state (of faith) similar to their state at the time of death and the state (of faith) of a person at time of death will be the same as his state (of faith) which he used to enjoy during his life. The state of a person in the Hereafter will be decided by the state of his heart. Only those who approach God with a sound heart will achieve salvation.

The Most Effective Cure for the Mindless Heart

You should know that distracting thoughts are the cause for having a mindless heart during prayer. The cure for this is to resist the temptation to succumb to these distracting thoughts. The way to resist these thoughts successfully is by removing their root causes. The root causes for the distracting thoughts could be either external or internal.

The external root cause could be either a visual or audible distraction. A person may see or hear something during his prayer and that would trigger distracting thoughts in his mind. A person may see an image which reminds him of an experience and one thought will lead to another. Those who have strong will can control their thoughts and prevent them from wandering around away from the prayer. Those whose will is not that strong need to eliminate the root cause for these distracting thoughts. One way is to lower their gaze during prayer, pray in a dark house, or pray to a wall so that they would not be able to see around them. They should avoid praying on the street or using colourful prayer mats. That is why serious worshippers used to pray in small houses only large enough to accommodate them during prostration. Those who have strong will would go to pray at the Mosque but they would lower their gaze; their eyesight does not extend beyond the point where their forehead would touch the ground during prostration; and they would not recognize who was standing in the row beside them during prayer.

The internal sources for distractions are more difficult to deal with. The thoughts of a person who is overwhelmed by various interests in the worldly life will take him around jumping from

one place to another. The distraction comes from within so lowering one's gaze will not be a cure. The remedy for this shortcoming is the vigorous control of one's mind forcing it to focus on what is being recited during the prayer. The person should prepare himself for this before starting the prayer by reminding himself that prayer is the gate to the reward in the Hereafter. He should remind himself also that during prayer he is in private communication with God; one should therefore devote his whole heart for this communication.

One of the things that should be done before starting the prayer is to make sure that there are no pending activities which may distract people during the prayer. If this does not work, then one should consider the root of the distractions. There is no doubt that these distractions are rooted in the interest of the person in his daily activities. These activities may be connected to the person's desires and lusts. One should rebuke himself for such desires and lusts and should sever all ties with whatever distracts him from his prayer. These distractions are the enemy of his faith, and they are the soldiers of Iblis (Satan). It is difficult to control them so all ties must be severed.

One time the Messenger of God (PBUH) was at the pulpit; he had a golden ring on his finger (before the prohibition of gold for men); he suddenly took off the ring and threw it away. He said³⁴, "*This ring distracted me from fully devoting myself to you.*"

Another time a man had a garden of palm trees; the palm trees were loaded with dates. He was praying in the garden and the scene of the fruits on the palm trees distracted the man during his prayers, so he forgot how many rakaa he had completed. The man narrated this incident to Othman (RA). Othman (RA) said, "*Make it a charity and give it up for the sake of God.*" The man gave the garden to Othman (RA) as a charity and Othman (RA) sold it for fifty thousand dinars.

This is the way devout Muslims used to deal with things that distracted them during their prayers. This kind of charity served dual purpose: it served as a motivation to resist the tendency of the mind to be distracted, and it atoned for the imperfections in the performance of the prayer. This is the most effective way to eliminate distractions during prayer; no other cure will be useful. The remedial actions which were mentioned before, including calming the mind and urging it to focus on understanding the recitation, are only useful when the distractions are caused by mild interests and desires. These are the kind of interests and desires which touch the heart only peripherally. These remedial actions are ineffective when the distractions are caused by strong desires and interests which overwhelm the heart. Fighting these major distractions using the remedy suggested to resist minor distractions may have to continue during the span of time of the whole prayer.

There are many types of these desires that are the cause of distractions, and it is very rare that a person would be free from having them. The root cause of these desires is the love of the worldly life. This is the main reason of all sins, the basis of every shortcoming, and the source of every

³⁴ Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al-Nassaie. The text does not specify whether it was a gold or silver ring.

corruption. A person whose inner self has been overtaken by the love of the worldly life and who indulges in its pleasures - not only to use it for subsistence or as a means to get the reward of the Hereafter - should not entertain the hope of engaging in the kind of prayer that makes him communicate privately with God. Those who seek happiness in the enjoyment of this worldly life will not find happiness in meeting and communicating with God. People derive their motivations from the things that make them happy. People who find their happiness in the enjoyment of this worldly life will be more inclined to pursue their enjoyment in this life. However, they should not completely give up on striving against their desires by training their hearts to become mindful during prayer and reducing the chances of succumbing to distractions. This is the bitter medicine. Many people refuse to take this medicine because of its bitterness and consequently their illness becomes chronic, entrenched in their souls, and difficult to cure.

Many of the devout scholars failed to perform a short prayer (only two rakaas) without being distracted by the affairs of the worldly life, no matter how hard they tried. This indicates that people like us have no hope of achieving such a formidable task. We only hope that we would be able to perform half or even third of our prayers without being distracted, so that we join the category of those who will come on the Day of Judgement with a mixture of good and bad deeds. The interests in the worldly life and the reward of the Hereafter compete together to win the human heart. The parable of this competition is like trying to pour water into a cup which is full of vinegar. The cup can only accept an amount of water equal to the amount of vinegar that is taken out of the cup. The cup cannot be occupied by the water and the vinegar at the same time.

An outline of the things that the heart should be busy thinking of during each part of the prayer is as follows:

The Call to Prayer

When you hear the call to the prayer, your heart should think of the enormity of the call on the Day of Resurrection. Hasten to respond to the call and prepare your inner self and your external senses to respond to the call. Those who are quick in their response to the call will be called kindly on the Day of Judgment.

Purification

In addition to cleansing the place where you pray, the clothes you are wearing, and the skin that covers your body you should purify your heart which is your inner self. Work hard to purify your heart by repenting, feeling sorry for the sins you committed, and making the sincere intention that you will not commit these sins again. God looks at your inner self.

Covering the Body

Covering the body is meant to protect the private parts of the human body from being seen by people. You should cover the ills of your inner self by repenting because God sees all what is in the inner self.

Facing the Qibla

This requires that you turn your face towards the Sacred House of God and you do not look in any other direction. Don't you think that the heart should only busy itself with the affairs of God and should not pay attention to any other affair? Yes, this is what is required. The heart should only busy itself with God's affairs. Turning your face towards the Sacred House of God is meant to motivate the inner self to busy itself with God alone. It is also a means to calm down the senses and the body parts so that they do not distract the heart. You should know that since turning one's face towards the Sacred House of God is not realized until one abandons turning his face towards all other directions, then also the heart will not busy itself with God alone unless it abandons thinking of all things other than the prayer.

Standing Upright

This involves presenting oneself in body and heart to the presence of God. You should bow down your head, which is the most honoured part of your body. Bowing your head should be a command to the heart to be humble and to abandon arrogance. You should envision the horror of standing in front of God on the Day of Judgement to account for your deeds. You should know that when you pray you are actually standing in front of God and He is looking at you. If it is difficult for you imagine the enormity of the situation, then remember how you would stand in front of the king of the kings of this world.

The Intention

You should make a sincere intention to obey God's command to perform and perfect the prayer; and to abstain from actions that render the prayer null or imperfect. Your intention should be solely devoted to God for the purpose of seeking his reward and avoiding His wrath. You should magnify the value of being able to communicate privately with God during your prayer. You should carefully consider who you are communicating with, how are you communicating with Him, and what language you use in communicating with Him. If you truly absorb all of this, then you will sweat out of shame, tremble out of apprehension, and the colour of your face will become yellow out of fear.

Saying Allah is Great (Takbir)

When your tongue utters these words, it should reflect the true belief in your heart. If there were in your heart something greater than God, then God bears witness that you are a liar.

The Opening Supplication

When you say, *“I direct my face towards He who created the heavens and earth,”* this does not mean that you are physically directing your face towards God, because God is high above being limited to any one direction. You cannot direct your body physically towards God but it is your heart that should incline towards God. You should not start your private communication with God telling a lie. So, make sure that your heart is wholly devoted to the communication with God. When you say, *“Upright Muslim,”* you should know that a Muslim is a person who does not assault people physically or verbally. When you say, *“I am not one of those who associate partners with God,”* you should also remember the hidden type of associating partners with God. When you say, *“My life and my death are for God,”* you should know that this is the state of a servant who only realizes his existence in the nearness of God.

Seeking Refuge with God from Satan

When you say, *“I seek refuge with God from the cursed Satan,”* then you should know that Satan is your avowed enemy. He is stalking your movements. His sole intention is to distract your heart away from remembering God. He envies you for having the opportunity of a private audience with God. He envies you for having the opportunity to prostrate yourself to God. One of Satan’s tricks is to make you think of the Hereafter and the planning of doing good deeds to distract you from understanding what you are reciting. You should know that any thoughts that distract you from understanding what you are reciting are whispers from Satan. The main objective of the recitation in the prayer is to understand what is being recited not merely uttering the words.

In the Name of God, the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy: When you say, *“In the name of God the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,”* it should be your sincere intention that you are saying this to seek God’s blessings for reciting His verses.

The Opening (Al-Fatiha)

When you recite the Opening of the Book, you should reflect on the meaning of each one of its verses as given in the books of interpretation (Tafseer).

Recitation of Quran

You should reflect on the meanings of the verses which you are reciting; understanding its commands, its prohibitions, its promises, and its threats. Your recitation should be done according to the rules, slowly and quietly. This will help you reflect on the meanings of the verses.

Bowing (ruku) and Prostrating (sujood)

When you bow and prostrate, you should remember the Majesty of God. When you bow, you should feel the glory of God. When you stand up, you should express your gratitude to Him and

praise Him for the honour He bestowed on you. When you prostrate yourself, you should feel humble in front of God.

Tashahud

You should sit politely and declare that all what you say of the blessings and prayers are for God alone. Remember the Prophet (PBUH) in your heart and great him. You should be certain that your greeting will reach him, and he will respond generously to your greetings. Then you should greet yourself and the righteous servants of God and consider God's greeting to you in response. God's greetings will be as many as the number of His righteous servants. Then declare that you bear witness that there is no deity except God and that Muhammad (PBUH) is His messenger. Finally, recite the traditional supplication with humility while pleading to God to accept your supplication. Remember to include your parents and the rest of the believers in your supplication.

Tasleem

End your prayer by saying, "Assalamu Alaikum" and make your intention that you include the angels and all those who are present in this greeting.

After the Prayer

Having completed the prayer, let your heart feel fear and shame for your shortcomings during the prayer. Entertain the combined feelings of fear and hope. The fear that your prayer may not be accepted, you may have committed either a known or a hidden sin that rendered your prayer unacceptable; and the hope that God will exercise His generosity and magnanimity and accept your prayer.

You should know that the light that will illuminate your heart and can open for you the door to the hidden knowledge (the knowledge that leads to God) can only be obtained by perfecting the prayer using the schedule for the acts to be performed during the prayer which we mentioned above. The righteous people gain the hidden knowledge that draws them nearer to God only during their prayer, especially during prostration. God said, "*Prostrate and draw near.*" (96: 19) The servant is nearest to God during prostration.

Quotes about Humility in Prayer (Khushu)

Prayer is part of the Hereafter, when you enter in your prayer you exit from the worldly life.

A scholar was asked, "*Do you think about a matter of the worldly life while you are praying?*" He said, "*I don't do that whether I am praying or not.*"

Abu Al-Dardaa (RA) used to say, "*A measure of the wisdom of a person is his visit to the washroom before he makes ablution for the prayer. A man can only devote his heart to the prayer if he does not have a pressing need to do something else.*"

Abu Al-Aaliah was asked once to explain the verse, “*Who are heedless of their prayer.*” (107: 5) He said, “*Those are who are distracted during the prayer, so they lose count of how many rakaa they had performed.*” Al-Hassan was of the opinion that this verse refers to those who are distracted and forget to perform the prayer at the prescribed time. Other scholars are of the opinion that this refers to those who do not express joy when they perform their prayer early during the prescribed time, nor are they saddened if they were late in performing it late during the prescribed time. They do not have the sense that performing prayer early is good while performing it late is bad.

