



239712 - The virtue of reflection and contemplation, and how to do that

the question

Could you tell me of practical ways to reflect, of which the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "A short time of reflection (tadabbur) is better than a year of worship"?

Detailed answer

Praise be to Allah.

It was narrated by Abush-Shaykh in *Al-`Azamah* (43), and by Ibn al-Jawzi in *Al-Mawdu`at* (3/144):

that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Messenger of Allah (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Contemplating for a short time is better than worshipping for sixty years."

This is a fabricated hadith; Shaykh al-Albani (may Allah have mercy on him) quoted it in *Silsilat al-Ahadith ad-Da`ifah* (173), and said: It is fabricated (mawdu`).

See: *Al-Fawa'id al-Majmu`ah* by ash-Shawkani (p. 242), annotated by Shaykh `Abd ar-Rahman al-Yamani (may Allah have mercy on him).

But al-Bayhaqi narrated in *Ash-Shu`ab* (117), with a sound isnad from Abud-Darda' a mawquf report [of which the isnad ended with him] that he said: Contemplating for a short time is better than spending a night in voluntary prayer (qiyam).

It was narrated by Ibn al-Mubarak in *Az-Zuhd* (949) via another isnad. Ibn Sa`id said: Its isnad is ghareeb [it has only one isnad] but it is authentic (sahih).

Abu Na`im (6/271) narrated it from al-Hasan al-Basri, and its isnad is sound (sahih).

Abush-Shaykh narrated it in *Al-`Azamah* (42) from Ibn `Abbas with a weak (da`if) isnad.



He also narrated (48) from `Amr ibn Qays al-Mula'i that he said: I heard that contemplating for a short time is better than striving in worship for a lifetime.

What is meant is that reflecting and contemplating help a person to realize his servitude to Allah, may He be Exalted, in many ways and brings many benefits which strengthen his faith, and which may be of greater impact than some physical acts of worship. That is because contemplation is an action of the heart, and actions of the heart are the basis of physical acts of worship, and motivate a person to do them.

Contemplation should be on everything that prompts a person when reflecting on it to increase his faith and acts of worship. Hence he may reflect on the verses of Allah in the Quran and the rulings of sharia; thus he will increase in knowledge of the greatness of the Creator, His wisdom, His beautiful names and His sublime attributes.

Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an? If it had been from [any] other than Allah, they would have found within it much contradiction} [An-Nisa' 4:82]

{Then have they not reflected over the Qur'an, or has there come to them that which had not come to their forefathers}[Al-Mu'minun 23:68]

{[This is] a blessed Book which We have revealed to you, [O Muhammad], that they might reflect upon its verses and that those of understanding would be reminded} [Sad 38:29].

What is meant by reflecting on the ayat (verses) of Allah is contemplating their meanings, and thinking hard about what one reads in the Quran and the fates of the believers and disbelievers. For reflecting on the Book of Allah is the key to all types of knowledge; through reflecting on it, a person will learn about everything that is good and will acquire all types of knowledge, thus the faith in his heart will increase and will become deeply rooted, for the Book will give him knowledge of the Lord who is worthy of all worship, what perfect attributes He has, and what shortcomings He should be declared to be far above. It will show him the path that leads to Allah, describe to him



the people who follow that path and the reward they will attain when they meet Him; and it will tell him of the enemy who is his true enemy, warn him of the path that could lead to punishment, describe to him the people who follow that path, and what they will go through when the reason for punishment is there.

The more a person reflects on the Quran, the more he will increase in knowledge, strive harder and develop insight. Hence Allah has enjoined that and urged people to reflect on it, and has told us that contemplation of the Quran is the purpose for which it was revealed.

One of the benefits of reflecting on the book of Allah is that it will bring the individual to the level of certainty and knowledge that it is the word of Allah, because he will see parts of it confirming other parts, and will realize that its parts are in complete harmony with one another.

End quote from *Tafsir as-Sa`di* (p. 189).

Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Reading a little with reflection is better than reading a great deal without reflection; it is narrated clearly from the Sahabah that this was their practice, and there is a report from Ahmad which indicates that. It was narrated from him by Muthanna ibn Jami` [that he said]: There is a man who eats until he is full and prays and fasts a great deal, and there is another man who eats little and his supererogatory deeds are little, but he contemplates a great deal; which of them is better? Then he quoted what was narrated about the virtue of contemplation: Contemplating for a short time is better than spending a night in voluntary prayer (qiyam).

He may also reflect on the creation of the heavens and the earth, and what Allah has created in them of signs, and what Allah sends down from the sky of rain with which He revives the earth after it was lifeless.

