45207 - Can we strive in worship as the early generations did?

the question

The righteous people of earlier generations are famous for their love of worship and striving hard in performing it, such as qiyaam al-layl (spending the night in prayer and worship), and reading and memorizing Qur'aan. Can we in this day and age do even a little of that, with all the fitnah (temptation and tribulation) that surrounds us on all sides?.

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

Any one of us can strive in worship and compete with those men in doing the acts of worship enjoined in sharee'ah and encouraged by the teachings of Islam. The Muslim should have strong will and ambition that could even turn mountains to dust, as it was said, The ambition and will power of a man can move mountains.

The Sahaabah (may Allaah be pleased with them) are the best example to this ummah of obedience and worship, but that did not prevent those who came after them from being motivated to compete with them in the field of worship, so that they will not be the only ones who are close to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him). Listen to one of them and you will be amazed at his great ambition and will power. Abu Muslim al-Khawlaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: Did the companions of Muhammad think that they would be the only ones who will be close to him? No, by Allaah, we will crowd around him with them so that they will know that there were men (of ambition and will power) who succeeded them!

He used to say this whenever he spent the night in prayer and worship (qiyaam al-layl). If his feet grew tired he would strike them with his hand and say that. With such determination the Muslim can perform acts of worship and obedience. This is the kind of praiseworthy competition that is encouraged in the verse where Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning):

“and for this let (all) those strive who want to strive”

[al-Mutaffifeen 83:26]

If it were not possible for the later generations (those who came after the Sahaabah, until today) to strive to do great acts of obedience and worship, we would not see Allaah urging all His slaves to do that, and promising them a great reward if they do it, and the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) would not have given this important advice when he said: “Make the most of five things before five (other things happen): your life before you die, your good health before you become sick; your free time before you become busy; your youth before you grow old; and your wealth before you become poor.” Classed as saheeh by al-Albaani (may Allaah have mercy on him) in Saheeh wa Da’eef al-Jaami’ al-Sagheer. This is a call to us to make the most of our lives by worshipping Allaah before death catches us unawares; to make the most of our good health before we become incapable and sick, for a healthy person can do things that a sick person cannot; to make the most of our free time before we get busy with spouses, children and work; to make the most of our youth with its energy and ambition and will power before we grow old and weak; and to make the most of our wealth by giving in charity and spending before that is taken away and we are no longer able to do it.

There are many shining examples among contemporary Muslims whose lives are filled with obedience and worship. No age of Muslim history has been devoid of such examples – praise be to Allaah – who have great ambition that motivates them to say and do all that Allaah loves and that pleases Him. Among this ummah nowadays there are those who have spent their lives in jihad and sacrificed themselves for the sake of Allaah, thus earning Paradise. There are those who have striven in pursuit of knowledge from the moment they developed discernment until they died. There are those who regularly prayed qiyaam al-layl and never stopped, whether they were travelling or were at home. There are those who have spent all their wealth for the sake of Allaah even though zakaah was never required of them. There are those who have devoted themselves to the Muslims, interceding for some and meeting the needs of others, giving answer to people’s questions, issuing fatwas, teaching the ignorant and urging the people to do good.

You will never lack any brilliant example in the lives of our scholars, imams and mujaahideen. You will see in their lives that which will encourage you to do acts of worship and will make you realize that there is still room for us to compete with those who went before us. If you look at the lives of just three imams – ‘Abd al-‘Azeez ibn Baaz, al-Albaani and Ibn ‘Uthaymeen – you will see how they learned, taught, strove hard, gave and spent, interceded for others and called people to Islam. And the Muslims are still producing great examples in their jihad against the kuffaar throughout the world.

There are many good examples of people who memorize the Qur’aan. Many people memorized the entire Qur’aan before reaching the age of eight, and there are some who have memorized the entire Book in two months, or even in one month.

The Muslim who wants to do acts of worship and obedience and compete with those who came before him and with his contemporaries of those who have ambition and will power has to beware of a few things:

1 – Beware of being negligent about the Hereafter and its great rewards. Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said in Badaa’i’ al-Fawaa’id (p. 98): Hearts are ruined because of complacency and negligence, but they are made sound with fear and remembrance of Allaah.

2 – Stop competing in worldly matters with the people of this world; leave it for them and concern yourself with higher matters. Beware of making this world the main focus of your concern. You should have money and property in your hand, not in your heart.

3 – Stop procrastinating. You should hasten to do good deeds in response to Allaah’s command (interpretation of the meaning):

“And march forth in the way (which leads to) forgiveness from your Lord, and for Paradise as wide as the heavens and the earth, prepared for Al-Muttaqoon (the pious)”

[Aal ‘Imraan 3:133]

“Race with one another in hastening towards forgiveness from your Lord (Allaah), and Paradise the

width whereof is as the width of the heaven and the earth”

[al-Hadeed 57:21]

And Allaah is the Source of strength.