The Duties of the Imam

Before the Prayer

1. No one should lead a prayer without the full acceptance of the people he is leading. One should not compete with others to lead the prayer.
2. If a person was given the choice either to make the call to the prayer (Azan) or to lead the prayer, he should choose leading the prayer. While the two tasks are both highly rewarded however, the reward for leading the prayer is greater. However, it is disliked for a person to perform both tasks. It is true that leading the prayer is a grave responsibility, but grave responsibilities are always rewarded generously.
3. The Imam should always establish the prayer early (in the beginning of the time span prescribed for the prayer). He should not delay the prayer hoping for more people to join the congregation. The reward for performing the prayer early is better than the reward for having a bigger congregation. The Messenger of God (PBUH) and the companions were once on a trip; the Messenger (PBUH) went to perform ritual purification before the prayer and was late in coming to the prayer. The companions did not wait for the Messenger of God (PBUH) to lead them; they started the prayer with Abdel Rahman Ibn Awf (RA) leading the prayer. The Messenger of God (PBUH) joined the congregation in the second rakaa. The companions were worried about the fact that they did not wait for the Messenger of God (PBUH) to lead the prayer, but he not only approved what they did but he also praised their decision. The Imam should not wait for the person who has been designated to call to the prayer (Muezzin) if he was late in coming to the congregation. However, the person who calls to the prayer should wait for the designated Imam if he was delayed.
4. The Imam should have the sincere intention that he is leading the prayer for the sake of God alone. He should be honest in fulfilling the requirements for the ritual purification and the prayer. One of the conditions for sincerity is that the Imam should not be paid for leading the prayer. Being honest in performing the acts of purification involves striving hard to purify his inner self by abstaining from committing acts of transgression, committing major sins, and habitually committing minor sins. In addition, he should be honest in maintaining his state of ritual cleanliness. If he remembered, after he had started the prayer, that he was ritually unclean; or if he became ritually unclean during the prayer he should not be ashamed to appoint another person from among the congregants to

continue leading the prayer in his stead while he goes to perform the rituals of purification. The Messenger of God (PBUH) once started leading the prayer and suddenly remembered that he was not ritually clean, so he brought a man forward from among the congregants to lead the prayer in his stead. The Messenger of God (PBUH) then went and performed the ritual of purification (Ghusl) and came back to join the prayer. Sufian said, *“Pray behind whoever is leading the prayer, whether he was righteous or transgressor. But do not pray behind an Imam who is known to be an alcoholic, a person who has the audacity to show off his disobedience of fundamental religious tenets, a person who is unkind to his parents, a person who is making up religious innovations, or a rebellious slave.”*

5. The Imam should not start the prayer before making sure that the people are standing in straight rows.
6. The Imam should raise his voice when he says “Allahu Akbar.”

During the Recitation

1. The Imam should not say the opening supplication and seeking refuge in God loudly but should only say them in whisper. He should recite loudly the Opening of the Book (Al-Fatiha) and the sura that follows it in the Dawn (Fajr) prayer; and the first two rakaas of the Sunset (Maghreb) and Evening (Isha) prayers. He also should say, “*Ameen,*” loudly. The congregation should join the Imam in saying, “*Ameen,*” loudly at the same time. The Imam should raise his voice when he says, “*In the Name of God the Lord of Mercy, the Giver of Mercy,*” as has been indicated by Imam Al-Shafi’i.
2. The Imam should stay silent for a moment at three points in the prayer: after saying Allahu Akbar in the beginning of the prayer (this is the time when he is reciting the opening supplication), after finishing the recitation of Al-Fatiha, and after finishing the recitation of the Quran before bowing down (ruku).
3. The Imam should follow the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) in choosing a sura to recite in the different prayers as follows:
 - a. Dawn (Fajr) prayer: Two of the long suras with less than a hundred verses each. It was the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) to recite long suras in the Dawn prayer. He may elect to pray the last twenty or thirty verses of one of the suras in the second rakaa.
 - b. Noon (Zuhr) prayer: He should recite around thirty verses from one of the suras in the group of suras which starts with surat Qaf (50) and ends with surat Al-Naba (78).
 - c. Afternoon (Asr) prayer: The length of the recitation in the afternoon prayer is about half of the length of the recitation in the noon prayer.
 - d. Sunset (Magreb) prayer: The Imam could recite the shorter suras at the end of the Quran.

It is recommended that congregational prayers should be short. The Prophet (PBUH) said³⁵, “*The Imam should keep the prayer short. There may be people among the congregants who are weak or old; others may also have pressing needs to attend to.*”

Regarding Performing the Prayer

1. The Imam should keep bowing and prostrating short.
2. The congregants should not stand beside the Imam. Their movements should be subsequent to the movements of the Imam. It has been said that the congregants could be divided into three categories:
 - a. Those whose movements follow the Imam will earn a reward equivalent to twenty-five times the reward of the prayer they performed
 - b. Those who synchronize their movements with the movements of the Imam, they will get the reward of one prayer.
 - c. Those whose movements precede the movements of the Imam, they will get no reward.
3. The Imam should not make a very long supplication after the tashahhud.

Ending the Prayer

1. The Imam should have the intention to include the angels and the congregants in his finishing greeting (tasleem).
2. The Imam should only stay in his position after the tasleem a period of time long enough for him to say, “*God, You are Peace, and peace is from You. Blessed are You. You are the Majesty, the Generous,*” (Allahum anta Al-Salam wa minka al-salam. Tbarakta ya dha Al-Jalal wa Al-Ikram). Then the Imam should move to another place to pray sunnah.
3. The Imam should turn around after finishing the prayer and look at the congregants.

Notes:

There is a supplication in the Dawn prayer (Dua al-Qunoot). When the Imam says in the Qunoot, “*God, you are the Truth and you judge with the Truth,*” the congregants should respond by saying, “*This is true and we bear witness to this truth.*”

³⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

Book 5: The Inner Dimensions of Zakat (Alms)

The Inner Dimensions of the Etiquette of Paying Zakat

The following is a list of the duties that should be completed by those who are seeking the way that leads to the Hereafter through paying zakat:

1. Understanding the Purpose and Significance of zakat
2. Paying zakat Early
3. Observing Confidentiality in Giving zakat
4. Giving zakat Openly
5. Not Invalidating the Charity
6. Belittling the Charity
7. Spending out of the Best and Dearest of his Wealth
8. Seeking the Recipients Who are Most Deserving

Understanding the Purpose and Significance of Paying Zakat

Paying zakat is a practical application of the belief in the oneness of God, a means for achieving purification, and an expression of gratitude to God.

The Belief in the Oneness of God

The utterance of the testament of faith, “*There is no deity except God, and Muhammad is His Messenger,*” should reflect the absolute belief in its meaning. The direct implication of the belief in the truthfulness of this statement is that the person’s heart should be only filled with the love of God because true love tolerates no partnerships. This means that one should abandon the love of anything else other than God.

Since people love wealth, spending for the sake of God becomes a test that people have to pass to show their love of God. Based on the understanding of the meaning of the testament of faith, people can be divided into three categories:

The first category includes people who understood the true meaning of the belief in the Oneness of God; they believed in it and they fulfilled their covenant with God. The people in this category spend all their wealth for the sake of God. They do not save any money. Some of these people were asked, “*How much money one should pay as zakat if his wealth is two hundred Dirham?*” They answered, “*For ordinary people, the legal requirement is five Dirham, but for us we have to pay the whole two hundred Dirham.*” One of these people is Abu Bakr (RA) who gave all the money he had for the sake of God.

The second category includes people who spend moderately to fulfill the requirements of their families without extravagance and spend whatever extra money that remains for the sake of God. These people spend more money for the sake of God than the amount that is legally required.

The third category includes people who only fulfill the legal requirements.

Purification

Paying zakat purifies the individual from being stingy. The Quran says, “*And whoever is protected from the stinginess of his soul – it is those who will be successful.*” (59: 9) Stinginess is caused by the love of wealth. To rid oneself of the love of wealth one has to force oneself to forsake wealth by paying zakat regularly, until the person becomes used to spending in the sake of God.

Gratitude

Paying zakat is a way to express one’s gratitude to God. God has bestowed many favors on His servants. These favors include the blessings of health and wealth. Performing the physical rituals is an expression of the servant’s gratitude for the blessing of health. Paying zakat is an expression of the servant’s gratitude for the blessing of wealth.

Paying Zakat Early

The practice of the religious people is not to wait until the legal time for its payment has been reached, but they pay it ahead of the legal time. This is a way to express their willingness to fulfill their obligations and their intent to make the poor happy. They also pay the zakat early to circumvent any unforeseen event that may prevent them from fulfilling this obligation and to guarantee the fulfillment of the obligation before its designated legal time. Paying the zakat after the designated legal time is an expression of disobedience to God. One should take advantage of the opportunity whenever the desire to do good arises from within, because there is no guarantee that the circumstances will remain unchanged.

Observing Confidentiality in Giving Zakat

Those who observe confidentiality when they give zakat belong to one of the seven categories of people who were promised to be protected under the shade of God on the Day of Judgement. Giving in secret is a measure of the sincerity of the donor. It purifies the individual from the doubt of being sanctimonious and showing off. A person whose intention of paying zakat is to show off will not be rewarded for his deed. Zakatgiving is meant to free people from stinginess and to belittle the love of wealth in their hearts. Love of fame and honor is more intense than the love of wealth; both have dire consequences for the servant on the Day of Judgement. However, note that being stingy is less harmful than showing off. Resisting the lesser evil while letting the greater one grow serves no purpose.

Giving Zakat Openly

One should give zakat openly if it will encourage others to follow suit. However, he should be careful not to let his heart fall prey to the vice of showing off. So, spending openly is only allowed when a benefit will be accrued that cannot be realized otherwise. There is one more pitfall in giving openly, which is breaking the confidentiality of the recipient. However, if the recipient asks openly then it is allowed to respond openly. In this case it is the recipient who broke his own confidentiality.

Not Invalidating the Charity

The donor should not render his zakat invalid by taunting or hurting the recipients of his charity. There are different interpretations for the meaning of taunting and hurting. One interpretation is that taunting means reminding the poor of the favor being bestowed on him; while hurting refers to breaking the confidentiality of the recipient. I think that taunting is a state of the heart that is reflected on the utterance of the tongue. It is rooted in the donor's feeling that he is the bountiful benefactor; while the truth is it is the recipient who is the benefactor and the reason for the donor's salvation. The recipient has agreed to act as God's deputy and receive the debt that the donor owes God; thus, helping him to fulfill his obligation.

Hurting also refers to speaking harshly to the poor, sneering at them, and humiliating them by exposing their secret. These actions stem from two emotions that the donor may experience: the reluctance to part with money, and the feeling that he is superior to the recipient. Both emotions stem from a state of ignorance.

It is sheer stupidity to think that money given away in charity is wasted. Who would not give away one Dirham in exchange for a thousand? Had the rich realized the rank and honor that the poor have in the sight of God, he would not have looked down upon him. Had the rich realized the perils of wealth he would have sought his blessings from the poor.

If you say that this is a mystery, there is rarely a heart that does not experience these emotions; so what is the cure? You should know that there are two remedies to these problems. The first deals with the inner feelings and the second deals with the apparent actions. The remedy that deals with the inner feelings is to understand and carry out the inner duties which we explained above. The remedy that deals with the apparent actions involves changing the behaviour of the donor. The outward behaviour can change the heart. Examples of this are the rich who puts the charity in the hand of the poor and begs him to accept it. Another example is the rich who extends his palm with the charity so the poor would have the upper hand when he picks up the charity, and the rich man would have the lower hand.

Belittling the Charity

One should think little of his charity because if he thinks that his charity is enormous, he would be filled with sanctimonious admiration. Sanctimonious admiration is one of the deadly sins that spoils the good deeds. Recite, if you will, the verse, *“Assuredly God did help you in many battlefields and on the day of Hunain; when your great numbers elated you, but it did not avail you at all.”* (9: 25)

The remedy for this consists of acquiring certain knowledge and performing certain action. As for the knowledge, it must be realized that Zakat only amounts to one tenth or a quarter of one tenth of the wealth. This is a minute amount in comparison with the original wealth. A person should be ashamed of the fact that he is giving back this small amount of money. He should know that the wealth is a bounty from God. He should not think highly of the small amount that

he is obligated to pay for charity which rightfully belongs to God. He should, instead look forward to the reward that he will gain in the Hereafter which amounts to a multitude of what he is spending in this life.