He may also reflect on his own self and the way in which he is created, and his situation and that of other creatures, and how none of them can be beyond the control of Allah, may He be Exalted, and His running of their affairs.



Allah, may He be Exalted, says:

{ Indeed, in the creation of the heavens and earth, and the alternation of the night and the day, and the [great] ships which sail through the sea with that which benefits people, and what Allah has sent down from the heavens of rain, giving life thereby to the earth after its lifelessness and dispersing therein every [kind of] moving creature, and [His] directing of the winds and the clouds controlled between the heaven and the earth are signs for a people who use reason} [Al-Baqarah 2:164].

As-Sa`di (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Here, Allah tells us that in these created beings there are great signs, that is, evidence of the oneness and divinity of the Creator, and of His great power, mercy and all other attributes. But they are signs {a people who use reason} that is, for those who use their minds for the purpose for which they were created. So according to the level of rational thinking with which Allah has blessed His slave, that person will be able to benefit from these signs, and recognize them by way of his reasoning, thinking and pondering.

End quote from *Tafsir as-Sa`di* (p. 78).

In conclusion, praiseworthy reflection is when the heart feels focused and humbled before the Lord of the Worlds, so he reflects on the ayat (verses) of the Quran and the ayat (signs) in the universe, and act in accordance with his reflection.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Al-Fudayl said: Contemplation is a mirror that shows you your good deeds and bad deeds. Sufyan often used to quote this line of verse:

If a man has the habit of contemplation, he will find a lesson in everything.

Al-Hasan said regarding the verse {I will turn away from My signs those who are arrogant upon the earth without right} [Al-A`raf 7:146]: [What is meant is:] I will prevent them from reflecting upon



it. And al-Hasan said: Constant contemplation will show a person the path that leads to Paradise. Wahb said: No one reflects a great deal but he will acquire knowledge, and no one acquires knowledge but he will strive in worship.

`Umar ibn `Abd al-`Aziz said: Reflecting on the blessings of Allah is one of the best acts of worship. Bishr said: If people were to reflect on the might and greatness of Allah, they would not disobey Him. Ibn `Abbas said: Two rak`ahs of moderate length with reflection are better than standing in voluntary prayer all night without focus.

Ibn `Abbas also said: Thinking of doing good deeds will prompt one to do them.

That is because thinking is an action of the heart and worship is a physical action, and the heart is nobler than the physical faculties, therefore actions of the heart are nobler than physical actions. Moreover, reflection strengthens the faith of the one who reflects in a way that mere physical actions do not, for reflection leads to seeing the true nature of things and makes that clear to him, and that will lead to him differentiating between what is good and what is bad. Thus he will come to know what is less important and what is more important, what is most abhorrent and what is less abhorrent, the causes that lead to what is abhorrent and how to resist these causes. He will become able to distinguish between what he should strive to attain and what he should strive to ward off.

Similarly, if he contemplates the consequences of things, and goes beyond merely thinking of them, he will realize the different levels of importance and different categories of things. So if he starts to think of that which could lead to committing sin and indulging in desires, then his reflection goes beyond the idea of instant pleasure and joy to the bad consequences and what could result from that of pain and sorrow that will be far greater than any pleasure or joy – whoever thinks of that will most likely not commit that sin.

Similarly, when he thinks that he should slow down, rest, take it easy and relax, and take a break from striving hard in doing acts of worship that have been exhausting him, and his thoughts move on to thinking of the pleasures, good times and joy he will experience as a result of slowing down,



he will confront those thoughts with resolve, energy, strength and determination.

Similarly, when he thinks of the ultimate decline of what enslaves him – such as wealth, and pursuit of status and images – and reflects on how they will ultimately end, he will feel ashamed of letting his mind and soul be enslaved by such things.

Similarly, if he thinks about how the fine food that animal-like people compete to obtain ends up when it comes out of the body, he would feel himself to be above wasting his time on focusing on that, as it was narrated in *Al-Musnad* from the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) that he said: “Allah has made the nature of the food of the son of Adam like this world: even if he adds spices and salt to it, he knows how it will end up” – or words to that effect.

If he reflects on the joys and pleasures of this world and what they are accompanied by of troubles, and how this transient world will soon come to an end, then he reflects on the joys and pleasures of the hereafter, and how it will never end, and how its joys and pleasures are superior to those of this world, and he becomes certain about the knowledge he attained through this reflection, he will acquire further knowledge, which is that it is more appropriate for every rational man to give precedence to the hereafter over this transient world that is filled with problems and pains and things that spoil any joy.

End quote from *Miftah Dar as-Sa`adah* (1/180).

And Allah knows best.