

Ways to help oneself pray Qiyam al-Layl

Praise be to Allaah.

There are many things that one can do to help oneself pray qiyaam al-layl, among which are the following:

1 – **Being sincere towards Allaah**, as He has commanded us to be sincere towards Him and none other in our deeds. He tells us (interpretation of the meaning): **“And they were commanded not, but that they should worship Allaah, and worship none but Him Alone...”** [al-Bayyinah 98:5]. The more sincere a person is towards Allaah, the more he will be guided and helped to obey Allaah and draw closer to Him. Ubayy ibn Ka'b (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: **“Give glad tidings to this ummah of splendour, religion, high rank, victory and prevalence on earth. Whoever does the deeds of the Hereafter to gain some worldly benefit, will have no share of the Hereafter.”** (Reported by Ahmad. Saheeh al-Jaami', 2825). Mutarrif ibn 'Abd-Allaah ibn al-Shakheer said: **“The goodness of a deed is related to the goodness of the heart, and the goodness of the heart is related to the goodness of the intention.”** Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: **“The degree to which a person is helped and aided by Allaah depends on the degree of his intention, drive, aim and hopes. Help from Allaah comes to people in proportion to their drive, intention, hopes and fears, and failure comes to them in like manner.”**

Therefore the salaf were very keen to conceal their acts of worship such as qiyaam al-layl. A man asked Tameem ibn Aws al-Daari (may Allaah be pleased with him), **‘How do you pray at night?’** He got very angry and said, **‘By Allaah, one rak'ah that I pray in secret in the small hours of the night is more beloved to me than praying the whole night long and then telling people about it.’** Ayyoob al-Sakhtiyaani used to spend the entire night in prayer, then when dawn approached, he would go back to bed and lie down, and when dawn came, he would raise his voice as if he had just woken up.

2 – **The person who wants to pray qiyaam al-layl should realize that Allaah is calling him to qiyaam.** When the slave realizes that his Master, Who has no need of people's worship, is calling him to do this, he will respond. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): **“O you wrapped in your garments (i.e., Prophet Muhammad)! Stand (to pray) all night, except a little. Half of it, or a little less than that, or a little more; and recite the Qur'aan (aloud) in a slow, (pleasant tone and) style.”** [al-Muzzammil 73:1-4].

Sa'd ibn Hishaam ibn 'Aamir said to 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her): **“Tell me about how the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) prayed qiyaam.”** She said: **“Have you not read “Yaa ayyuha'l-muzzammil (O you wrapped in your garments!)?”** He said, **“Of course.”** She said: **“Allaah, may He be exalted and glorified, made qiyaam obligatory at the beginning of this soorah, so the Prophet (peace and blessings of**

Allaah be upon him) and his companions prayed qiyaam for a year, and Allaah withheld the end of this soorah for twelve months, until He revealed something at the end of this soorah to make things easier, so qiyaam al-layl became voluntary after it had been obligatory.” (Reported by Muslim).

3 – **Knowing the virtues of qiyaam al-layl.** Whoever knows the virtues of this act of worship will be keen to talk to Allaah, may He be exalted, and to stand before Him at that time. Among the reports that describe the virtues of this act of worship is the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The best of prayers after the prescribed prayers is prayer in the depths of the night, and the best of fasting after the month of Ramadaan is fasting the month of Allaah, Muharram.” (reported by Muslim).

‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr (may Allaah be pleased with them both) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The most beloved of prayer to Allaah is the prayer of Dawood, and the most beloved of fasts to Allaah is the fast of Dawood. He used to sleep for half of the night, then get up and pray for a third of the night, then sleep for a sixth of the night, and he used to fast every other day.” (Agreed upon).

‘Amr ibn ‘Absah reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The closest that the Lord is to His slave is in the later part of the night, so if you can be one of those who remember Allaah at that time, then do so.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and al-Nisaa’i).

According to a hadeeth narrated by Ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Our Lord admires two men: a man who leaves his mattress and cover, and slips away from his wife and lover, to go and pray. Allaah says, ‘O My angels, look at My slave. He has left his mattress and cover and slipped away from his lover and wife to pray, out of hope for what is with Me and out of fear of what is with Me.” (Reported by Ahmad. It is a hasan report. Saheeh al-Targheeb, 258).

