

The Ibadah of Imam Zaynul Abideen (A.S.)

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In His name, the Beneficent, the Merciful

Dear Readers, Salamun 'Alaykum.

Today is 25th of Muharram 1416 AH. Today the Shi'ah Muslims are commemorating the martyrdom of Imam 'Ali Zaynul 'Abideen, 'alayhis-salaam. His titles Zaynul-'Abideen (adornment of worshippers) and Sayyidus-Sajideen (chief of those who prostrate) indicate that he was a great worshipper.

I would like to take this opportunity to talk about the great 'ibaadah (worship) of our fourth Imam and reflect upon possible reasons why some of us do not find the taste and pleasure in worshipping the Almighty. Why don't we enjoy performing salaah (both obligatory and recommended prayers), doing Du'as (supplicating and invoking the Almighty), and the tilawah (reading from the Holy Qur'an) the way the Holy Prophet (s) and Imams (a) used to?

Let me begin by narrating few incidents from the life of Imam as-Sajjad (a).

Incident 1

Shaykh al-Mufid states in Kitaab al-Irshaad that once Imam Abu Ja'far Muhammad al-Baqir visited his father Imam 'Ali bin al-Husayn. He saw that Imam as-Sajjad had reached an unprecedented state of 'ibadah. "His color had paled from keeping awake all night; eyes sore from weeping; forehead and nose bruised due to prolonged sajdahs; and his feet and ankles were swollen from standing in salaah." Such was the state of our fourth Imam during the worship that our fifth Imam says that he could not help breaking into tears. "I wept out of compassion that I felt for him," commented Imam al-Baqir. Some time passed before the Imam realized that his son has come. Upon seeing him, Imam as-Sajjad asked for the parchments which describe the great 'ibadah of Imam 'Ali bin Abi Talib (a). The fourth Imam read something from it and let it go from his hands in exasperation commenting, "Who has the strength to worship like 'Ali b. Abi Talib, 'alayhis-salaam?"

Incident 2

Shaykh al-Toosee writes that once Abu Hamzah al-Thumaalee saw Imam 'Ali ibn al-Husayn saying his prayers and his cloak slipped from his shoulders. The Imam did not arrange it. After the prayers Abu Hamzah asked him about it. The Imam responded: Woe to you, don't you know before whom I stood (Wayhaka, atadaree bayna yaday man kuntu)?

Incident 3

It is said that Imam al-Sajjad did twenty hajj every time travelling on foot Mecca.

Incident 4

The fourth Imam had a large farm of date trees. He offered two raka'at payers besides each date tree.

Incident 5

His daily practice of salaah. His father Imam Muhammad al-Baqir (a) states: "Ali b. al-Husayn, 'alayhimas-salaam, used to pray a thousand rak'at during the day and the night. The wind would sway (his body) forward like an ear of corn." reports al-Mufid in al-Irshaad.

Incident 6

His style of entreating the Almighty is well known to all of us who have had a chance of reading from his famous du'as found in Al-Sahefaat Al-Sajjadiyyah. I invite you all to study, or just have a brief look at, the Du'a Abu Hamzah al-Thumalee found in almost all books which cover the A'maal of Holy Ramadhan.

Reflection Upon Our Ibadaat Compared to That of the Imam (A)

When I say our 'ibadaat I do not mean that each and every one of you offer such salaah. I mean some unfortunate people, this humble and abject servant of the Ahlul-bayt being no exception, who consider various types of worships a burden and sometimes even a waste of time and energy.

1. Our life style, it is claimed, is busier and more demanding than that of our parents and grand parents. We have more to do and lot to worry about compared to our forefathers. Those of us who live in big cities, for instance, spend long hours commuting to work, Islamic centers and carrying out domestic chores. Another example, society and extended family system no longer take care of our children in helping them to follow Islam and have good morals. We have to spend a lot of efforts and time in both educating (ta'leem) and upbringing (tarbiyah) of children.

Result of this: we sometimes believe that we must shorten our 'ibadah to bare minimum. We insist on limiting to what is wajib or faridah (obligatory/ mandatory). Any Imam of Jam'ah or an 'Alim who lengthens prayer and other rituals is considered out of fashion.

Imam al-Sajjad used to say a lot of mustahab (supererogatory) prayers. The Imam also had to look after his family members (15 children), the poor and destitute, also his business (e.g. date farms). It is said that he used to purchase hundreds of slaves whom he used feed, clothe, house and train them and then free them. All this required wealth. He used to work to earn this money.

2. We live in a world which is preoccupied with inventing gadgets and equipments to ease our life styles. This of course is not objectionable (to a limit). But the ease and comfort in carrying out various day to day activities has sometimes inundated our 'ibadaat. We would like to make things easier and comfortable when it comes to worshipping. We would like to offer our salaah in spacious places which have air conditions, fans, good carpets, etc.

