

Mending the Rift: Guidelines to help you observe Fajr Prayer

{And then there followed after them (the prophets) an evil generation who delayed the prayer and followed their lusts. Soon will they face destruction, except he who repents, affirms his faith and does deeds of righteousness}

[Soorah Maryam: 59-60]

Introduction

Sufficient it is for me to praise Allah and supplicate Him for peace on those servants of His whom he has chosen.

To proceed: I have read this letter entitled "Mending the Rift" and found it to be valuable in the choice of its subject matter. Thanks to Allah, the author succeeded in realising the growing tendency of people to miss the Dawn Prayer in congregation in the mosque. He noticed with dismay that mosques are getting virtually empty of people at that time, except for a few elderly people and some adults who, with Allah's assistance, found their way back into the mosque. Indeed, even a sizeable majority of these elderly people have stopped coming to the mosque to uphold this prayer in congregation and have grown lazy about the other prayers as well.

Our Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) is our exemplar who provided the best example in spending long hours of the night in prayer and waking in time for Fajr Prayer. This record was authentically known of him both in his teachings and his living example as he did not like sleeping before Isha [night] Prayer and discouraged his followers from useless talk after it. In this he was followed by his companions and all the muslims up to a time not very far from our own days. They knew the reasons which cause laziness and lessen motivation to observe prayers in time (be such prayers Fard [obligatory] or Nafla [optional]) and warned people against them so much that some of them are reported to have said: "If you are unable to pray at night, then that is a clear sign that your sins have shackled you and deprived you of good deeds". Al-Hasan al-Basri was once asked: "Why is it that we cannot uphold prayers at night?" He answered: "You are shackled in your own sins".

Motivation is presently lacking among muslims. Otherwise they would not have given in to sleep even if they had to stay awake in the first part of the night. When one of them is required by his work arrangements or for his own worldly benefit to wake early at dawn, he would no doubt take the necessary precaution not to miss his appointment. He will forsake his peace of mind and have a restless sleep just for fear he might be punished or have his salary reduced. When it comes to prayer, they have no excuse especially when in our modern times Allah has provided us with alarm clocks which would be set at any time we wish. The problem therefore, is one of laziness. Such people do not know what they are missing. The Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) said with respect to those who do not observe Isha and Fajr prayers: "Had one of them known that he would find a wholesome meal or two good targets, he would have come for Isha prayer."

All in all, for him who sincerely wants to purify his soul from the attributes of the hypocrites, let him steer clear of laziness, be active, put into practice the action inspiring instructions laid out in our religion, accustom himself to take the initiative and realise what he and everybody in his position are missing in terms of the health of the body and great reward from Allah. Only then will his performance improve, Allah willing, and he will make up for what he has missed and follow the lead of the best of generations.

Allah, the Most High and Exalted, is the Provider of success and assistance. Peace and Blessings be upon Prophet Muhammed, his household and followers.

Signed,

Abdullah Ibn Abdur-Rahmaan al-Jibreen.

The Text

Most surely all praise belongs to Allah, we praise Him and we seek His Aid and Forgiveness. We seek refuge in Allaah from the evils of our souls and from the evils of our actions. Whomsoever Allaah guides there is none to misguide and whomsoever He misguides there is none to guide. I send prayers and blessing upon our leader Muhammed with the best of prayers and the most complete submission.

To proceed:

One of the ill-seeming phenomena and most serious precedents boding impending danger and punishment, giving reason to fear and calling for most urgent consideration on our part requiring immediate investigation into its causes and treatment of its symptoms is the fact that a growing number of observers of prayer deliberately shun Fajr prayer in congregation and only perform it at times other than its lawful time.

It may be the case that this is due to their wasting away long hours at night engaged in idle and leisure pursuits. Our ancestors not very long ago used to make a point of going to bed early, to lock their doors after Isha prayer and to make their dinner light so as to be able to wake up for Fajr prayer in an energetic state. That is why they led a happy, peaceful and healthy life experiencing the real taste of life.