Qiyaam al-Layl expels forgetfulness from the heart, as is stated in the hadeeth narrated by ‘Abd-Allaah ibn ‘Amr ibn al-‘Aas (may Allaah be pleased with them both), in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever recites ten aayaat in qiyaam will not be recorded as one of the forgetful. Whoever recites a hundred aayaat in qiyaam will be recorded as one of the devout [???], and whoever prays a thousand aayaat in qiyaam will be recorded as one of the muqantareen (those who pile up good deeds).” (Reported by Abu Dawood and Ibn Hibbaan. It is a hasan report. Saheeh al-Targheeb, 635).

Yahyaa ibn Mu’aadh said: “The medicine of the heart is five things: reading Qur’aan and pondering the meaning, having an empty stomach, praying at night (qiyaam al-layl), beseeching Allaah at the time of suhoor, and keeping company with righteous people.”

4 – Studying how the salaf and righteous people practised qiyaam al-layl and adhered to it. The salaf used to enjoy qiyaam al-layl and rejoice greatly in doing it. ‘Abd-Allaah ibn Wahb said: “Every type of pleasure is enjoyed only once, except for acts of worship, which are enjoyed three times: when you do it, when you remember it, and when you are given the reward for it.”

Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir said: “There is nothing left of the joys of this life except three: qiyaam al-layl, meeting one’s brothers in faith, and praying in congregation.”

Thaabit al-Banaani said: “There is nothing I enjoy more than qiyaam al-layl.”

Yazeed al-Riqaaashi said: “A lot of tahajjud brings delight to the worshippers, and a lot of thirst (i.e., fasting), brings joy when they meet Allaah.”

Mukhallad ibn Husayn said: “I never woke up at night except I saw Ibraaheem ibn Adham remembering Allaah and praying, and this made me depressed, so I consoled myself with this aayah (interpretation of the meaning): ‘... **That is the Grace of Allaah which He bestows on whom He pleases. And Allaah is the Owner of Great Bounty**’ [al-Hadeed 57:21].”

Abu ‘Aasim al-Nabeel said: “Abu Haneefah used to be called al-Watad (pole or pillar) because he prayed so much.”

Al-Qaasim ibn Ma’een said: “Abu Haneefah spent an entire night in qiyaam reciting this aayah (interpretation of the meaning): ‘**Nay, but the Hour is their appointed time (for their full recompense), and the Hour will be more grievous and more bitter**’ [al-Qamar 54:46], repeating it and weeping, beseeching Allaah until morning came.”

Ibraaheem ibn Shammaas said: “I used to see Ahmad ibn Hanbal staying up at night to pray when he was a young man.”

Abu Bakr al-Marwadhi said: “I was with Imaam Ahmad for nearly four months in the army, and he never stopped praying qiyaam at night or reading Qur’aan during the day, and I never knew when he completed the Qur’aan, because he kept that secret.”

Imaam al-Bukhaari used to pray qiyaam and tahajjud at night until the time of suhoor, and he would read between a half and a third of the Qur’aan, and complete it at suhoor every third night.

Al-‘Allaamah Ibn ‘Abd al-Haadi said, describing the qiyaam of Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyah: “At night he would keep away from people, and spend that time only with his Lord, beseeching Him continually and reciting Qur’aan, repeating different kinds of acts of worship by night and by day. When he began to pray, his body would start to tremble, leaning to the left and right.”

Ibn Rajab said concerning his shaykh Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim: “He was a man of worship, tahajjud and lengthy prayers. I have never seen his equal in worship and knowledge of the Qur’aan, hadeeth and principles of faith.”

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar said, describing his shaykh al-Haafiz al-Iraqi: “I stayed with him, and I never saw him forsake qiyaam al-layl: it was like a habit for him.”

5 – **Sleeping on one’s right side.** The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) taught his ummah to sleep on their right sides, as is reported in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When any one of you goes to bed, let him clear his bed by hitting it with his garment, for he does not know what may have come onto it. Then let him lie down on his right side, then let him say, ‘Bismika Rabbi wada’tu janbi wa bika arfa’uhu. In amsakta nafsi farhamhaa wa in arsaltahaa fahfazhaa bimaa tafazu bihi ‘ibaadaka al-saaliheen (In Your Name, my Lord, I lay myself down and I get up again. If You take my soul, then have mercy on it, and if You send it back to me, then protect it with that with which You protect Your righteous slaves).’” (Agreed upon).