As for the action, one should feel ashamed that his stinginess is preventing him from spending all his wealth for the sake of God. The wealth is a bounty from God; the wealth actually belongs to God. God would like to see the wealth spent in charity, but He only required people to spend a small amount of their wealth in charity because He knows how difficult it would have been had He commanded His servants to spend more. God tells us, *“This worldly life is only amusement and diversion. And if you believe and remain conscious of God, He will give you your rewards and not ask you for your properties. If He should ask you for them and press you, you would withhold, and He would expose your moral failings.”* (47: 36-37)

Spending out of the Best and Dearest of his Wealth

One should choose from his wealth only the best and dearest to him to spend for the sake of God. God is good, and He only accepts the good things. How can a servant put himself and his family ahead of God by keeping the best of his wealth for himself and his family and spending out of that which he does not value?

The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said³⁶, *“It may be that (the reward for) one Dirham (of charity) is better than (the reward for) one hundred thousand Dirham.”* The companions asked the Prophet (PBUH), *“How can that be?”* He said, *“Consider the case of a person who has only two Dirham and gave out one of them in charity and the case of a very rich person who spent a hundred thousand Dirham out of his vast wealth. (Who would have a better reward?)”*

Seeking the Recipients Who is Most Deserving

One should seek recipients who will put the charity to its best use. It is not sufficient for a recipient to belong to one of the eight legally deserving categories because there are ranks within each category.

Here are some of the traits that a donor should seek in the recipients:

1. Those who are God conscious who are not interested in seeking the pleasures of this worldly life. The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said³⁷, *“Do not share the food unless it is offered by a person who is God conscious and do not offer your food except to a person who is God conscious,”*
2. Those who are dedicated to seeking knowledge.
3. Those who are sincere in remaining conscious of God and understanding the meaning of the belief in the Oneness of God.
4. Those who do not declare their need by complaining often about how poor they are.

³⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported and declared authentic by Al-Nisaie and Ibn Habban.

³⁷ Narrated by Abu Said and reported by Abu Daoud and Al-Tirmidhi.

5. Those who support large families or whose circumstances (illness or otherwise) prevent them from seeking employment. They are described by the verse, “*Charity is for the poor who have been restricted for the cause of God, unable to move about in the land. An ignorant person would think them self-sufficient because of their restraint, but you know them by their characteristic sign.*” (2: 273)
6. The relatives and kindred.

These are the recommended categories of people to give charity to, however within each category there are ranks. One should seek those who are higher in the rank within each category. Those who belong to two or more of these categories are placed higher. If one did his best in seeking the most deserving and his choice was right then he will get two rewards, and if he erred in making the right choice then he will still get one reward. The two rewards which he will get if he makes the right choice are:

1. Ridding himself from the trait of stinginess and confirming his love to God.
2. The benefit that he will gain from the supplication of the person who received the charity. The supplication of the pious are known to be accepted by God; the effects of these supplications will show on the state and wealth of the donor.

On The Recipients, Criteria for Entitlement, and Etiquette of Receiving

The Duties of the Recipient

The first duty: The recipient should know that God has legislated zakat to address his financial needs so that he can focus on his duty to worship God.

The second duty: The recipient should thank the donor, praise him, and ask God to accept his deeds.

The third duty: The recipient should refuse to accept money that he knows came from illegal source.

The fourth duty: The recipient should make sure that he belongs to one of the charity deserving categories, and should only take the permissible amount of the charity.

The fifth duty: The recipient should make sure that his share is not more than one-eighth of the amount of zakat legally due from the donor.

Voluntary Charity (Sadaqah)

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said³⁸, “*Everyone is protected (on the Day of Judgment) under the shade of the charity he gave until the judging of people has been completed.*” The Messenger

³⁸ Narrated by O’qbah ibn A’mer and reported by Ibn Habban and Al-Hakem and declared authentic on the basis of Muslim’s criteria

of God (PBUH) was asked³⁹, “Which charity is best?” He said, “The charity which you give while you are healthy, when you are reluctant to spend, when you hope that you will live long, and when you are afraid to become poor. Do not wait until you are on the verge of dying and say I give such and such this much.”

Ibn Massoud (RA) said, “A man worshipped God for seventy years then committed an indecency, his worship was rendered useless. He then passed by a poor man and gave him a loaf of bread. God forgave him his sins and rewarded him for the seventy years of his worship.”

Nouman said to his son, “When you commit a sin, follow it by a charity.” Al-Shuubbi said, “The charity of the person, who does not feel that his need for the reward of the charity he gives is more than the need of the poor person for the charity, has been rendered useless. It will slap him on the face.”

Elucidation of Giving Charity in Secret or in Public

Reasons for giving charity in secret

1. It guards the anonymity of the recipient.
2. It is better for people’s hearts and tongues. People may envy the recipient thinking that he does not deserve the charity.
3. It helps the donor remain anonymous.
4. It is degrading for the recipient to be given openly.
5. It removes any doubt of the desire to show off on the part of the donor.

Reasons for giving charity in public

1. It forces the donor to be sincere in giving and to try hard to avoid entertaining the desire to show off.
2. It forces the recipient to relinquish pride and teaches humility.
3. It emphasizes the concept of the belief in the oneness of God and that no one matters except Him.
4. It allows the donor to show his gratitude for the blessings of God.

The conclusion is that one cannot say unconditionally that one is better than the other. In some cases, giving charity in secret is better and in others giving it openly may be better; depending on the intention, the circumstances, and the people involved. The sincere person should not be tempted into conceit; and should always be alert to the trickery of Satan and the temptation of the self. Trickery and temptation can exist in both situations.

The recipient may be tricked in believing that giving charity in secret is better. A person may not like the fact that he is a recipient of charity to be publicly known. He may be worried that others will look down upon him, while admiring the donor who will be seen as a benefactor. Worrying about one’s image in the eyes of people is a buried illness which will be used by Satan to argue in favor of giving charity in confidence. Satan will support his argument by pointing out the five reasons for keeping the charity confidential which are mentioned above. The criterion that can be

³⁹ Narrated by Abu Huraira and reported by El-Bukhari and Musim

used to know whether the desire in confidential charity is motivated by the false pride of the recipient or by his sincere desire to preserve his dignity is to consider the situation when other people are facing a similar situation. If the recipient is keen on preserving the privacy of others as he is keen on preserving his own privacy, then his concern is genuine. But if he only cares about his own privacy and does not care whether the privacy of other recipients is breached or not, then his inclination to secrecy is motivated by Satan. It is the principle that matters not to whom it applies. He who understands this principle may be able to frustrate the efforts of Satan otherwise he will do much, but he will be rewarded a little.

Some recipients may be inclined to accept charity in public because it makes the donor to feel good and it motivates others to give. In addition, it allows the recipient to be seen as one of those who openly express their gratitude; these people may then be generous to him and will enquire about his circumstances. This is also a hidden illness. Satan has one strategy to approach a religious person. Satan may argue that by showing gratitude is an application of the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) and hiding is a sign of showing off. The criterion, that can be used to discern whether the recipient's inclination to receive charity openly is motivated by the desire to show off or by a genuine desire to follow the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH), is to ask himself two questions: will he still show gratitude even if the donor or prospective donors will not be aware of his gratitude? and will he show gratitude in front of donors who give in secret and hate to be thanked for their charity? If the answer to the two questions is affirmative, then he is genuinely motivated by the desire to follow the tradition of the Prophet (PBUH) in expressing his gratitude publicly; otherwise, he is conceited.

If the recipient knows that the donor does not care whether the recipient thanked him or not, then it is safe for him to express his gratitude openly. This is the reason the Messenger of God (PBUH) said to his companions when they praised a man⁴⁰, "*You killed your brother, had he heard what you said he would not succeed.*" However, the Prophet (PBUH) did praise people for doing good deeds in their presence because he knew that the praise would not tempt them to become conceited, on the contrary the praise would motivate them to continue their good deeds. The Prophet (PBUH) once received a man and introduced him to his companions saying⁴¹, "*He is the master of the Nomad people.*" He also said⁴², "*Honor those who are highly honoured by their people.*" The Messenger of God (PBUH) once heard a man giving a speech, he admired the man's speech and said⁴³, "*Truly some speeches are like magic.*" He has also been quoted to have said⁴⁴, "*If you know something good about your brother then you should bring it to his attention to encourage him to do more.*"

Those who want to improve their hearts should understand the statements that are mentioned above. This is the kind of knowledge which has been referred to in the saying, "*One may get better reward for learning one lesson than performing voluntary rituals for one year.*" This is the kind of knowledge that revitalises the rituals that one will perform all his life.

⁴⁰ Narrated by Abu Bakrah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁴¹ Narrated by Qais Ibn Asem and reported by Al-Tabarani, Ibn Qanie, and Ibn Habban.

⁴² Narrated by Ibn Omar and reported by Ibn Majah.

⁴³ Narrated by Ibn Omar and reported by Al-Bukhari.

⁴⁴ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al- Darqotni.

To sum up, receiving charity openly and rejecting it in confidence are the best practices, until one reaches the stage that both practices are equal to him. This is the red Sulphur that people talk about, but they never see.

Zakat and Voluntary Charity

It is better to be a recipient of voluntary charity than to be a recipient of zakat because the categories of those who are eligible for receiving zakat are restricted while there are no similar restrictions on those who are eligible to receive voluntary charity. A person may not fulfil the criteria for those who are eligible for receiving zakat. If the number of people asking for zakat is large, then the chance that the needs of the poor can be addressed will be reduced. On the other hand, receiving zakat helps the rich to fulfil their obligation. Zakat is not a favour that the rich do the poor, but it is a religious obligation that the rich must fulfill. It is the poor's right to receive zakat.

The truth is that it depends on the circumstance of the recipients and their intentions. A person should not seek to receive a share in zakat, if he has doubt concerning his eligibility. If a person who is eligible to receive a share from zakat is given the choice to either receive zakat or receive voluntary charity he should choose the voluntary charity, if he knew that the donor will not donate this voluntary charity otherwise. This will open up the chance for others to benefit from the zakat. However, if money from the voluntary charity is available anyway and the need of the poor can be addressed, then it is up to the person to choose. It should be mentioned that in general, receiving a share from the zakat has a greater effect in breaking the pride and teaching humility. God knows best.

Book 6: The Inner Dimensions of Fasting

Virtue of Fasting

God attached special importance to the ritual of fasting by stating that fasting is done for His sake and that the reward for fasting will be decided by Him⁴⁵, *“The reward for a good deed will be between ten folds to seven hundred folds, except the reward for fasting. Fasting is done for My sake, and I will decide its reward.”* There are two reasons for the honor that God bestowed on fasting. These are

1. The essence of fasting is abstention; hence it has only inner dimensions. Fasting does not involve external actions that can be seen by people. All the other rituals have external as well as inner dimensions. People can observe the external rituals but only God can see the inner dimensions. Fasting involves pure perseverance practiced by the inner self.
2. Fasting is a tool to conquer the enemy of God, Satan. Human desires and lusts are the means which Satan uses to tempt human beings. Desires and lusts are strengthened by eating and drinking. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁴⁶, *“Satan flows with the blood in the veins of the human beings. Use hunger as a means to restrict the path of Satan.”* God granted fasting a special rank among the acts of worship because fasting is particularly effective in overcoming Satan and in closing the passages through which he can approach people. Fasting enables the servants of God to subdue Satan. The servant of God is able to show his support to God by overcoming the enemy of God; God said, *“Believers, if you support God, He will support you and plant firmly your feet.”* (47: 7)

Satan finds very fertile ground in the prevalence of lust. Satan will surround the servant of God and continue to hover around him if the soil of his lust is fertile. As Satan hovers around the servant of God, a veil will cover his eyes; this veil prevents him from approaching God and meeting Him. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁴⁷, *“If it were not for Satan which hovers around the hearts of the human beings, they would have seen the kingdom of the heaven.”*

The Inner Dimensions of Fasting

Categories of Fasting

You should know that fasting has three categories: ordinary fasting, special fasting, and extra-special fasting.