The advent of modern civilisation spoiled both our religious observances and our worldly arrangements. As a result, we have fallen into laziness and inertia; our bodies grew fat and flabby; we move about less frequently whilst showing a greater readiness to sleep and a marked inability to perform the most trivial of manual actions.

The present paper attempts therefore to suggest ways which may be of help in inducing us to wake up for Fajr Prayer; for instance:

ONE: To make sure to go to bed early as the Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) used to discourage sleep before performing Isha prayer and especially engaging in conversation after it. Certain cases were excepted, some of which are enumerated by Imam Nawawi in his explanation of Muslim's account. Nawawi, may Allaah have mercy upon him says:

The reason why conversation after it is discouraged is the fear lest it leads to staying awake for long, which might induce drowsiness and difficulty with observing night prayers or Subh [dawn] prayer in their permitted, preferred or best times. The topics covered by this restriction are all fulfilling no good useful purpose. However, as to useful verbal activities, such as the pursuit of knowledge, listening to the wise tales of righteous people, talking to one's guest or bride, or members of one's family for the sake of company, interacting with travellers with a view to protect themselves and their goods, embarking on talks designed to conciliate between people or intercede before them in a good cause or to enjoin good and forbid evil and admonish people by pointing to a beneficial course of action to follow etc... there are no such restrictions.

TWO: To be assiduous in observing the Aadaab [good manners prescribed in Islam] as to what to do before sleep such as making Du'aa [supplication], bringing one's palms together, very mildly spitting into them and reciting the last three soorah's of the Qur'aan into them and then wiping them over one's face, head and body, being physically and religiously pure and performing a two rakah voluntary prayer after wudhoo [ablution]. A muslim has to ask his wife, parents, relatives or neighbours to help waking him up. Once waken up, he should not linger lazily for long in bed, lest he acquires the vices of the hypocrites who come to prayer showing ample signs of laziness and lack of enthusiasm.

THREE: To fill one's heart with faith and good deeds. Once faith is alive in the heart, it induces the person to do good deeds and strive unremittingly hard. Faith is like a tree which only yields good fruit when irrigated from the streamlets of good deeds, thus bringing about an improvement both in personal conduct and at the interactional level with society at large. The lack of such streamlets or water supplies proportionately causes faith to wither and wilt. The heart is highly sensitive to external hardening stimuli, such as excess food or drink or aberrations in watching or listening (letting your eyes and ears loose to what is unlawful for them). You should therefore protect your heart from such external allurements.

FOUR: To keep away from Ma'aasi [acts of disobedience to Allah] by protecting the eyes, the tongue, the hearing and all the senses from indulging in the perception of objects that Allah has made unlawful for us. As an alternative, one should concern himself with matters pertaining to the worship of Allaah, such as devoting one's sight to the reading of Allaah's Book, meditating over the creatures that Allaah has created in this universe, reading books of knowledge etc. One member of the rightly guided early generations was asked about the reason why people found it difficult to uphold voluntary prayers at night. He answered: "Your sins have shackled you". No doubt sins can be a major cause for a persons inability to enjoy the blessings of piety. As Imaam Ibn ul-Qayyim said, sins are wounds and some wounds can be fatal.

FIVE: To bear in mind the great reward for attending Fajr prayer in congregation on time, and the strong rebuke for him to fails to observe it and to satisfy its conditions. Uthmaan ibn 'Affaan related:

I heard Allah's Messenger (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) say: "He who prays Ishaah in Jamaa'ah [congregation] is as if he has prayed for half the night. As to him who (also) prays Fajr in congregation, it is as if he has prayed all night." [narrated by Maalik and the wording is that of Muslim who also reported it]

Similarly, Bukhaaree and Muslim and An-Nasaaee related on the authority of Ibn Mas'ud (radiallaahu-anhu) that he said:

The case of a man who slept all the night up to sunrise (without waking up for Fajr) was related to the

Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) whereupon he said: "That was a man in whose ear Shaytaan has urinated", or he said "in both his ears".