Al-Baraa’ ibn ‘Aazib (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When you want to go to bed, do wudoo’ as for prayer, then lie down on your right side.” (Agreed upon)

Hafsah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: “When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went to bed, he would put his right hand under his right cheek.” (Reported by al-Tabaraani, Saheeh al-Jaami’, 4523).

Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allaah have mercy on him) said: “There is a reason for his lying on his right side, which is that the heart is located on the left, so if a person lays on his left side, he will sleep too deeply, because the heart’s position will be too comfortable, but if he sleeps on his right side, he will not be too settled, so he won’t sleep deeply.”

6 – **Sleeping in a state of tahaarah (purity).** We have already quoted the hadeeth of al-Baraa’ ibn ‘Aazib (may Allaah be pleased with him), in which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said, “When you go to bed, do wudoo’ as if for prayer.” (Agreed upon).

Mu’aad ibn Jabal (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “There is no Muslim who goes to sleep remembering Allaah and in a state of purity, and when he turns over he asks Allaah for good in this world and the next, but it will be given to him.” (Reported by Abu Dawood and Ahmad. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 5754).

Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with them both) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Purify these bodies and Allaah will purify you, for there is no slave who goes to sleep in a state of purity but an angel spends the night with

him, and every time he turns over, [the angel] says, ‘O Allaah, forgive Your slave, for he went to bed in a state of purity.’” (Reported by al-Tabaraani. Al-Mundhiri said, its isnaad is jaayid. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 3831).

7 – **Going to sleep early.** Sleeping straight after ‘Ishaa’ is the advice of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and a good and healthy habit. One of the ahaadeeth that describe its virtues was narrated by Abu Barzah al-Aslami (may Allaah be pleased with him) who said that **the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) used to prefer to delay ‘Ishaa’, and he did not like to sleep before it or talk after it.** (Reported by al-Bukhaari).

Al-Haafiz Ibn Hajar reported that al-Qaadi ‘Ayaad said, concerning the phrase “He did not like to sleep before it”: **“Because that could lead to one praying it too late, or delaying it until after the preferred time, and talking after it could lead to one sleeping before Fajr and missing it, or missing qiyaam al-layl.”**

Ibn Raafi’ said: **“ ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab (may Allaah be pleased with him) used to wave his stick at the people when darkness fell, and would say, ‘Get up and go, may Allaah help you to pray qiyaam at night!’”**

Another matter that has to do with sleep is choosing a suitable bed, not one that is excessively luxurious or soft, because that makes a person sleep too much and become negligent, and causes laziness and carelessness. ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) said: **“The pillow of the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) on which he slept at night was made of leather stuffed with palm fibres.”** (Reported by Abu Dawood and Ahmad. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 4714).

Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that ‘Umar ibn al-Khattaab entered upon the Messenger of Allaah (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) when he was lying on a mat of palm fibres that had left marks on his side. ‘Umar said, **“O Messenger of Allaah, why do you not get something more comfortable than this?”** He (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: **“What do I have to do with this world? My relationship with this world is like that of a traveller on a hot summer’s day, who seeks shade under a tree for an hour, then moves on.”** (Reported by Ahmad and al-Haakim. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 5545).

‘Ali ibn Bakkaar (may Allaah have mercy on him) used to have a slave-woman who would spread out his bed for him, and he would touch it with his hand and say: **“By Allaah, you are good, and by Allaah you are cool, but by Allaah I will not rest on you tonight.”** Then he would get up and pray qiyaam until Fajr.

Also, one should not sleep too much or too deeply. Ibraaheem ibn Adham said: **“If you are sleeping at night, and running about during the day, and always committing sin, how can you earn the pleasure of the One Who is directing your affairs?”**

8 – Having the habit of reciting adhkaar prescribed by sharee’ah before going to sleep, because these adhkaar are like a fortress which protects a person from the Shaytaan, by the permission of Allaah, and helps him to get up for qiyaam. Among these adhkaar is that mentioned in the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him), who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When any one of you goes to bed, let him clear his bed by hitting it with his garment, for he does not know what may have come onto it. Then let him lie down on his right side, then let him say, ‘Bismika Rabbi wada’tu janbi wa bika arfa’uhu. In amsakta nafsi farhamhaa wa in arsaltahaa fahfazhaa bimaa tahfazu bihi ‘ibaadaka al-saaliheen (In Your Name, my Lord, I lay myself down and I get up again. If You take my soul, then have mercy on it, and if You send it back to me, then protect it with that with which You protect Your righteous slaves).’” (Agreed upon).

‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) reported that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went to bed each night, he would put his palms together, blow in them, and recite Qul huwa Allaahu ahad, Qul a’oodhu bi Rabbi’l-Falaq and Qul a’oodhu bi Rabbi’l-Naas, then he would wipe as much of his body as he could with his hands, starting with his head and face, and the front of his body, doing this three times. (Agreed upon).

Ibn Mas’ood (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever recites the last two aayahs of Soorat al-Baqarah, this will take care of him.” (Agreed upon).

Anas ibn Maalik (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went to bed, he would say: “Al-hamdu Lillaah illadhi at’amanaa wa saqaanaa, wa kafaanaa fa kam mimman laa kaafeeya lahu wa laa mu’weeya lahu (Praise be to Allaah Who has fed us and given us to drink, and Who has given us enough, for how many are there who have no-one to suffice them or give them refuge).” (Reported by Muslim).

According to the hadeeth of Abu Hurayrah in which he tells the story of how he captured the Shaytaan, the Shaytaan said to him: “When you go to bed, recite Aayat al-Kursi, ‘Allaah! None has the right to be worshipped but He, the Ever-Living, the One Who sustains and protects all that exists...’ [al-Baqarah 2:255 – interpretation of the meaning] until the end of it, because it will bring Allaah’s protection for you, and no shaytaan will approach you until morning comes.” Abu Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him) mentioned this to the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him), and he said, “He spoke the truth even though he is a liar.” (Agreed upon).

‘Ali ibn Abi Taalib (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that when the Prophet’s daughter Faatimah (may Allaah be pleased with her) came to him and asked him for a servant, he (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to her and ‘Ali: “Shall I not teach you something that will be better for you than a servant? When you go to bed, say

‘Subhaan Allaah’ thirty-three times, ‘al-hamdu Lillaah’ thirty-three times, and ‘Allaahu akbar’ thirty-four times. This is better for you than a servant.” (Agreed upon).

Anas ibn Maalik (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Recite ‘Qul yaa ayyuha’l-kaafiroon’ when you go to sleep, for it is a renunciation of shirk.” (Reported by al-Bayhaqi. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 1172).

Hafsah (may Allaah be pleased with her) reported that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) went to bed, he would put his right hand under his right cheek and say: ‘Rabbi qinee ‘adhaabaka yawma tab’athu ‘ibaadaka (My Lord, save me from Your punishment on the Day when You resurrect Your slaves).’” (Reported by Abu Dawood, Saheeh al-Jaami’, 4532).

Al-Baraa’ ibn ‘Aazib (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When you go to bed, do wudoo’ as if for prayer, then lie down on your right side, then say: ‘Allaahumma aslamtu nafsi ilayk, wa wajahtu wajhi ilayk, wa fawwadtu amri ilayk, wa alja’tu zahri ilayk, raghbatan wa rahbatan ilayk, laa malja’a wa laa manjaa minka illa ilayk. Aamantu bi kitaabik alladhi anzalt, wa bi nabiiyyik alladhi arsalt (O Allaah, I submit myself to You, I turn my face to You, I delegate my affairs to You and I rely totally on You, out of fear and hope of You. There is no refuge or sanctuary from You except in You. I believe in Your Book which You have revealed and in Your Prophet whom You have sent).’ Then if you die, you will have died on the fitrah, so make these the last words you speak.” (Agreed upon).

Similarly, the Muslim should have the habit of reciting adhkaar prescribed by sharee’ah when waking up, such as that reported by Abu Hurayrah, who said that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When any one of you wakes up, he should say: ‘Al-hamdu Lillaah illadhi radda ‘alayya roohi, wa ‘aafaani fi jasaki wa adhina li bi dhikrihi (Praise be to Allaah Who has restored my soul, given health to my body, and allowed me to remember Him).’” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and al-Nisaa’i, Saheeh al-Jaami’, 326).