Ordinary Fasting: A person performing ordinary fasting is simply required to abstain from eating and enjoying carnal desires.

⁴⁵ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁴⁶ Narrated by Safiyah bint Huyaii abd reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁴⁷ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Ahmad

Special Fasting: A person performing the fasting of the righteous is required, in addition to the above, to refrain from committing all types of sins that may be committed by listening, seeing, and talking; in addition to sins that may be committed using the hands, the legs, or any other body part. This is the fast that the righteous perform. This type of fast must fulfil six conditions:

1. To restrain one's eyesight by refraining from looking at any unseemly, disliked, or prohibited scene. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁴⁸, "*The look (at an unseemly scene) is one of the poisoned arrows of Iblis (Satan). Whoever refrained from looking out of fear of God, God will bestow on him faith whose sweetness will reside in his heart.*"
2. To restrain one's tongue from idle talk, lying, backbiting, slander, indecent talk, coarse talk, spreading enmity, vain argument. One should maintain silence and busy himself with the remembrance of God.
3. To restrain the ears from listening to indecent talk; God said, "*They are avid listeners to falsehood.*" (5: 41) "*Indeed, you would then be like them.*" (4: 140)
4. To restrain all senses from committing sins; the Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁴⁹, "*Many a fasting person gains nothing from their fast except hunger and thirst.*"
5. To restrain his intake of lawful food when he breaks his fast, so that he would not overeat. The worst container to fill to the rim in the sight of God is the stomach, even if it is filled with lawful food. How can one overcome Satan and subdue his desires if he is going to make up for the food he lost during the day by overeating during the night? The objective of fasting is overcoming the lust and strengthening the will to achieve God consciousness. Starving the stomach during the day will increase its desire for food and when this desire is fully satisfied in the evening with all sorts of delicious food the desire for carnal lusts will be evoked in a much more dangerous fashion.
6. It is also judicious not to sleep often during the day so that one can experience the hunger and the thirst that accompany fasting. Feeling the physical weakness helps to purify the heart. One should let this physical weakness continue during the night so that it would be easy for him to perform the night prayer and the routine of the remembrance of God. Hopefully, this will prevent Satan from hovering over his heart so that he would be allowed to see the kingdom of heavens. The night of Power is one such opportunity for a part of the kingdom of heaven to be revealed.
7. To maintain his heart in a state hovering between fear and hope at the time he breaks his fast, because he does not know whether his fast will be accepted or will be refused. In explaining this, the scholars said, "*How many a fasting person did not fulfill his fast, and how many a person who did not actually fast has fulfilled the fast.*" A person who eats and drinks but refrains from committing sins is a person who did not fast but fulfilled the conditions of the fast. A person who abstains from eating and drinking but indulges in all

⁴⁸ Narrated by Hudhayfah and reported by Al-Hakim.

⁴⁹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Nassaie and Ibn Majah

forms of sin is a person who outwardly fasts but does not actually fulfill the conditions of fasting.

Extra-Special Fasting: A person who performs the extra-special fasting is a person whose heart refrains from thinking about all worldly affairs; his heart is completely devoted only to the remembrance of God. This kind of fast is broken when the person starts thinking of anything other than God and the Hereafter. The fast is also broken when the person thinks of worldly affairs except those which led to a benefit for the religion. These kinds of affairs are part of the provision that benefit the person in the Hereafter. This is the type of fast that the prophets, the saints, the martyrs, and those who are brought to the nearness of God perform.

Book 7: The Inner Dimensions of the Hajj

Virtues of Hajj and the Cities of Mecca and Medina

Virtues of Hajj

When the verse, *“This day I have perfected for you your religion and completed My favor upon you and have approved for you Islam as a religion,”* (5: 3) the people of the Book said, *“Had this verse been revealed to us we would have made this day a day of celebration.”* Upon hearing this, Umar (RA) said, *“I bear witness that this verse was revealed to the Messenger of God (PBUH) in a day where two celebrations were held: the day of Arafat which happened to be a Friday. When the Messenger of God (PBUH) received this revelation while he was standing on the mount of Arafat, he said⁵⁰, ‘Lord, grant forgiveness to whoever performs hajj and to those whom a pilgrim asks you to forgive’”*

Al-Hassan Al-Basri described the high status that the Sacred House and Mecca have by saying, *“The reward for one day of fasting (while in Mecca) is equivalent to the reward for fasting a hundred thousand days anywhere else; the reward for giving one Dirham in charity is equivalent to the reward of giving a hundred thousand Dirham anywhere else; and the reward for one good deed is equivalent to the reward of a hundred thousand good deeds done anywhere else.”* It has been said that *“Performing seven circumambulations around the Kaba is equivalent to performing Umrah; and performing three Umrahs is equivalent to performing a hajj.”* In the authentic tradition, the Messenger of God has been quoted to have said⁵¹, *“Performing Umrah in Ramadan is equivalent to performing hajj with me.”*

Virtues of Mecca

The cautious apprehensive scholars were afraid to reside in Mecca for three reasons:

The fear of boredom and over-familiarity with the Sacred House. Residing in Mecca may cause the person to become over-familiar with the House. This may reduce the enthusiasm of the heart to hold the House in great reverence. That is why Umar (RA) used to chase the pilgrims out of Mecca once they had completed the rituals saying, *“People of Yemen, go back to Yemen; people of Syria, go back to Syria, people of Iraq, go back to Iraq.”* Umar (RA) was tempted to prevent people from performing too many circumambulations around the Kaba for fear of becoming over-familiar with the House.

Separation enflames the yearning to the House. When a person visits the House for a short time then returns home, he will always yearn to come back another time to visit the house. God made the House a returning point and a secure place for people to return to often; they should never feel that they had enough of it. Some Muslims of the earlier generations said, *“It may be that a heart in Khorasan is more attached to the House than the hearts of those who are actually performing circumambulation around it.”* It has been said that *“The Kaba performs circumambulation about some of God’s servant seeking God’s favor.”*

⁵⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Hakem.

⁵¹ Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

The fear of committing sins while in Mecca. There is a greater danger for those who commit sins in Mecca because this angers God. Ibn Massoud (RA) said, “*Only in Mecca does God hold people accountable for their intentions, even if they do not act upon them.*” He then recited, “*And who ever intends (a deed) therein of deviation (in religion) by wrongdoing- We will make him taste of a painful punishment.*” (22: 25) This means that punishment is earned by the mere intention to commit a sin. It is also said that the punishment for a sin committed in Mecca is double the punishment for the same sin committed anywhere else. Also, the reward for a good deed in Mecca is double the reward for the same deed anywhere else. Ibn Abbas said, “*Practicing monopoly in Mecca is an act of disbelief.*” It was also said that lying in Mecca is also a kind of disbelief. When the Messenger of God (PBUH) returned to Mecca, he faced the Kaba and said⁵², “*You are the best of God’s land and the most beloved God’s land to me. Had they not expelled me from this place, I would have not gone out.*” Why would that not be, knowing that even the look at the House is considered an act of worship?

Virtues of Medina

The city of the Messenger of God (PBUH) is the second best place in the world after Mecca. The good deeds performed in Medina are rewarded in multiple. The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁵³, “*A prayer performed in my mosque is better than thousand prayers performed anywhere else, except for a prayer performed in the Sacred Mosque.*” One Good deed performed in Medina is equivalent to a thousand good deeds performed elsewhere. The third best place is the holy land in Jerusalem. One prayer in Jerusalem is equivalent to five hundred prayers elsewhere, with the exception of prayers performed in the Sacred Mosque. This also applies to all good deeds. The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁵⁴, “*Whoever can meet his death in Medina let him do that, I will intercede on behalf of those who die in Medina.*”

The Inner Dimensions of Hajj

You should know that hajj starts with the understanding: I mean understanding the significance of hajj in Islam. The subsequent steps are yearning to perform it, the resolve to perform it, severing all ties that may prevent one from performing it, buying the unstitched dress to be worn during performing it (Ihram), preparing the necessary provision needed for the trip, buying the required ride, starting the trip, crossing the desert, wearing the unstitched dress at the appointed place while pronouncing the Talbyah, entering Mecca, then completing the rest of the rituals. In each of these steps there is a reminder for the mindful, a lesson for whoever wants to learn, an exhortation for the sincere student, and a learning process for the judicious.

⁵² Narrated by Abd Allah ibn Aadi ibn Al-Hamraa and reported by Al-Nassaie

⁵³ Narrated by Abu Huraira and Ibn Omar and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim.

⁵⁴ Narrated by Ibn Omar and reported by Al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maja.

Understanding

You should know that you cannot approach God unless you give up all desires; refrain from all pleasures; limit yourself to the necessities; and devote all your deeds, thoughts, and activities completely to God. That is why monks, in previous faiths, abandoned living among people and became recluse. They took refuge in mountains' caves preferring solitude to the company of people so that they can attain comfort in the nearness of God. They renounced the urgent worldly pleasures in favor of being in the company of God. They sought to live a hard life hoping for the reward in the Hereafter. God praised them in His Book saying, *“That is because among them are priests and monks and because they are not arrogant.”* (5:82). As time progressed, people forgot these practices, indulged themselves in the pleasures of this life, and abandoned the devotion to the worship of God. God then sent His Prophet (PBUH) to identify the path that leads to the rewards in the Hereafter and to revive the traditions of the previous messengers of God. The people of the Book asked the Prophet (PBUH) if Islam allows the practice of solitary worship as their monks used to do. The Prophet (PBUH) answered⁵⁵, *“God replaced this practice with the practice of Jihad and performing hajj.”* When the Prophet (PBUH) was asked about people who used to roam around in isolated lands worshipping God in seclusion (tourists), he (PBUH) answered⁵⁶, *“This type of worship has been replaced by fasting in Islam (a fasting person is a tourist).”*

God blessed this nation by designating hajj as its form of monasticism. God honored the Old House when He claimed it as His House. He made His House the focus of the rituals for His servants. God honored the House by making the land around it inviolable; no one is allowed to hunt an animal or to cut a tree in the precinct of the House. God modeled the House as a king's court; it is a goal for everyone to flock to from all parts of the world. People come dusty and dishevelled to express their humility to the Lord of the House, knowing full well that God is high above being confined to a place or a country. To magnify their sense of submission to God, they are required to perform tasks that they may find strange and whose significance may not be apparent to the minds, e.g. stoning the pillar repeatedly and walking back and forth between the two mounts of Safa and Maewah. However, they perform the tasks as requested obediently. This illustrates their deep sense of submission to God. This distinguishes hajj from other rituals. The significance of Almsgiving (Zakat) is easy to understand. It is an act of kindness that people may find appealing. Fasting is a mean to control one's desires, the desires which open the door to God's enemy. Bowing (ruku) and prostrating (sujood) are a way to express one's humility in front of God. But, one cannot find a rational explanation for stoning the pillar and walking back and forth between Safa and Marwah. In addition, people do not find these acts appealing in general. The only reason people perform these tasks is that they are eager to express their submission to God's command. People do not try to rationalize these tasks, nor do they care if these tasks are appealing to them or not. The only incentive for performing these tasks is

⁵⁵ Narrated by Abi Imamah and reported by Abu Daoud

⁵⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Baihaqi

showing total obedience to God. That is why the Prophet (PBUH) - when he went to perform hajj - said, *“Lord, I come to you to perform a truthful hajj that expresses my complete devotion and submission.”* He did not say this in his prayer or when he performed other acts of worship. Fulfilling commands that involve performing actions that cannot be readily understood by the person is the ultimate submission. Such acts of submission purify the soul. Total submission to God becomes the only incentive for the soul to commit a certain act.

Yearning

Yearning comes after understanding and the realization that the House is God’s House, the only intention of those who visit the House is to visit God. Yearning to the meeting of God is a strong incentive to seek the ways that lead to God. In addition, a lover yearns to everything that is connected to his loved one, and the House is the House of God. Above all of this, there is the generous reward that has been promised those who perform hajj.