The urinating is literally true, as Imaam Qurtubi says, since Shaytaan urinates and has sexual intercourse and procreates in a manner that Allah alone knows (1). To ascertain for yourself the truth of this assertion, look at the faces of those who come to deal in their daily business without having prayed Fajr in congregation at due time; look at their faces at working hours. You will surely ask Allaah for refuge from a lot as miserable as theirs. But, after all what do you expect from a person in whose heart Shaytaan has urinated!!!

SIX: To realise the bad effects resulting from one's failure to pray Fajr, such as the melancholic and depressive state of mind and the loss of many religious and worldly benefits, and the good effects resulting from managing to perform it. In this respect the Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) said:

"Shaytaan ties three knots on the crown of any one of you in your sleep. He says upon each knot that he ties: "You have a long night before you, therefore sleep". But if you wake up and mention Allah, Most Exalted in remembrance one knot will be untied. If you then make ablution another knot will be undone. If you then proceed to pray the last knot will be disentangled. Thus, you will feel in the morning energetic and in good spirits. Otherwise you will feel in a despicable state, lazy". [narrated by Maalik, Bukhaaree, Muslim and Abu Dawood]

The time following Fajr prayer is full of goodness and blessings. At-Tirmidhee narrated upon the authority of Al Ghamdi that the Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) said: "O Allah bless my Ummah in its early rising!" and whenever he dispatched an expedition or army he sent them early at the beginning of the day. Sakhr was a merchant who always sent his merchandise early in morning thus, becoming wealthy (3). That is why we find the craftsmen and traders are particular about making good use of this time. Those who sleep up to the late morning have denied themselves the blessings of this early hour.

There are many benefits to the health derived from waking up for Fajr prayer. For instance, the highest proportion of ozone gas (O₃) in the atmosphere is registered at dawn. It then gradually fades away until complete disappearance by sunrise. This gas has a very beneficial effect on the nervous system as it vivifies the brain and energises the muscles such that when a person inhales the beautiful breeze of the dawn, known as the SABAA wind, he will experience a pleasure that is unparalleled at any other time of the day or night (4).

SEVEN: To lose no time to categorically clear yourself from the stigma of hypocrisy. Because of the difficulty of waking for this time, praying Fajr in congregation provides evidence that a person has firm faith and is free from hypocrisy. That is why in a hadeeth narrated by Bukhaaree and Muslim, the Prophet (sallallaahu-alaihi-wasallam) said:

"Indeed, the most difficult of prayers to bear, for the hypocrites, are Isha [night] and Fajr prayers. If only they knew what they are missing, they would sooner come, even if crawling on their knees".

The most worthy companion, Abdullaah and Ibn Mas'ood (radiallaahu-anhu) asserts "The only one indeed who misses them [i.e. Isha and Fajr prayers] is a confirmed hypocrite" (5). Ibn Umar (radiallaahu-anhu) said "When we find a man missing from the Isha and Fajr prayers we nurture suspicions about him" (6).

If you want a criterion for evaluating a person's degree of faith and truthfulness monitor his observance of Fajr prayer. If he passes the test, that should be taken as a sign indicating the strength of his Eeman [belief, faith]. Let us then testify to his truthfulness since he managed to achieve the greatest victory over himself and to be superior to the pleasure of sleeping in bed. If he fails the test, this is an index to his weakness in faith, a hardness in his heart, an indulgence in self-gratification and a defeat against his own whims.

How is it then that he who indulges in sleep and misses prayer should conceivably feel comfortable while people are delighting in the mosques in the company of the Qur'aan, listening raptuously to Allaah's message, and basking happily in His gardens. He who prefers the pleasures of the bed to the pleasure of the communion with Allaah is the real loser.

These are a few suggestions to help you wake up for Fajr prayer. May Allah make them useful. Glory be to Allah, Most Exalted over any false attributions and thanks be to Allah, the Lord of all Beings.

Written by an anonymous student of Islamic knowlege with an introduction by Sheik Abdullah Ibn Jibreen

References

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