‘Ubaadah ibn al-Saamit (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Whoever turns over at night and says ‘Laa ilaaha ill-Allaah wahdahu laa shareeka lah, lahu’l-mulk wa lahu’l-hamd wa huwa ‘a’l kulli shay’in qadeer. Al-hamdulillahi, subhaan Allaah wa laa illaaha ill-Allaah wa Allaahu akbar wa laa hawla wa laa quwwata illa Billaah (There is no god but Allaah Alone, with no partner or associate. His is the Dominion and the Praise, and He is Able to do all things. Praise be to Allaah, glory be to Allaah. There is no god except Allaah, Allaah is Most Great and there is no strength and no power except in Allaah),’ then says, ‘Allaahumma ‘ghfir li (O Allaah, forgive me),’ or some other du’aa’, it will be answered, and if he does wudoo’ and then prays, his prayer will be accepted.” (Reported by al-Bukhaari)

Imaam Ibn Battaal said: “Allaah has promised through His Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) that whoever wakes up from his sleep pronouncing words of Tawheed,

submitting to His sovereignty, recognizing His blessings by praising Him, exalting Him above that which does not befit Him by glorifying Him (saying ‘Subhaan Allaah’), submitting to Him by magnifying Him (saying ‘Allaahu akbar’) and admitting one’s utter dependence upon His help, then if he makes du’aa’ it will be answered, and if he prays his prayer will be accepted. Everyone who hears this hadeeth should apply it and make the most of it, and make his intention sincerely for his Lord, may He be glorified and exalted.”

Al-Baraa’ ibn ‘Aazib (may Allaah be pleased with them both) said: “When the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) woke up, he would say: ‘Al-hamdu Lillaah illadhi ahyaanaa ba’da maa amaataanaa wa ilayhi al-nushoor (Praise be to Allaah Who has brought us back to life after having caused us to die, and unto Him is the resurrection).’” (Reported by Muslim).

Ibn ‘Abbaas (may Allaah be pleased with them both) reported that when the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) woke up he would wipe the sleep from his face with his hand, then look at the sky and recite the final ten aayaat of Soorat Aal ‘Imran: “**Verily, in the creation of the heavens and the earth...**” [Aal ‘Imraan 3:190 – interpretation of the meaning].” (Reported by Muslim)

Imaam al-Nawawi said: “This indicates that it is mustahabb to wipe away the traces of sleep from one’s face, and to recite these aayaat when getting up from sleep.”

9 – **Being keen to take a nap or siesta during the day**, whether before zuhr or after. Anas (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Take a nap, for the shayaateen do not take naps.” (Reported by al-Tabaraani. Al-Saheehah, 2647).

Ishaaq ibn ‘Abd-Allaah said: “Taking a nap is one of the deeds of good people. It revitalizes the heart and helps one to pray qiyaam al-layl.”

Al-Hasan al-Basri passed by a group of people in the marketplace in the middle of the day, and heard the racket they were making. He said, “Do these people take a nap?” It was said to him, “No.” He said, “I think their nights must be bad.”

10 – **Avoiding eating or drinking too much.** Eating and drinking too much are two of the main obstacles that prevent people from praying qiyaam al-layl. Al-Miqdaam ibn Ma’d Yakrib (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Man fills no vessel worse than his stomach. It is sufficient for the son of Adam to have a few mouthfuls to give him the strength he needs. If he has to fill his stomach, then let him leave one-third for food, one-third for drink and one-third for air.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Maajah. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 5674).

Abu Juhayfah (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said to a man who burped in his presence: “Stop your

burping, for the people who eat the most in this life will be the most hungry on the Day of Resurrection.” (Reported by al-Haakim. Saheeh al-Jaami’, 1190).

Sufyaan al-Thawri said: “You should eat little, so that you will be able to pray qiyaam al-layl.”

Ma’qal ibn Habeeb saw some people eating a lot, and said, ‘I do not think that our companions want to pray qiyaam al-layl.’”

Wahb ibn Munbih said: “There is no son of Adam dearer to his shaytaan than the one who eats and sleeps a lot.”

11 – Striving against oneself to pray qiyaam al-layl. This is one of the best means of helping oneself to pray qiyaam, because human nature is inclined towards wrongdoing, so the one who follows his own inclinations will be led to doom and destruction. Allaah has commanded us to strive against our own selves, as He says (interpretation of the meanings):

“And strive hard in Allaah’s Cause as you ought to strive...” [al-Hajj 22:78]

“And as for those who strive hard in Our Cause, We will surely guide them to Our Paths. And verily, Allaah is with the muhsinoon (good-doers).” [al-‘Ankaboot 29:69]

“Their sides forsake their beds, to invoke their Lord in fear and hope, and they spend (charity in Allaah’s Cause) out of what We have bestowed on them” [al-Sajdah 32:16]

Fadaalah ibn ‘Ubayd (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The mujaahid is the one who strives against his own self for the sake of Allaah.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ibn Hibbaan. Al-Saheehah, 549).

