

The Ruinous Nature of Laziness

By Maulana Muaz Billoo

Among the most damaging of qualities is that of lethargy, or laziness. It allows our animalistic desires to take charge of our lives, it wastes time, and takes us far away from the path towards Allah ﷻ. It comes as no surprise that Allah ﷻ refers to laziness as from the qualities of the hypocrites,

وَإِذَا قَامُوا إِلَى الصَّلَاةِ قَامُوا كُسَالَى يُرَاءُونَ النَّاسَ وَلَا يَذْكُرُونَ اللَّهَ إِلَّا قَلِيلًا

Translation: “And when they stand for salah, they stand lazily, showing off to the people, and they remember Allah very little.”¹

Their laziness in fulfilling the command of Allah leads to their becoming distant from Allah ﷻ. We have to ensure that we are free of this trait. The hypocrites only pray to show off to the people, demonstrating insincerity in their prayers. May Allah protect us from the destructive quality of ostentation. To show off for the people demonstrates an obsessive love for dunya whilst seriously lacking in love for Allah ﷻ.

Hafiz ibn Kathir رحمته الله writes,

“This is the quality of the hypocrites in regards to the most noble, most virtuous, and best of deeds: salah, when they stand for it. They stand lazily because they have no intention nor faith nor fear, unrealizing its value.

‘Abdullah ibn ‘Abbas رضي الله عنه says, ‘It is disliked for a man to stand up for salah lazily. Instead, he should stand for salah with a cheerful face, great zeal and happiness, for indeed, he is going to converse with Allah ﷻ, and Allah ﷻ is before him, forgiving him and answering him when he calls onto Him.’

This is their outward state, just as Allah ﷻ says, ‘They only approach salah while they are lazy’² and thereafter Allah ﷻ mentions their inward state, ‘They show off to the people.’ In other words, they have no sincerity nor are they engaging with Allah ﷻ. Instead, they only show the people out of fear (of what they might say)...It is due to this reason that many of them abstain from such prayers wherein it is difficult for people to see (others) such as the ‘Isha prayer at night, and the Fajr prayer at early dawn.

¹ 4:142

² 9:54

It has been established in the two *Sahih* collections that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, ‘The most burdensome prayer on the hypocrites are the ‘Isha and Fajr prayers. If they know what is in them (i.e. the reward in praying the ‘Isha and Fajr prayers with congregation) they would come to them crawling.’³”

Imam Ishaq ibn Rahawaih and Hafiz Abu Ya’la al-Mawsili narrate the following Hadith via Ibrahim ibn Muslim al-Hajari, who narrates from Abu al-Ahwas, who narrates that ‘Abdullah ibn Mas’ud ؓ said that the Prophet ﷺ said,

“Whoever perfects his salah while the people watch him, yet makes it defective when alone, then that it is a mockery with which he mocks his Lord the Almighty, the Sublime.”⁴

Imam Malik ؓ narrates from al-‘Ala ibn Abdur Rahman, who narrates from Anas ibn Malik ؓ, who narrates that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said,

“That is the prayer of a hypocrite! That is the prayer of a hypocrite! That is the prayer of a hypocrite! He sits, awaiting the sun until it ends up between the two horns of Shaitan, thereafter he stands and pecks at the ground four times, remembering Allah ﷻ very little.”⁵

For context, this Hadith is in reference to the person who delays the ‘Asr salah until the very last moment.

Imam al-Baidawi ؓ writes, “The salah is burdensome upon them, as if they are being coerced into the act (of prayer).”

A question that may arise here is: what kind of lethargy or laziness is the verse referring to? What if someone has a medical excuse? What about the natural lethargy one experiences upon waking up in the morning?

Maulana Ashraf ‘Ali al-Tharvi ؓ writes,

“The laziness censured here is doctrinal laziness, (that is, slothfulness towards observance of the articles of faith due to lack of true conviction). However, laziness which there despite correct beliefs stands excluded from the purview of this censure. Then, should this laziness be there due to some excuse, such as sickness, fatigue, or sleepiness, it is not even blameworthy. But when without an excuse, it is (blameworthy).”⁶

³ *Sahih al-Bukhari* #657; *Sahih Muslim* #252

⁴ *Musnad Ishaq ibn Rahawaih* #3602; *Musnad Abu Ya’la* #5117. The Hadith was declared *Hasan* by Hafiz al-Busiri ؓ and Hafiz ibn Hajar ؓ; see: *al-Matalib al-‘Aliyah* which contains *Ithaf al-Khiyarah al-Maharah* in the marginalia 1:319 and 7:654.

⁵ *Muwatta Malik Riwayah Abu Mus’ab al-Zuhri* #31

⁶ *Ma’ariful Qur’an* 2:613

Therefore, we are excused from laziness that occurs naturally such as due to exhaustion, sleep, etc.

‘Allamah ibn ‘Ashur رحمه الله says,

“It (the laziness mentioned in the aforementioned ayah) is such half heartedness in action that occurs due to discomfort and dislike. Laziness in salah is an open declaration that the person praying holds little value for the salah, and that he feels he has no need for it. Therefore, it is from the attributes of the hypocrites.”

As for the statement of Allah ﷻ, **“They remember Allah very little,”**

Hafiz ibn Kathir رحمه الله says,

“In other words, they have no focus in their salah. They have no idea what they are saying. Instead, they are completely heedless and careless, ignoring the good that is intended for them.”

They remember Allah throughout the day only for a small amount of time or only in the parts of Salah where they have to. But for the rest of the day they couldn’t be bothered to remember Allah.

Furthermore, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ made the following dua,

اللهم إني أعوذ بك من العجز والكسل

Translation: Oh Allah! I seek your protection from inability and laziness.⁷

The Prophet’s ﷺ seeking Allah’s protection from laziness should suffice as a warning for us. To fight laziness is to fight the demands of our animalistic desires. The struggle against the *nafs* is from the greatest deeds a person can engage in.

Allah ﷻ says,

“As for the one who feared to stand before his Lord, and restrained his self from the (evil) desires, then indeed, Jannah is (his) abode.”⁸

⁷ Sahih al-Bukhari #2823

⁸ 79:40-41

Imam al-Qushayri رحمته الله says,

“Know that opposing the *nafs* is the head of all worship. Indeed, the *mashayikh* were asked about (the definition of) Islam, to which they responded, ‘To slaughter the *nafs* with the swords of opposition.’”⁹

Ibn ‘Ata’illah al-Iskandari رحمته الله says,

“The source of every disobedience, indifference, and passion is self-satisfaction. The source of every obedience, vigilance, and virtue is dissatisfaction with one’s self.”

Shaykh ‘Abdullah Gangohi رحمته الله comments,

“When a man is pleased with his condition, then he is in fact pleased with his own ego, whether his state is good or bad. This pleasure with the ego is the root of every evil, negligence and lowly desire. When a man is pleased with his ego, its defects and evils will be concealed from his gaze, and his own evil will also appear pleasing. His heart will feel safe and satisfied with his ego. He will then become forgetful of Allah Most High. In the wake of forgetfulness, stray satanic thoughts and lustful desires will strike one with force. Sin will then be the result.

Being displeased with the state of one’s ego is the root of obedience, alertness and purity. When man is displeased with his ego, he will always be alert. He will understand every trick and desire of this enemy. He will examine intelligently every demand of the ego by the standards of the Sacred Law; and any demand that he finds in conflict with the Law will be shunned.”¹⁰

⁹ *Al-Risalah al-Qushayriyyah* p. 389

¹⁰ *The Book of Wisdoms Kitab al-Hikam* pgs. 152-153