The Resolve

The pilgrim should know that in making the resolve to perform hajj he has made the resolve not only to depart from his country and family but also to abandon his lusts and desires. He should realize that he has resolved to achieve a great and honorable feat. Seeking to achieve a great goal involves greater risk. That is why a pilgrim should resolve to devote his act completely for the sake of God and purify his intention of any shadow of showing off or seeking fame. He should know that it is one of the greatest sins to visit God’s House while his intention is to seek something else.

Severing the Ties

Severing the ties that may prevent one from performing hajj entails redressing all injustices previously committed. One should seek sincere repentance for all the evil deeds that one committed before.

Preparing the Necessary Provision

He should secure the necessary provisions for his trip using a pure and allowable means. He should recognize that the trip to the Hereafter is longer than this trip. The provision for the trip to the Hereafter is God consciousness.

Buying the Required Ride

He should express his gratitude to God when he gets his ride. God has made it easy for him to travel. He should remember the ride to the grave, when he will be carried to the grave in his funeral. Who knows? It may be soon. It may be even sooner than the trip to perform hajj. His ride to the grave is certain, while his travel to perform hajj is probable. How could one pay attention to securing the means for a trip that he will probably make and ignore securing the means for a trip that he will certainly make?

Buying the Unstitched Dress

Buying the unstitched dress should be a reminder of the burial shroud, the shroud which will be used to wrap his dead body.

Starting the Trip

When he is about to leave his country, he should remind himself and alert his heart to the reason he is embarking on this trip, where he is heading, and who he intends to visit. He will be one of those who are going to visit the King of kings. Those who responded to the call of God; they severed the relations with everything; they abandoned their loved ones, their families, and their homes; and they came to visit God's House. They should find in their visit to God's House a consolation for not meeting the Lord of the House.

Crossing the Desert

As he crosses the desert from his hometown until he reaches the appointed place where he will put on the unstitched shrouds marking the start of the state of Ihram, he should remember the route he will cross from life to death until he reaches the appointed time of the Day of Resurrection. He should remember the difficulties and dangers that he will meet on that route. On the route to hajj, he may have to face robbers. This should be a reminder of the two angels who will question him in the grave. On the route to hajj, he may face wild animals. This should remind him of the scorpions and the snakes of the grave. If he feels lonely on the road to hajj, that should be a reminder of the agony and the desolation he will suffer in the grave.

Wearing Ihram and Pronouncing the Talbiyah

While pronouncing the Talbiyah is his response to God's call, he should feel a mixture of hope and fear in his heart. He should nurture the hope that by the grace of God, his response will be accepted. He should also entertain the fear that his response may not be accepted.

Entering Mecca

At the time he enters Mecca he should be grateful that he was able to reach God's Sacred House safely. He should nurture the hope in his heart, that by entering the Sacred House, he will be saved from God's punishment.

The First Sighting of the House

His heart should be filled with awe at the first sight of the House. He should entertain the hope, that by God's grace, he will be able to see God's face on the Day of Judgment. He should remember that on that day, people will push their way towards Paradise hoping to enter it. However, they will be divided into two groups: a group will get the permission to enter and a group will be denied the permission.

Circumambulation about the House

You should know that this is a prayer. Your heart should be filled with awe, fear, hope, and love. In your circumambulation you are emulating the angels who surround and encircle the Throne.

Do not think that circumambulation is meant to be an act of the physical body only but the whole point is to make your heart circumambulate with the remembrance of the Lord of the House.

Touching the Black Stone

When you touch the Black Stone, you should realize that you are entering into a covenant with God. It is a vow of obedience. You should have the sincere intention to fulfill this vow. Those who break their vows deserve God's abomination. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁵⁷, "*The Black Stone is God's right hand on earth. Those who touch the Black Stone shake God's hand as they shake each other hands.*"

Clinging to the Covering of the Kaaba

You should have the sincere intention that by clinging to the covering of the House you are seeking the nearness of God, out of your love and yearning to the House and the Lord of the House. You hope that they will provide you protection against Hellfire. Clinging to the covering of the House should be an indication of your persistence in seeking forgiveness and safety. Clinging to the covering of the Kaba is like the clinging of a culprit to the clothes of the victim asking for his forgiveness.

Walking Back and Forth between Safa and Marwah (Sayi)

This exemplifies the effort that a servant does around the house courtyard hoping that his master will take note of his sincere dedication. It is like a person who is waiting anxiously to hear the king's decision regarding a request that he had earlier presented to the king. This is also a reminder of the undulating motion of the balance on the Day of Judgment.

Standing at Arafat

The congregating crowds; the high voices; the different tongues; and the different groups, each group following its leader to perform the various rituals should all be a reminder of the gathering of people on the Day of Judgment. Each nation will follow its prophet. You should remember to ask God to enrol you among the righteous on the Day of Judgment under the banner of the Master of the messengers. It has been said, "*The most heinous sin is for a pilgrim to think that God did not forgive him.*" It seems that concomitance of the resolve of people coming from different places is the secret purpose of hajj. The conjunction of the hearts in their quest for God's mercy is the only way to receive such mercy.

Stoning the Pillar

You should have the intention that stoning the pillar is your way to express your complete submission to God. It is also your way to emulate Prophet Abraham (PBUH). You should know that by stoning the pillar you are actually stoning the face of Satan and you are breaking his back.

⁵⁷ Narrated by Ibn Abbas

Offering the sacrifice

You should know that this is an act of obedience which brings you closer to God. You should nurture the hope in your heart that God will save one of your limbs from fire for each limb of the animal you sacrificed.

Visiting Medina

Remember when you first see the walls of Medina that this is the city that God chose for his Prophet (PBUH). God appointed Medina as the place to which the Prophet (PBUH) migrated. You should trace in your mind the footsteps of the Prophet (PBUH) as he walked around. You should feel sorry that you missed the company of the Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. You should realize that you have already missed his company in this life and there is a great risk that you would miss his company in the Hereafter. You may be one of the miserable people who will be full of sorrow as they see the Prophet (PBUH) from afar but they will be unable to reach him. When you reach the Mosque, remember that this is the Mosque that God chose for His Prophet (PBUH) and his companions. This is where the rituals ordained by God were first practiced. This is where the best human being among God's servants has been housed in his life and after his death.

When you visit the Messenger of God (PBUH) you should stand in front of him as we have described. You should visit him as if he were alive. Approach his grave as if you are approaching his living person. You should know that he is aware of your presence and your visit and that He answers back your greeting. We seek God's help alone.

Having completed all these rituals, the heart of the pilgrim should be filled with a mixture of feelings: the feelings of sadness, concern, and fear. He does not know whether his hajj has been accepted or not.

Book 8: The Etiquette of Reciting Quran

Virtues of the Quran

Imam Ahmad ibn Hanbal said, *“I saw God in a dream. I asked, ‘Lord, which deed brings one closer to You?’ He said, ‘Reciting My words.’ I asked, ‘Lord, does it matter whether one understands or not?’ He said, ‘It does not matter whether it is understood or not.”* Muhammad ibn Kaab Al-Qarzi said, *“When people listen to God reciting Quran on the Day of Resurrection, it is as if they never heard it before.”* Al-Fadeel ibn Iaad said, *“A person who memorized the Quran should not be in need of any one, from the Caliph downward. On the contrary, others should feel in need of him.”* He also said, *“A person who memorized the Quran is the carrier of the banner of Islam. He should honor the prominence of Quran. He should not fool around with those who fool around, be deluded with those who are deluded, nor indulge in vain talk with those who indulge in vain talk.”*

Anas ibn Malik (RA) said, *“It may be that a person recites the Quran while he is being cursed by the Quran.”* Maysarah said, *“It is astonishing to find that the Quran is memorized by a transgressor.”* Abu Suleiman Al-Darni said, *“The angels of punishment seize those who memorized the Quran and continued to disobey God faster than they seize the idolaters who disobeyed God after they had received the Quran.”* Ibn Al-Rammah said, *“I regretted that I memorized the Quran because I came to know that whoever memorized the Quran will have the same level of accountability, on the Day of Judgment, as the prophets.”* Ibn Massoud (RA) said, *“The person who memorized the Quran should have signs that sets him apart from other people: he stays up by night while people are asleep, he is committed during his days while people are heedless, he is sad while people are happy, he weeps while people are laughing, he is silent while people are talkative, he is humble while people are exulting. The person who memorized the Quran should have a submissive demeanor and should be soft hearted. He should not be harsh, argumentative, noisy, or hard. He should not speak loudly.”*

A person from the early Muslim generation said, *“The angels will seek forgiveness for a man from the time he starts reciting the Quran until he finishes while they will curse another from the time he starts reciting the Quran until he finishes.”* People asked him, *“How so?”* He said, *“The angels will ask God to forgive those who recite the Quran and abide by its rules regarding the allowable and the prohibited, while they will curse those who recite the Quran but do not abide by its rules regarding the lawful (Halal) and the unlawful (Haram).”* Some scholars said, *“A person who reads the Quran may curse himself inadvertently. He may read, ‘Certainly God curses the wrongdoers.’ And he is a wrongdoer, and he may read, ‘Certainly God curses the liars,’ and he is one of them.”*

The Discernible Etiquette of Reciting Quran

The Physical State of the Reader

A person should perform ablution before reading the Quran. During the recitation he should be calm and humble. He can recite while standing up or sitting down facing the Qiblah and lowering his head. He should not be reclining or sitting down arrogantly. It is best to recite the Quran standing up in the Mosque. One could recite the Quran without performing ablution or while lying down however, the reward will be less, *“Those who remember God standing up, sitting down, and lying on their sides.”* (3:191)

The Length of Recitation

The Messenger of God (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁵⁸, *“No one can recite the whole Quran in less than three days and is able to understand what he is reading.”* The Prophet (PBUH) commanded Ibn Umar (RA) to recite the whole Quran in seven days. There are four plans regarding the time needed to recite the whole Quran:

1. To recite the whole Quran once every twenty-four hours. This has been considered disliked by some scholars
2. To recite the whole Quran twice every week, this is good.
3. To recite the whole Quran once every week, this is also good.
4. To recite the whole Quran once every month, this is too long a time.

Recitation Plan

The plan for reading the whole Quran once a week involves dividing the reading into seven parts as follows:

1. The first part: The first three suras.
2. The second part: the following five suras.
3. The third part: the next seven suras.
4. The fourth part: the next nine suras.
5. The fifth part: the next eleven suras.
6. The sixth part: the next 13 suras.
7. The seventh part: starting for surat Qaf till the end.

Writing

It is better to write the Quran in a nice, legible handwriting in order to avoid any mistakes and errors in the rules of the recitation.

⁵⁸ Narrated by Ibn Omar and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

Slow Recitation

Slow reading is recommended because, as we will show later, the intention of reciting the Quran is to reflect on it. Slow reading helps one to reflect. Ibn Abbas (RA) said, *“I like to recite surat Al-Baqarah and surat Al-Imran slowly rather than recite the whole Quran in haste.”*

Weeping

It is recommended to weep while reading Quran. The Messenger of God said⁵⁹, *“Recite the Quran and weep. If you are unable to weep you should sound as if you are weeping.”* It has been reported that he (PBUH) also said⁶⁰, *“He is not one of us who does not rhyme the Quran.”* If the eye is unable to weep let the heart weep.

Sujood

One should make sujood whenever one reads a verse that mentions sujood. One has to be ritually clean, ritually covered, and should face the Qibla.

Starting of the Recitation

Before starting the recitation, one should say, *“I seek refuge in God, the All-Hearing, the Omniscient from the cursed Satan.”* One should say, *“Glory be to God (Subhan Allah),”* whenever one reads a verse that mention God’s glorification (Tasbeeh). One should make supplication (Duaa) whenever one reads a verse that mentions supplications. One should seek God’s forgiveness whenever one reads a verse that mentions God’s forgiveness. Both the tongue and the heart should be involved in performing these tasks.

Reading Loudly

One should at least recite in a voice that is audible to himself. If one does not hear his own recitation during the prayer, the prayer is rendered invalid. Raising one’s voice to a level audible to others is in some ways good and in some ways disliked. Reciting the Quran loudly has its advantages and disadvantages. Its advantages are it involves greater effort, it may benefit a listener, it helps the reader to focus his attention, and it keeps the reader alert. Its disadvantages are it may distract others, and it may be a perceived as if the reader is showing off.