According to the hadeeth of ‘Uqbah ibn ‘Aamir (may Allaah be pleased with him), the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “When a man from my ummah gets up to pray at night, striving against his own self to get up and purify himself, there are knots on him. When he washes his hands in wudoo’, one knot is undone. When he washes his face, another knot is undone. When he wipes his head another knot is undone. When he washes his feet, another knot is undone. Then Allaah says to those who are veiled (in the Unseen): ‘Look at this slave of Mine, he is striving against his own self and asking of Me. Whatever My slave asks of Me shall be his.’” (Reported by Ahmad and Ibn Hibaan. Saheeh al-Targheeb, 627).

Muhammad ibn al-Munkadir said: “I struggled against my own self for forty years until it became right.” Thaabit al-Banaani said: “I struggled for twenty years to make myself pray qiyaam al-layl, and I enjoyed it (qiyaam al-layl) for twenty years.” ‘Umar ibn ‘Abd al-‘Azeed said: “The best of deeds are those which we force ourselves to do.” ‘Abd-Allaah ibn al-Mubaarak said: “The souls of righteous people in the past used to push them to do good deeds, but our souls do not do what we want them to do except by force, so we have to

force them.” Qutaadah said: “O son of Adam, if you do not want to do any good except when you have the energy for it, then your nature is more inclined towards boredom and laziness. The true believer is the one who pushes himself.”

12 – **Avoiding sin.** If the Muslim wants to be one of those who earn the honour of speaking to Allaah in the depths of the night, let him beware of sin, for the one who is contaminated with the stain of sin will not be helped to pray qiyaam al-layl. A man said to Ibraaheem ibn Adham, “I cannot pray qiyaam al-layl, so tell me the cure for this.” He said, “Do not commit sin during the day, and He will help you to stand before Him at night, for your standing before Him at night is one of the greatest honours, and the sinner does not deserve that honour.”

A man said to al-Hasan al-Basri: “O Abu Sa’eed, I sleep in good health, and I love to pray qiyaam al-layl, and I prepare water with which to purify myself, so why can I not get up?” Al-Hasan said: “Your sins are restricting you.” He said, may Allaah have mercy on him, “The slave who commits a sin will be denied the opportunity to pray qiyaam at night and to fast during the day.”

Al-Fudayl ibn ‘Ayaad said: “If you cannot pray qiyaam al-layl, or fast during the day, know that you are indeed deprived and restricted, chained by your sins.”

13 – **Checking oneself and rebuking oneself for not praying qiyaam al-layl.** Checking oneself is one of the signs of the righteous and truthful. Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning): “O you who believe! Fear Allaah and keep your duty to Him. And let every person look to what he has sent forth for the morrow, and fear Allaah. Verily, Allaah is All-Aware of what you do.” [al-Hashr 59:18].

Imaam Ibn al-Qayyim said: “If the slave is responsible and accountable for everything, even his hearing, sight and innermost thoughts, as Allaah says (interpretation of the meaning), ‘... Verily, the hearing, and the sight, and the heart of each of you will be questioned by Allaah’ [al-Isra’ 17:36], then he should check on himself before he is brought to account.”

Qiyaam al-layl is an act of worship that connects the heart to Allaah, may He be exalted, and enables it to overcome the temptations of life and to strive against one’s own self, at the time when voices are stilled, eyes are closed in sleep, and sleepers are tossing and turning in their beds. Therefore qiyaam al-layl is one of the measures of sincere determination and one of the qualities of those who have great ambitions. Allaah has praised them and distinguished them from others in the Qur’aan, where He says (interpretation of the meaning): “Is one who is obedient to Allaah, prostrating himself or standing (in prayer) during the hours of the night, fearing the Hereafter and hoping for the Mercy of his Lord (like one who disbelieves)? Say: ‘Are those who know equal to those who know not?’ It is only men of understanding who will remember.” [al-Zumar 39:9]

Qiyaam al-layl is “sunnah mu’akkadah” (confirmed Sunnah), which the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) urged us to do when he said, “You should pray qiyaam al-layl, for it is the habit of the righteous people who came before you, and it will bring you closer to your Lord, expiate for bad deeds, prevent sin, and expel disease from the body.” (Reported by al-Tirmidhi and Ahmad).