Also, the A'maal (rituals) which we perform in congregation only once a year need to be curtailed as much as it is possible. Often there are requests that why don't we say 10 times the salaam and la'nat (curses to the wicked who were responsible for massacre in Kerbala) in the recitation of the Ziyarat of 'Ashoora instead of 100 times. It is reasonable if such requests is on account of the weak state of seniors, the handicapped or the parents who have to take care of hyper children. However, such requests invariably come from young and energetic members of the community!

Why would Imam al-Sajjad go on foot to Mecca. Crossing the deserts of Arabia under that hot scorching sun, and those long distances! Why endure all these difficulties and hardships? He could have chosen, at least, camels instead of horses? Perhaps he wanted to demonstrate that when going to the House of God, one should adopt most humble and humiliating way. Or was it to show that when being grateful (doing shukr) for the unceasing favours from God one has to also give some time and put efforts when worshipping the Sustainer?

Why would the Imam weep so much that the eyes used to become sore? Was it due to the awe and fear of the Almighty? After all the Qur'an declares that the most fearful amongst God's creatures are the learned (35:28). The Imam was indeed learned and must have felt that he was unable to worship his Creator and Provider in a way that befits Him.

The Imam spent long hours offering his worship because he found pleasure in it. Perhaps he had tasted the spiritual pleasure and wanted the more of it? Do we, my dear brothers and sisters, find pleasure in offering our salaah? Is it a fascination when the time of salaah arrives or a burden? Is offering of salaah a great opportunity to communicate to the King of kings or release of an obligation imposed upon us?

Suggested Solutions

How can we also find pleasure in 'Ibadaat? How can we also enjoy saying salaah? What should we do that we can concentrate in our salaah so that we feel that we are indeed worshipping the Creator instead of merely carrying out a ritual?

1. We think and ponder over our creation. One reason of the creation is mentioned in the Qur'an

God did not create us and the jinns but for His worship. (51:56).

Of course 'Ibadah is rich and wide in meaning. It covers basically all those actions done to please the Almighty God. But it surely covers the acts of worship such as salaah, du'a and tilawah.

2. Reflect upon the great worship of the Prophet and the Imams. Read and re-read books which describe the outstanding 'ibadaat of those who were nearer to the mercy of the Almighty. Also take inspirations from the worship offered by other servants of God.

3. In the Qur'anic language God often refers to His beloved servants by words such as

“My worshippers” (2: 186)

“the sincere worshippers of God” (37:40, 74, 128, 160, 169).

In Farsi and Urdu, also, the servant of God is referred to as “Banda-e- Khuda”, literally the one who worships (does bandaghi) of God.

4. Do not give into waswasah (Satanic insinuations, devilish whisperings), wicked thoughts and unnecessary doubts. Thoughts and doubts such as: excessive worship is meant for only those who have nothing else to do, prolonged worshipping of God is a waste of time as well as energy, a learned has a more important thing to do than worshipping, 'ibadah is means to taqwa (piety and God-fearing) and now that some of us have achieved it we do not need to go back, we are not Ma'sumeen (the infallibles) therefore we do not need to imitate them, we are better than others who do not pray at all, prolonged and devoted worship is alien to Islam which is introduced by outsiders, etc.

5. Before beginning our obligatory prayers we need to spend sometime in either listening to the Qur'anic recitations or saying nawafil (supererogatory prayers) so that our minds settle down and we are able to concentrate better in the salaah.

6. The time we a lot for worshipping should be given in its entirety for the purpose. During this time we should not entertain other activities such as answering to telephone calls, responding to pagers, playing with our children, or attending to domestic chores. Both physically and mentally we give ourselves to worshipping the Almighty Creator and Sustainer.

7. Repeatedly appraise ourselves. Why is it that we do not find the pleasure and enjoyment in the worship that others find? Is it because of the company of people we keep who are skeptics? Is it because of the literature we read or the TV programs we watch? Is it on account of our attachment to materialistic things? Or is it because we have not given serious thought to this aspect?

For the pleasure in worship is certainly there. Others get it and partake of it. The Ma'sumeen (a) used to taste of it. When the time of prayers arrived, for instance, the Holy Prophet used ask Bilal (the Muadhhdhin) "please me O Bilal," instead of "go and give Adhan O Bilal."

The above is the summary of the majlis delivered to the Mu'mineen and Mu'minaat of the Vancouver Jamaat on the wafat anniversary of Imam Zaynul 'Abideen (a).

May the Almighty accept the humble efforts.

Contributed by Br. HK Ali

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