Reading the Quran from the text (using the Mushaf) is also better than reciting from memory because reading the text involves two senses. Looking at the text is an act of worship that will be rewarded. It has been said that reading the whole Quran from the text is equivalent to reading it from memory seven times. Othman (RA) recited the Quran from the text too often to the extent that two of his written texts (Mushaf) became worn out. Many of the companions (RA) of the Prophet (PBUH) used to recite from the text. They hated to miss one day without reading the text.

Reciting in a Nice Voice

One should try to recite slowly in a nice rhythmical voice without artificially elongating the words in a way that violates the rules of recitation. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have

⁵⁹ Narrated by Saad ibn Abi Waqqas and reported by Ibn Majah

⁶⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bukhari

said⁶¹, “God did not listen to anything more than listening to a beautiful voice reciting the *Quran*.” The Prophet (PBUH) liked to listen to Ibn Massoud (RA) reciting the *Quran*.

The Inner Dimensions of Reciting the Quran

Appreciating the Superiority of the Language of the Quran

One should appreciate the greatness and excellence of the text. One should also appreciate the grace and blessings of God for making humankind able to understand His speech. His speech is an attribute of His, inherent in Him, and pre-eternal. He made this attribute to manifest itself in the form of letters and sounds that are human attributes. Human beings are unable to understand the nature of the attributes of God except through His own description of these attributes. If it were not for the support of God that He afforded Prophet Moses (PBUH) he would not have been capable of hearing God’s speech, as the mountain which could not bear the burden of looking at God and was decimated when God revealed Himself to it. We have seen people fail when they tried to train animals using the language of human beings no matter beautiful and eloquent this language was. They had to take recourse to a code which animals can understand. Using this code, they were able to make the animals understand their commands. Similarly, people are incapable of understanding God’s speech in its original and perfect form. They could only understand it when it was manifested in the form of a language that they can understand. The language was honored by having the ability to convey the wisdom that came to it through the words of God.

Being in Awe of the Speaker

Reciting the *Quran* is like listening to God. The reciter of the *Quran* should be in awe of the Speaker. The reciter should appreciate the supremacy of the text which he is reciting. God said, “*None touches it except the purified.*” (56: 79) If it is not allowable for some hands to touch it, then not every tongue will be able to recite it, and not every heart will be able to understand its meanings.

Presence of the Heart

The heart should be fully devoted to what is being recited. No distracting thoughts should be tolerated. Muslims from the early generation used to repeat the verses which they felt were recited without having their hearts present during the recitation.

Reflection

This is the next step after the presence of the heart. A person may be successful in eliminating all distracting thoughts, but he may be merely listening to the recitation without attempting to reflect on the meanings of the verses. The intent of the recitation is to reflect. One of the scholars said, “*I recite the whole Quran once every week, once every month, and once every year. I started*

⁶¹ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

reciting the Quran thirty years ago and did not finish this recitation yet. Each of these recitations involved a different degree of reflection and investigation.”

Understanding

The reader should understand the true meaning of each verse. The Quran includes verses which mention the attributes and actions of God, the stories of the Prophets (PBUT), the stories of those who rejected the prophets and the consequences of their rejection, the commands of God, and the descriptions of Paradise and Hellfire.

Ridding Oneself of the Impediments to Understanding

Most people are deprived of understanding the meanings of the Quran. Satan has covered their hearts and placed impediments in their way to prevent them from delving into the world of the hidden wonders of the Quran. The Messenger of God has been quoted to have said⁶², *“If it were not for Satan which hovers around the hearts of the human beings, they would have seen the kingdom of heaven.”* The meanings of the Quran are part of the kingdom of heaven. That which cannot be conceived using human senses is part of the kingdom of heaven; it can only be conceived by the insight.

There are four impediments that prevent understanding. These are

1. *Being preoccupied by rules of recitation.* This impediment is created by the obsession to follow the rules of recitation rather than understanding the meaning of the verses. It is an impediment which a certain devil has been tasked with placing in the way of the reader to prevent him from understanding the Quran. He distracts those who recite the Quran by inspiring them to keep repeating certain letters under the presumption that this is the way to perfect the rules of the recitation.
2. *Following blindly and solidly a school of thought without evidence or insight.* The devil of imitation will prevent him from gaining an understanding different from the meanings mandated by the school of thought that he follows. If he attempts to think of a different meaning, Satan will inspire him to think, *“How dare you think differently from what your forefathers believed?”*
3. *Persisting in committing a sin or being arrogant.* The more the lusts and desires dominated a person the less possible it became for him to understand the meaning of the Quran. Gaining knowledge is easier for a heart which is less burdened by interests in the affairs of the daily life.
4. *Believing that the interpretation of Quran can only be received by transmission from scholars of the earlier Muslim generation.* Believing that the meaning of the words of the Quran can only be received through the transmission from well known scholars e.g. Ibn Abbas (RA) and Mejahid (RA). Such opinion state that all other interpretations are unacceptable because they are based on personal views.

⁶² Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Ahmad

Personalization of the Message of Quran

One should think of the Quran as a message addressed to him personally. When he comes across a command, he should consider that the command has been issued to him personally. When he comes across a threat, he should consider the threat to be directed to him personally. He should not consider the stories of the prophets to be a mere story telling exercise, but he should look for the lessons to be learnt from these stories. Each one of the stories told in the Quran has a lesson which the Prophet (PBUH) and his nation were meant to benefit from. This is why God said, *“And each story We relate to you from the news of the messengers is that by which We make firm your heart.”* (11:120) One should consider that God sent down this Quran to firm up the heart of the reader. He should consider that God is addressing him personally by His words, *“This Quran has been revealed to me so that I should thereby warn you, and whomsoever it may reach.”* (6: 19)

Emotional Involvement

The heart of the reader should be filled with the emotion appropriate to each verse he reads, e.g. sadness, fear, or hope. Those who are knowledgeable will find that most of the time it is humility that overwhelms their hearts during the recitation of Quran. Many of them would be so overwhelmed with emotions that they fall unconscious when they recite verses that convey threats of punishment. Some of them even died when they heard these verses. The Quran says, *“The believers are only those who, when God is mentioned, their hearts become fearful, and when His verses are recited to them, it increases them in faith; and they put their trust in their Lord.”* (8: 2) The companions of the Prophet (PBUH) busied themselves trying to understand the meaning of the Quran. The number of the companions of the Prophet (PBUH) at the time of his death was about twenty thousand, only six of them memorized the whole Quran (There are conflicting narrations about two of them.) Most of them only memorized one or two suras. Those who memorized surat Al-Baqarah and surat Al-Anaam were considered scholars.

The perfect recitation of the Quran involves the participation of the tongue, the mind, and the heart. The tongue’s task is the correct pronunciation, the mind’s task is the understanding of the meaning of the verses, and the heart’s task is the emotional involvement and following the commands. The tongue recites, the mind interprets, and the heart receives the admonition.

The Promotion

This means that the reader is promoted to a degree that he no longer hears his own recitation, but he hears the words as if God is speaking to him. There are three ranks for the promotion. These are

The Lowest Rank: When the reader feels as if he is reciting the Quran in front of God. He feels that God is looking at him and listening to him. He would be in the state of appealing to God, seeking His bounty and approval.

The second rank: When the reader's heart feels as if the reader is - by the grace of God - standing in front of God and God is speaking to him. He would be in a state of shame, awe, listening and understanding. This is the rank the companions of the right side.

The third rank: When the reader sees God through the recitation and God's attributes through the words. He forgets himself, his recitation, and the bounty he is receiving completely. His whole interest is fully devoted to the Speaker. His thoughts are fully concentrated on the Speaker. He does not think of anything except the Speaker. This is the rank of those who have been drawn closer to God.

Those who do not belong to the ranks of the companions of the right side or those who have been drawn closer to God are the ranks of the heedless.

Jaafer ibn Muhammad Al-Sadeq said, *"God reveals Himself to His servants through His words, but they do not see."* One of the sages said, *"I used to recite the Quran never experiencing its sweetness until I recited it as if I were hearing the Messenger of God (PBUH) reciting it, then I experienced its sweetness. Then my rank was raised and I recited the Quran as if I were hearing Gabriel (PBUH) reciting to the Messenger of God (PBUH). Then my rank was raised further by God. So, now I hear it being recited by the One who spoke it. I found the ultimate pleasure in its recitation."*

Helplessness

What I mean by this is that the reader of the Quran should feel completely helpless and powerless. He should relinquish any feeling of self-consciousness of his piety. He should not think of himself when he reads verses that promise rewards to the righteous, but he should aspire to be one of them. He should be full of fear and apprehension when he reads verses which convey threats to the disobedient and should hope that he would not be one of them.

Understanding and interpreting the Quran

You should know that he who claims that the understanding of the Quran should only be obtained from an interpretation of the Quran based only on the apparent meanings of its words is only speaking for himself. He is correct in applying this rule to himself, but he is wrong when he applies this rule to others who may have better levels of understanding than his. Many narrations state that the Quran can be understood at different levels by people who have different intellectual capacities. Ali (RA) said, *"God has given His servant an understanding of the Quran. What does that understanding mean, if we are only limited to the interpretations given by earlier scholars."* The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁶³, *"This Quran has a back (an apparent meaning), an abdomen (a hidden meaning), a boundary (commands and obligations), and steps (levels of understanding)."* What are the meanings of a back, an abdomen,

⁶³ Narrated by Ibn Massoud and Reported by Ibn Habban

a boundary, and steps? Ali (RA) has been quoted to have said, *“I could overburden seventy camels with (papers that contain) the interpretation of surat Al-Fatiha.”* What does this mean, and we do know that the interpretation of surat Al-Fatiha based on the apparent meanings of its words is quite short? Abu Aldardaa said, *“A man is not a scholar until he has understood the different meanings of the Quran.”*

However, there are statements which warn against interpreting the Quran based on one’s own opinion. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁶⁴, *“Whoever interpreted the Quran using his own opinion should select his seat in Hellfire.”* Abu Bakr (RA) has been quoted to have said, *“What kind of earth that would let me walk on it, and what kind of sky will let me walk under it, if I interpret the Quran on the basis of my personal opinion.”* These statements may imply that the interpretation of the Quran should only be limited to the narrations transmitted from the Prophet (PBUH) and there is no room for independent thought or deduction. Or it may imply something else.

It is absolutely false that these statements imply that the interpretation of the Quran should be only limited to the transmitted narrations for the following reasons:

1. Only the interpretation of some verses of the Quran has been narrated by the companions and has been transmitted to us.
2. The companions of the Prophets (PBUH) and the scholars who composed books interpreting the Quran provided different interpretations for the same verse. These different versions could not have been all given by the Prophet (PBUH). An example is the different explanations of the significance of the incursive letters at the beginning of some suras.
3. The Prophet (PBUH) asked God to bless Ibn Abbas (RA) with a deep understanding of Islam saying⁶⁵, *“Lord, give him deep understanding of the religion and grant him the ability to make interpretation (of the Quran).”* What is the meaning of the Prophet’s (PBUH) request if the interpretation of the Quran was, like the Quran, only to be reported as has been given by the Prophet (PBUH).
4. God has said, *“When news concerning peace or fear comes to them, they go about spreading it. Had they referred it to the Messenger and to those having authority among them, then the ones who can make deductions would have known about it.”* (4:83) This gives the scholars the right to make deductions.

⁶⁴ Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al-Tirmidhi

⁶⁵ Narrated by Ibn Abbas and reported by Al-Hakim

There are two situations where using one's own understanding in the interpretation is not allowed. These are

1. People who interpret verses of the Quran in a subjective way to support pre-conceived opinions that they are inclined to espouse. This includes scholars who use Quranic verses to support innovations of their own making while they know full well that this was not the intent of the verses. Also, he who uses verses to support his argument simply to win a debate knowing that the verses that he is using were not meant to apply to his argument.
2. People who hastily use the apparent meaning of the Arabic words without understanding the intricate details and the context of the text. A person should be well informed of the classical texts of interpretations before attempting to reach to the inner meanings of the text. Many examples can be cited here. "*And their hearts absorbed (the worship of) the calf because of their disbelief.*" (2: 93) The word "love" has been eliminated from the verse. The meaning of the verse is that their hearts absorbed the love of the calf. Another example, "*And ask the city in which we were and the camels (caravan) with which came.*" (12: 82) This verse does not mean they told him to ask the camels, but they meant he should ask the people in the caravan which they travelled with. Many other examples could be cited because the Quran came down in Arabic and it provided figures of speech that were known to the Arabs as a way of impressing them by the eloquence of the Quran. A person who limits himself to the apparent meaning of the Arabic words without familiarizing himself with the classical interpretations will certainly make many mistakes. He would be included in the category of people who make interpretations based on their own understanding.