According to a hadeeth, the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “The best of prayers after the prescribed prayers is qiyaam al-layl.” The Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) always had the habit of praying qiyaam al-layl, and never gave it up, whether he was travelling or staying at home. Even though he, among all the sons of Adam, would be the one to have all his past and future sins forgiven, he prayed qiyaam al-layl until his feet became swollen, and when he was asked about that, he said, “Should I not be a grateful slave?” (Agreed upon).

This is how the noble salaf were, may Allaah have mercy upon them. Abu’l-Darda’ (may Allaah be pleased with him) said: “Pray two rak’ahs in the darkness of the night for the darkness of the grave.” Ahmad ibn Harb said: “I am astonished at people who know that the delights of Paradise lie above them and the horrors of Hell lie beneath them. How can they sleep in between them?”

When ‘Umar ibn Dharr saw that night had come, he would say: “Night has come, and night has dignity, and Allaah is most deserving of reverence.”

For this reason, al-Fudayl ibn ‘Ayaad said: “I met some people who feel ashamed before Allaah to sleep for too long in the depths of the night. Such a person may be resting on his side, and when he moves, he says to himself, ‘This is not your right. Get up and take your share of the Hereafter.’”

Al-Hasan said: “We do not know of any deed more difficult than the struggle to stay up at night or to spend money.” It was said to him, “Why do the mutahajjadeen (those who pray Tahajjud at night) have the most beautiful faces?” He said, “Because they spend time alone with the Most Merciful, so He adorns them with some of His light.”

The women of the salaf also used to strive to pray qiyaam al-layl with energy and determination. Where are the women of our own age when it comes to such great deeds? ‘Urwah ibn al-Zubayr said: “I came to ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) one day to greet her, and I found her praying and reciting the aayah (interpretation of the meaning), **‘But Allaah has been gracious to us, and has saved us from the torment of the Fire’** [al-Toor 52:27], repeating it and weeping. I waited for her, but I got bored of waiting, so I went to the market for some things I needed, then I came back to ‘Aa’ishah, and she was still praying and reciting this aayah and weeping.”

Anas ibn Maalik (may Allaah be pleased with him) reported that the Prophet (peace and blessings of Allaah be upon him) said: “Jibreel said to me, ‘Go back to Hafsa, for she fasts a

lot and prays a lot at night (qiyaam al-layl).” (Reported by al-Haakim, Saheeh al-Jaami’, 4227).

Mu’aadhah al-‘Adawiyyah, one of the righteous Taabi’aat spent her wedding night, along with her husband Silah ibn Ashyam, praying until Fajr. When her husband and son were killed in the land of jihaad, she would spend the whole night in prayer, worshipping and beseeching Allaah, and she would sleep during the day. If she felt sleepy whilst she was praying at night, she would tell herself: “O soul, there is plenty of sleep ahead of you.”

When Habeebah al-‘Adawiyyah prayed ‘Ishaa’, she would stand on the roof of her house, wearing her chemise and khimaar (i.e., covered in proper Islamic dress), then she would say, “O my God, the stars have come out, people have gone to sleep, and kings have closed their doors, but Your door is open. Every lover is alone with his lover, but here I am standing before You.” Then she would start to pray and talk to her Lord until the time of suhoor. When the time of suhoor came, she would say, “O Allaah, this night is ending, the day is coming, and I wish I knew whether you have accepted this night (of worship) from me, so that I could congratulate myself, or if it has been rejected, so that I might console myself.”

‘Amrah, the wife of Habeeb al-‘Ajami, prayed qiyaam al-layl one night whilst her husband was asleep. When the time for suhoor came, and her husband was still asleep, she woke him up and said to him, “Get up, my master, for the night has gone, the day has come and ahead of you lies a long road with little provision, and a small group of righteous people who have gone before us, and we are still here.”

We ask Allaah to help us to remember Him, to thank Him and to worship Him properly. May Allaah bless our Prophet Muhammad.

Islam Q&A
Sheikh Muhammed Salih Al-Munajjid

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