

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ never left off any of his supererogatory acts of devotion as long as he lived, as Umm Salama ؓ said: 'The Messenger of Allah ﷺ did not die until he performed most of his (supererogatory) prayer whilst seated; the most beloved of devotional acts to him were those that a person was constant in performing, even if they [the actions] were only small.'¹⁷⁷

THE REALITY OF WORSHIP

Worship means to draw closer to Allah ﷻ in full submission and with humility before Him, by means of those words and deeds that He established for His servants, whether they be actions of the heart, the body, or the spiritual state. Worship has a sweetness and a delight; and when a person tastes its sweetness, and samples its delectation, he becomes attached to it, and yearns for it, and so he never allows himself to be separated from it, because it becomes his source of tranquillity and repose.

The greatest of those who tasted the sweetness of worship, and experienced its delights, and bore witness to its treasures and illuminations, was our Master MuḤammad ﷺ, the leader of the devotees, the Master of the righteous, the most pious of the first and the last by the attestation of Allah's word: «[Say:] My Protecting Friend is Allah, He Who revealed the Book; and He ever befriends the righteous.»¹⁷⁸ By this, Allah informed us that He befriends His servants according to their righteousness, and that He ﷻ befriended His Beloved ﷺ in a way that He befriended no other, which He indicated with His word: «My Protecting Friend is Allah,» that is, 'My Protecting Friend, Who takes care of all my affairs in a way unique to me, is Allah.' Divine befriending comes commensurate with righteousness, as the end of the verse indicates, and this shows that he ﷺ reached a unique station of righteousness, that was reached by no other. Because of this, the Prophet ﷺ had the most complete experience of the sweetness of worship, and he derived the most tranquillity and delight from it.

¹⁷⁷ Narrated by Ibn Ḥibbān in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection. (*Al-Tarḡīb wal-Tarḥīb*).

¹⁷⁸ Qur'an 7:196

It was narrated in the *Musnad* and elsewhere that the Prophet ﷺ said: ‘Arise, O Bilāl, and give us tranquillity in prayer!’¹⁷⁹ It is also narrated in the *Musnad* and elsewhere that the Prophet ﷺ said: ‘The coolness of my eye has been placed in prayer.’

The followers of our Master Muḥammad ﷺ were also granted their share of the sweetness of worship, and the delights of devotion, according to their spiritual ranks. It is narrated that the great Shaykh and Gnostic, Ibrahim b. Adham ؒ, said: ‘If the kings knew the sweetness we have found, they would fight us with swords on its account.’ Another great Shaykh and Gnostic, Abū Sulaymān al-Dārānī ؒ, said: ‘The people of nightly devotion derive more delectation from their devotion than the people of idle pleasure gain from their play; were it not for nightly devotion, I would not desire to remain in this world.’ Another of the saints ؒ said: ‘If the denizens of Paradise are granted what we now possess, they will indeed have a fine existence!’ It is for this reason that the denizens of Paradise will take it upon themselves to worship their Lord ﷻ in Paradise, without being commanded to do so; and they will worship Allah ﷻ in Paradise more than they worshipped Him in this world.

Bukhārī and Muslim narrated in their *Ṣaḥīḥ* collections, on the authority of Abū Hurayra ؓ, that Allah ﷻ says to the Angels who roam the streets seeking out the people who remember Him: ‘What do My servants say?’ ‘They glorify You, and magnify You, and praise You, and exalt You,’ the Angels reply. He will say, ‘Have they seen Me?’ ‘No, by Allah, O Lord, they have not seen You.’ He will say, ‘And what if they had seen Me?’ ‘Had they seen You, they would worship You even more, and exalt You even more, and glorify You even more...’

The denizens of Paradise will therefore worship more than they did on earth, because they will behold their Lord ﷻ; and their worship will be voluntary, and free of difficulty. It will be their source of tranquillity and delight.

Muslim narrated in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* collection, on the authority of Jābir ؓ, that the Prophet ﷺ said, about the denizens of Paradise: ‘They will be inspired to speak words of glorification, praise and devotion, just as you all inspired to draw breath.’

¹⁷⁹ Bilāl ؓ used to perform the call to prayer for the Prophet ﷺ. [t]

Acts of worship leave their mark on the soul of the worshipper: they cleanse him from thoughtlessness and triviality, and pretension and egotism, until the worshipper's soul is purified, and he enters into the servitude of the Sovereign of Lordship. When Rabī'a b. Ka'b al-Aslamī requested the Prophet's ﷺ companionship in Paradise, he ﷺ said to him: 'In that case, assist me for your sake by offering much prostration.'

Acts of worship dye the heart and mind of the worshipper, and all of his senses, with Divine light, until even his face is illuminated by it. Allah ﷻ said: «[We take on] Allah's own dye [*sibgha*]; and who is better than Allah at dyeing? We are His worshippers.»¹⁸⁰ In other words, 'Keep to the dye of Allah, for He dyes with strong light, and there is no finer dye; and the means to this is adherence to the worship of your Lord as He established it for you.' The Prophet ﷺ said: 'Prayer is light, and patience is illumination.'

Worship purifies the heart, and cleanses and illuminates it, until the lights of the Real are manifested in it. Allah ﷻ said: «Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth. The similitude of His light is as a niche...»¹⁸¹

That is, the likeness of His light in the heart of His believing servant is like a niche, wherein lies a lamp, ablaze with light. The niche refers to the breast, and the lamp means the believer's heart, resplendent with the light of faith in Allah ﷻ.

One of the Gnostics said:

*When the pool lies limpid,
And unmoved by the breeze,
The sky appears clear therein,
As do the sun and the stars;
Just so the hearts of the people of purity:
In their clarity can be seen Allah Almighty.*

¹⁸⁰ Qur'ān 2:138

¹⁸¹ Qur'ān 24:35

All this is a case of Divine theophany, and the reflection of Divine light in the mirrors of the heart; it is not in any way a case of pantheism or Divine incarnation—Allah ﷻ is far exalted above any such thing.

Acts of worship draw the servant closer to the Lord of Lords.

Allah ﷻ said: ﴿Prostrate yourself, and draw near,﴾¹⁸² and in a Sacred Ḥadīth, the Prophet ﷺ reported that his Lord ﷻ said: ‘My servant keeps drawing closer to Me with supererogatory acts until I love him.’¹⁸³ This is not the place to go into details about the effects and secrets of worship. We have merely mentioned a few notions; whomsoever wills might reflect upon them, and so realise that worship has a great effect on the worshipper, and contains a tremendous secret, and leads to brilliant illumination, and to a higher state, and to nearness to Allah, and His love.

What do you imagine then, O sagacious one, about the effects of the worship offered by the Master of all worshippers and devotees, and the leader of the Prophets and Messengers ﷺ? What do you estimate the strength of the illuminations of his worship might be, and its lights and treasures, and its proximity and closeness to Allah? Indeed, none can know this save Allah ﷻ, He Who raised His Prophet ﷺ above all the other chosen ones.



¹⁸² Qur’ān 96:19

¹⁸³ See our books *al-Ṣalāt fī al-Islām (Prayer in Islam)* and *al-Taḡarrub ilā Allāh Ta’ālā (Drawing Nearer to Allah Almighty)*; the latter includes an examination of all the different narrations of the Ḥadīth, and an explanation of its many meanings.