Book 9: Remembrance of God and Supplications (Duaa)

The Virtue of Remembrance of God

The Quran says, *“Remember me I will remember you.”* (2: 152) It also says, *“Remember God with much remembrance.”* (33:41) and *“And when you have completed the prayer, remember God standing, sitting, or lying on your sides.”* (4:103)

The Messenger of God (PBUH) said⁶⁶, *“God says, I am with My servant as long as he remembers me and his lips moved with my name.”*

He (PBUH) said⁶⁷, *“The only deed that guarantees salvation from the punishment of God is the remembrance of God.”* The companions asked, *“Not even a Jihad in the way of God,”* he (PBUH) said, *“Not even a Jihad in the way of God unless you fight with your sword until it is broken (he said that three times).”*

He (PBUH) said⁶⁸, *“God said, ‘I will give those who busy themselves with My remembrance - to the extent that they forget to ask Me for something they need - more than what I give anyone who asks Me.’”*

If you ask why, it is that a simple task like the remembrance of God, easy for the tongue and does not involve hard work, is better than other acts of worship which are more difficult to perform? Then you should know that explaining this is not possible without the knowing the science that uncovers inner knowledge. What we can state here is that the effective remembrance of God is the continuous remembrance combined with the presence of the heart. Remembrance uttered by the tongue while the heart is heedless is of no use. This has been corroborated by various narrations. Even the intermittent presence of the heart, being distracted by various interests in one’s daily life, renders the remembrance of little use. The presence of the heart at all times or at least most of the time renders the remembrance of God the most excellent act of worship. It will bring excellence to the other acts of worship if done jointly. Actually, the remembrance of God is the ultimate goal of the acts of worship. Remembrance of God has a beginning and an end. It starts with love and ends with love; this love is the objective of the remembrance of God. In the beginning it may be difficult to maintain the presence of the heart fully; it may take extra effort to force the heart and the tongue to shun the distractions and engage in the remembrance of God. However, if the servant was able to continue remembering God, the love of God will grow in his heart until it becomes very difficult for the servant to stop or to forget remembering God. The remembrance becomes motivated by loving God. So the love that grows because of the continuous remembrance will become the motivating force which will maintain the continuous remembrance of God.

⁶⁶ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bayhaqi and Ibn Habban

⁶⁷ Narrated by Muadh and reported by Al-Tabarani

⁶⁸ Narrated by Umar ibn Al-Khattab and reported by Al-Bukhari

The Etiquette of Supplications

There are ten rules to follow to fulfil the proper etiquette for supplications. These are

1. One should make his supplications during the noble times. God says, *“And in the hours before dawn they would seek forgiveness.”* (51: 18)
2. One should take the opportunity of the noble situations. Abu Hurairah (RA) said, *“The doors of heavens are opened when the army moves to perform Jihad in the way of God, at the time of rain, and at the times of the Iqamah of the prescribed prayers. So, take the opportunity of these occasions to make your supplications.”* Also, the time between the Azan and Iqamah is an opportune time for making supplications.
3. One should face towards the Qiblah when making supplication. One should also raise one’s hands high during the supplication.
4. One should lower one’s voice during the supplication.
5. One should not use artificially rhyming supplication format.
6. One should implore God with humility, aspiration, and fear.
7. One should be unequivocal in his requests and be certain that God will respond favorably to them. Abu Sufian ibn Iyynah said, *“Do not let your knowledge of your shortcomings prevent you from asking God to answer your supplication. God answered Iblis’s supplication when he asked God saying, ‘Lord, then relieve me until the Day they are resurrected.’ He (God) said, ‘So, indeed, you are of those relieved.’”* (15: 36-37)
8. One should be persistent in his supplication, repeating it three times. Ibn Massoud (RA) said⁶⁹, *“Whenever the Prophet (PBUH) made an supplication, he would repeat it three times; and whenever he asked God something, he would repeat his request three times.”* One should not be impatient when God’s answer to the supplication is delayed. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁷⁰, *“Your supplication will be answered unless you become impatient saying, ‘I asked and it was not answered.’ If you ask God, ask him many times because God is generous.”* Someone said, *“I have been asking God for twenty years for one thing and He did not answer me. I am still hoping that he will answer my request. I have been asking Him to help me mind my own business.”*
9. One should start the supplication with the name of God or one can start by offering prayer and peace to the Prophet (PBUH). One should always finish his supplication by offering prayer and peace to the Prophet (PBUH).
10. The inner etiquette is to repent and redress any injustice one has committed and to approach God with a pure heart. This is the essence of the supplication which invites God’s answer.

⁶⁹ Narrated by Ibn Massoud and reported by Muslim

⁷⁰ Narrated by Abu Hurairah and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

You may ask, what is the use of making supplications when we know that fate cannot be changed?

You should know that God may choose to change fate by answering the supplication. Supplications are a means for changing fate and procuring mercy. Exactly, as the coat of mail is a means for protection against arrows; and water are the means that make a plant grow. Believing in the inevitability of fate does not mean that we do not carry arms in defense of ourselves. God said, "*Be cautious.*" (4: 71) It does not mean that we do not water the plant saying, "*If God wills it will grow.*" In fact, believing in the inevitability of fate requires that we use all available means. In addition, supplications done with the presence of the heart is the epitome of worship.

Usually, people do not remember God unless they are in need of something, or they suffer an affliction. When an affliction hits, man makes long prayers. Need is the motive for supplication. Supplication brings the heart back in humility to God. This is a form of remembrance of God which is the most honored act of worship. That is why the prophets (PBUT) suffered the greatest afflictions. The second rank after the prophets are those who have been brought nearer to God whose sufferings come next to the sufferings of the prophets. The affliction that a person suffers is commensurate with the rank he achieved. Afflictions motivate people to seek God's help and prevent people from forgetting Him while affluence generates ingratitude in most cases. A person is sure to transgress whenever he feels that he has become self-sufficient

**Book 10: The Adoption of Regular Spiritual Devotions
and Performance of Night Prayers**

The Virtue of Adopting a Regular Program of Devotions

You should know that those who have insight realized that there is no salvation except in the meeting of God and the only way to meet God is for the servant to die while in the state of loving God and knowing Him. Love will not be attained unless the servant continuously remembered his beloved. Knowledge will not be attained except by continuously thinking and reflecting on His attributes and His actions. God said, *“And celebrate the name of your Lord morning and evening; and part of the night, prostrate yourself to Him; and glorify Him a long night through.”* (76: 25-26) and He said, *“Their sides do forsake their beds of sleep, the while they call on their Lord, in fear and hope.”* (32: 16) This shows that remembering God at different times of the day and night is the way that leads to God.

The motions of the sun and the moon determine the passing of the day and the night reminding the servant of the duty to remember God. God said, *“The sun and the moon (move) by precise calculations.”* (55: 5) And He said, *“Have you not considered your Lord – how He extends the shadow, and if He willed, He would have made it stationary? Then We made the sun for it an indication.”* (25: 45) *“And the moon – We have determined for it phases, until it returns (appearing) like the old date stalk.”* (36: 39) *“And it is He who placed for you the stars that you may be guided by them through the darkness of the land and the sea.”* (6: 97) These creations were meant to serve as time-measurement devices to help us organize the performance of the acts of obedience and to fulfill the undertakings which lead to the reward in the Hereafter. This is corroborated by the verse, *“And it is He who made the night and the day in succession for whoever desires to remember or desires gratitude.”* (25: 62) The night and day come one after the other, so that what could not be done during the day will be done during the night. The verse states that the purpose of this cycle is only to perform acts of remembrance of God and to express our gratitude to Him.

The Regular Spiritual Devotions

The number of the regular daily spiritual devotions is twelve, seven are done during the day and five are done during the night. These are

Spiritual devotions to be performed during the day

1. Devotions to be performed between Dawn and Sunrise
 - a. The traditional supplication for waking up.
 - b. The traditional supplication for getting dressed and the intention to use the dress as a ritual body cover.
 - c. Using the washroom according to the traditional Islamic etiquette.
 - d. Performing ablution according to the tradition.
 - e. Brushing the teeth (using Siwak)
 - f. Praying the voluntary (Sunnah) prayer preceding the prescribed Dawn prayer.

- g. Leaving the house saying the proper supplication, walking serenely to the Mosque, and entering the Mosque saying the proper supplication.
 - h. Trying to reach the first row if possible; then performing the Mosque greeting prayer.
 - i. Continuing to remember God until the prayer has been called for.
 - j. Performing Dawn prayer.
 - k. Glorifying God (Tasbeeh) and asking for God's forgiveness after the prayer.
 - l. Continuing to make supplications and remembering God until sunrise.
2. Devotions to be performed between Sunrise and Mid-morning (Duha)
 - a. Performing the mid-morning prayer.
 - b. Doing general good deeds.
 - c. Visiting a sick person.
 - d. Following a funeral procession.
 - e. Helping someone in performing a good deed.
 - f. Attending a halaqah, otherwise spending the time in the remembrance of God, supplication, and reflecting on the Quran.
 3. Devotions to be performed between Mid-morning and the time when the sun starts its decline (Zawal)
 - a. Spending the time in the practice of one's vocation and earning one's living. However, continuing to always remember God.
 - b. Having a nap. This is a prophetic tradition which helps with the devotion by night.
 - c. Continuing to remember God, saying supplication, and reflecting on the Quran
 4. Devotions to be performed between the time when the sun starts its decline and finishing Noon (Zuhr) prayer
 - a. Heading to the Mosque, performing ablution according to the tradition, performing Mosque greeting prayer, engaging in the remembrance of God until the prayer time.
 - b. Performing the voluntary prayer before the prescribed noon prayer.
 - c. Continuing to remember God between the Azan and Iqamah.
 - d. Performing prescribed noon prayer and continuing to glorify God (Tasbeeh) and asking for forgiveness.
 5. Devotions to be performed between the time of finishing Noon prayer (Zuhr) till the Afternoon prayer time (Asr)
 - a. It is recommended to stay at the Mosque and do good deeds.
 - b. It is not recommended that the person who had a nap before noon prayer to have a nap after it.
 6. Devotions to be performed between the time of the Afternoon (Asr) prayer until the mid-afternoon (mid afternoon is marked by the time when the light of the sun becomes yellowish)
 - a. Continue to remember God until the prayer is called for.
 - b. Perform Mosque greeting prayer.

- c. Perform the voluntary (Sunnah) prayer and continue to remember God.
 - d. Perform prescribed Afternoon prayer.
 - e. Continue to remember God.
7. Devotions to be performed between the mid-afternoon (mid afternoon is marked by the time when the light of the sun becomes yellowish) and Sunset.
- a. It is recommended to continue Tasbeeh and seeking forgiveness during this time.

Spiritual devotions to be performed during the night

1. Devotions to be performed between sunset and evening (Isha) prayer time (indicated by the disappearance of the red twilight)
 - a. Going to the Mosque and performing the Mosque greeting prayer, the voluntary (Sunnah) prayer, and the sunset prescribed prayer.
 - b. Performing voluntary (Sunnah) prayer.
 - c. Spending the time between sunset and the evening prayers remembering God, praying, and devotions.
2. Devotions to be performed between time for evening (Isha) prayer and bedtime.
 - a. Perform four rakaa Sunnah before the prescribed evening prayer and six rakaa after it.
 - b. Perform 13 rakaa, the last one is the one rakaa (witr) sunnah.
 - c. Either perform the witr before going to bed or if one is used to performing night prayers, witr can be delayed and done at the end of the night prayer.
3. Devotions to be performed before bedtime
 - a. Perform ritual cleansing and Siwak.
 - b. Make the intention for getting up to perform night prayers. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁷¹, *“Whoever had the intention to get up during the night to perform night prayers but did not because he was overcome with sleep, God will reward him for the prayer he intended to do but did not do and will consider his sleep a charity bestowed on him from God.”*
 - c. He should have his will prepared and placed under his pillow for fear that he may die during the night. Those who die without a prepared will shall not be permitted to speak at the purgatory.
 - d. One should offer repentance for all the sins he committed before going to bed and cleanse his heart of any ill feeling towards his fellow Muslims; he should never entertain the thought to wrong someone and should never have the intention to commit a sin when he wakes up.
 - e. One should not prepare for himself a comfortable soft bed, or at least one should do it in a moderate way.
 - f. One should go to bed when he becomes sleepy and should not force himself to sleep if he does not feel like it, unless he intends to get up during the night. The

⁷¹ Narrated by Abi El-Dardaa and reported by Al-Nisaie and Ibn Majah

Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁷², “*One should continue his acts of worship by night if he is able to. He should go to bed when he feels sleepy.*” He (PBUH) also has been quoted to have said⁷³, “*Only do what you are able to do, God never gets bored until you get bored.*”

- g. One should lie down facing the Qiblah.
 - h. One should say the traditional bedtime supplication.
 - i. At the time of waking up, one should remember that sleep is a kind of death and waking up is a kind of resurrection.
 - j. At the time of waking up, one should say the traditional waking up supplication. One should endeavor that the last words he says before sleeping and the first words he says after waking up are words of remembering God. This is a sign of love. This is also a tool to train the heart to love God.
4. Devotions to be performed between midnight until 5/6 of the night has passed
- a. Performs Ablution.
 - b. Stands up for prayer facing the Qiblah and then says the traditional supplication.
 - c. One should perform the night prayer two rakaa at a time. Then he should follow by Tasbeeh and seeking forgiveness.
 - d. One should then pray witr.
5. Devotions to be performed in the final 1/6 of the night
- a. This is a time quite close to dawn time. It is the time during which the night angels’ shift ends, and the day angels’ shift starts. This time should be spent in prayers, Tasbeeh, supplications, remembrance of God, and reciting Quran.

Types of Spiritual Devotions

The type of spiritual devotion to be followed depends on the person performing them. There are six kinds of devotees

The Worshipper

The above-mentioned plan is suitable for this kind of person. If you ask, “Which tasks should take priority?” Then you should know that reciting Quran during performing prayers standing up while reflecting on the meaning of Quran sums up all kinds of devotions. Otherwise, one should consider which form of devotion has the most effect on his heart. This would be the type of devotion that he should concentrate on. If he feels bored with one kind of devotion, he should move on to another.

The Scholar

⁷² Narrated by Anas and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁷³ Narrated by Aisha and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

This person is usually involved in teaching, giving Fatwa, or writing books. His plan for devotions should be different from the above, because he needs time to read. Learning and teaching are great feats, and they are considered superior acts of worship. However, he will not be able to spend all his time reading and teaching. So, he can follow the following plan:

1. The time between Dawn and Sunrise: The remembrance of God and supplications.
2. The time between Sunrise and the Mid-Morning: Teaching.
3. The time between Mid-Morning and Afternoon (Ast): Reading and teaching. During this time, he should take time to visit the washroom, perform the prescribed prayer, and take a short nap if possible.
4. The time between the beginning of the Afternoon and the Mid-afternoon: Listening to recitations of Quran interpretation or other useful material.
5. The time between the Mid-afternoon and Sunset: Remembrance of God, Tasbeeh, and seeking forgiveness.

Thus, his first devotion will be categorized as actions of the tongue, the second devotions as actions of the heart, the third devotion as actions of the eye and the hand, the fourth devotion as actions of the ear (to give rest to the eye and the hand), and the fifth devotion as actions of the tongue. This way, his senses will be busy during the day working with the heart and promoting the presence of the heart the whole day.

During the night, the best plan is Imam Al-Shafie's plan. He used to divide the night into three parts: the first third for reading and writing, the second third for praying, and the final third for sleeping.

The Learner

Learning is better than spending the time making supplications. The learner should follow the scholar's plan.

The Professional

The professional is a person who works to earn his living and support his family. Earning a living to support one's family takes a priority. His devotion is his work. However, he should practice the above-mentioned devotions whenever he can.

The Person in Authority

This would include government leaders and officials in charge of people's affairs and judges. Their devotions are to serve the people sincerely and honestly. Their situation is like Umar's (RA) which he expressed by saying, *"I have no time to sleep. If I sleep during the day, I would be delinquent in discharging my obligation to the people; and if I sleep by night, I would be delinquent in discharging my obligation to myself."*

The Devotee Believer

This is a person who has one interest in life. He loves God only, fears God only, and he does not expect provision except from God. He sees God in everything he looks at. Those who reach this rank do need to vary their devotions. In addition to performing the prescribed prayer, they will focus on the presence of the heart with God at all times. Any thought they entertain, any sound they hear, and anything they see will carry a lesson which will bring them one step closer to their ultimate goal. These are the people who sought refuge with God, *“So flee to God.”* (51:50) This is the rank of the saints. It can only be reached after a long and hard practice of the acts of devotion. No devotee should think that he reached this rank and neglect the required devotions. The criterion that characterizes the members of this group is that their hearts are immune to the whisper of Satan, their minds are protected from the thoughts of disobedience, they are not annoyed by severe afflictions, and they are not perturbed by major happenings.

The important thing for any of these groups is the perseverance in performing these devotions regularly and continuously. That is how the inner attributes of people can change. Only through regular and continuous practice would these devotions be effective in changing people. The Prophet (PBUH) said⁷⁴, *“God loves most the recurrent deeds, even if they were small.”*

Virtue of Night Prayers

The Messenger of God (PBUH) was once told about a man who sleeps all night, he (PBUH) said⁷⁵, *“Satan urinated in this man’s ear.”* It was narrated that Gabriel (PBUH) said to the Prophet (PBUH), *“Ibn Umar is a good man, if only he prays by night.”* The Prophet (PBUH) told Ibn Umar (RA) about this conversation. Ibn Umar (RA) never stopped praying by night after that. The Prophet (PBUH) has been quoted to have said⁷⁶, *“God will call a man who got up in the middle of the night, woke up his wife, and prayed with her two rakaa, among those who remember God often.”* It was narrated that Umar (RA) would lose consciousness while he was performing his devotions by night. He would be sick for days after it. Ibn Massoud (RA) used to get up during the night to pray, his voice would sound like a beehive. Sufian Al-Thawry had a full stomach one day. He said, *“when you over feed a donkey, you expect more work from him.”* This night he prayed all night till dawn. Al-Hassan said, *“People are deprived the blessing of praying by night as a result of their sins.”*

Ways to Make the Night Prayers Easy

You should know that night prayer is very difficult for people except those who have been guided to take the means which make it easy for them. Some means are apparent and some are hidden.

⁷⁴ Narrated by Aysha and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁷⁵ Narrated by Ibn Massoud and reported by Al-Bukhari and Muslim

⁷⁶ Narrated by Abi Hurairah and reported by Abu Dawood and Al-Nassaie

The Apparent Means

There are four apparent means that can be used to facilitate getting up by night to perform night prayers. These are

1. One should not overeat because too much food and too much water induce sleep and make staying up to perform night prayer difficult.
2. One should not over work himself during the day.
3. One should have a short nap during the day. This is a Sunnah which enables one to perform night prayer.
4. Avoid the acts of disobedience. Acts of disobedience hardens the heart and puts a barrier between the person and the means of mercy.

A man said to Al-Hassan (RA), *“Aba Said, I go to bed healthy and I like to get up during the night to perform night prayer however, I always miss it.”* Abu Al-Hassan (RA) said, *“Your sins prevented you to get up for prayer.”* Al-Thawri said, *“I was deprived the blessing of performing the night prayer for five months because of a sin I committed.”* He was asked, *“What kind of sin?”* He said, *“I saw a man weeping and I said to myself he is only acting.”* A man went to see Ibn Wabarah, he found him weeping. The man asked, *“Did you receive bad news about a family member?”* Ibn Wabarah said, *“No, it is more painful than this,”* The man asked, *“Have you been afflicted by a painful sickness?”* He said, *“Even more than this.”* The man said, *“Tell me then why you are weeping.”* He said, *“My door is closed, my curtain is down, and I did not recite my regular devotion yesterday. This is all because of a sin that I committed.”* This is because goodness leads to goodness and evil leads to evil. A small amount of either one leads to more of the same. Abu Suleiman Al-Darni said, *“People miss congregational prayer when they sin.”* Prayer prohibits committing of sin; similarly, sin prohibits performing of prayer.

The Inner Means

There are four inner means that can be used to facilitate getting up by night to perform night prayers. These are

1. Liberating the heart of any ill feeling, innovation, and interest in the worldly life.
2. Having a fearful heart knowing that life is short. When one thinks of the Hereafter and the torment of Hellfire, one loses interest in sleep because of fear. When one thinks of Paradise, one loses interest in sleep because of hope.
3. Recognizing the excellence of night prayer by listening to verses, narrations, and stories related to it.
4. The most excellent motivation for performing night prayer is the love of God. One should firmly believe that night prayer is a private communication with God. God looks at him and knows his thoughts. The one who loves God, loves to be alone with God and enjoys the private communication with God. Night prayer will be then a pleasure. You should not discount the fact that for such a person night prayer will be enjoyable because this has

been proven by intellectual rationalization as well as by narrations from previous generations.

Through intellectual rationalization one can reach the conclusion that having private communications with a beautiful person whom you love or with a generous king who bestowed his bounty on you is a source of extreme enjoyment. If you say that seeing a beautiful person is a source of enjoyment, but we do not see God. I say, you would enjoy a private communication with the one you love even if the meeting was held in the dark or from behind a curtain. If you say that part of the enjoyment is that he hears the speech of his loved one, and we do not hear God's speech. I say, even so, it is enough pleasure to express his feelings to God. The person who has certitude hears from God the answers to all the thoughts in his mind. Similarly, a person would enjoy having a private audience with a generous king even if the meeting was held in the dark or from behind a curtain knowing that the king will bestow his bounty on him. The hope in God's bounty is more certain than the hope in the king's bounty.

There are many narrations from previous generations which support the above argument, of these we mention one. Ibn Al-Munkader said, "*There are only three true pleasures in this life, performing night prayers, meeting with the brothers, performing congregational prayers.*"

Different Ranks for Performing Night Prayer

You should know that there are seven ranks for performing night prayers depending on how long one spends performing these prayers.

Spending the whole night praying

This is the endeavor of the strong people who have been brought nearer to God. They have devoted their lives to the worship of God and to the enjoyment of having private communication with him.

Spending half the night praying

Many Muslims from the earlier generations used to do this. It is best to sleep the first one third and the last one sixth of the night and pray in between.

Spending one third of the night praying

In this case a person would sleep the first half and the last one sixth of the night.

Spending either 1/6 or 1/5 of the night praying

The best time would be after midnight.

Praying as much as one can

People who follow this plan usually pray during the early hours of the night, then they sleep for a while, get up and pray again as much as they can, then go back to sleep. This is the plan that was followed by Ibn Umar (RA) and other companions.

Praying two or four rakaa

The least one can do is to pray two or four rakaa or to sit facing the Qibla to engage in the remembrance of God for a short time.

Those who are unable to pray by night should not neglect to perform their devotion between the Sunset and Evening prayers. They should get up before Dawn so they should not be caught sleeping at Dawn. This is the seventh rank.

The Blessed Nights and Days

The Blessed Nights

1. The last five odd nights in Ramadan. These will include the Night of Power.
2. The night of the 17th of Ramadan.
3. The first night of Muharram.
4. The 10th night of Muharram (Ashoraa).
5. The 27th night of Rajab.
6. The night of Arafat.
7. The night of each of the two feasts.

The Blessed Days

1. The Day of Arafat.
2. The Day of Ashoraa.
3. The 27th of Rajab.
4. Fridays.
5. The days of each of the two feasts.
6. The 10th to the 13th of Zul-Hijja
7. Mondays and Thursdays.