



15. Staying Focused on What is Important, and Not Being Diverted

Delivered by His Eminence
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...A worshipping servant of Allaah who has eemaan (i.e. holds sound beliefs and performs righteous deeds) must remain diligent as he treads his path to Allaah, and he must persevere along that path in order to reach the objective he seeks. He must not let obstacles obstruct him from reaching his goal and arriving at the destination he seeks. This is because the momentous duties and objectives that occupy a person of eemaan do not leave room for him to become preoccupied with anything else that would be detrimental. They also leave no room for him to divert his focus to anything that is of no concern to him, since he is to be a person who remains firmly determined to proceed along his path.

Servants of Allaah, let us learn about this reality by examining the guidance of our Prophet Muhammad (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) and contemplate the course he followed, so that we ourselves can adhere to that.

Al-Haakim collected a hadeeth in his Mustadrak from Jaabir (may Allaah be pleased with him) who stated, "When Allaah's Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) walked, he would not glance all over."¹ The meaning understood here is that he would proceed along his course without halting or being sluggish.

May Allaah grant all of us His guidance. Glancing all about, left and right, without paying attention to what is in front of oneself is a trait to be avoided. Looking about in that manner slows down one's pace and may even bring one to a halt altogether. That is contrary to the guidance of our Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection). When he set out for a certain purpose, he remained focused on that and walked with determination, not laziness. Therefore, if there is no need for a person to glance aside from his course as he proceeds ahead, he should not be gazing all over.

Servants of Allaah, a discerning individual only diverts his glance from his course when there is reason to direct attention elsewhere. That is when such diversion has legitimate meaning. Furthermore, not only did the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) avoid diverting his glance from the course along which he was proceeding, he also avoided letting himself be diverted in greater ways as well. He would not let himself be obstructed from calling to Allaah by those who stood in his path or put obstacles in his way so as to hinder him from his objective. There are numerous prominent incidents that demonstrate the unshakable will of the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection), the fact that he did not let himself be diverted by anyone's harm or insolence, and the fact that he did not pay any mind to the malice harboured by others towards him. One such instance was collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim from 'Aa'ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her). She narrated that a group of the Jews had asked to meet the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) and they greeted him by saying "as-samu 'alaykum (may death come upon you)." 'Aa'ishah replied, "Rather, may death come upon you yourselves, and may Allaah expel you from His mercy." The Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said, " 'Aa'ishah, Allaah is certainly gentle and He loves gentleness in all matters." 'Aa'ishah asked, "Did you not hear

¹ Al-Mustadrak (7875). See also as-Saheehah (2086).



what they said?” However, the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) replied, “I told them: upon you as well.”²

Another instance was during the time when some of the people among the tribe of Quraysh would revile the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection). A woman among them had stood and said, “We refuse to obey the one who is Muthammam (blameworthy) and we refuse to accept his religion.” However, the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) commented to the Companions, “Have you not seen the remarkable way in which Allaah averts from me the insults of Quraysh? They keep reviling someone who is Muthammam, and insulting Muthammam (blameworthy); but I am Muhammad (praiseworthy).” This was collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.³ Hence, the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) did not pay any mind to their insults and disparagement, he did not let himself be diverted by their insolence or lies, and he did not slow down or halt in calling people to Allaah.

“You must proceed ahead, not remain stopped in your place. The path ahead will not just come to you, and dreams will not just fall into your hands without any effort. All of your days have to be ones of constant striving. If you turn towards the rear, you will lose what you already have.”⁴

If a person wants to protect his own self and dignity, it is only fitting for him to ignore the foolishness of the insolent, and not reciprocate their insolence. The way he carries himself should demonstrate that if he passes by anyone who reviles him, he is someone who proceeds onwards and pays no mind to that person. An instance was narrated in which one person had insulted another, but the latter paid no mind. The one who extended the insult told his target, “You are the one I am talking to”, but his target replied, “You are the one I am ignoring.”

A very noteworthy remark was narrated in this regard from al-Imaam ash-Shaafi‘ee (may Allaah have mercy upon him). He said, “People may say, ‘You stayed quiet and, thus, you were defeated.’ However, I say to them, ‘Responding in such a case is a key that opens the door to ills. Silence in response to the ignorant or insolent is a mark of dignity, and it also preserves a person’s integrity. Have you not considered that lions are feared even when they are quiet, while dogs are pelted even when they constantly bark?’”

Avoiding reciprocating people’s insolence and lies, as well as not letting oneself be diverted by their words, are manifestations of wisdom and honour. Allaah commended those who give no attention to unbecoming words directed at them by the insolent, do not preoccupy themselves with responding to such things, and do not reciprocate the same foul speech. Allaah said,

﴿ وَإِذَا سَمِعُوا اللَّغْوَ أَعْرَضُوا عَنْهُ وَقَالُوا لَنَا أَعْمَلُنَا وَلَكُمْ أَعْمَلُكُمْ ﴾

﴿ سَلَّمَ عَلَيْكُمْ لَا نَبْنِي الْجَاهِلِينَ ﴾

“When they hear sinful speech, they pay no mind to it; and they say, ‘We have our deeds and you have your deeds. You will remain safe, without experiencing any harm from us. We do not seek to follow the course of the ignorant.’”⁵ So long as a person is doing what is correct, he should not let himself be diverted by things people say. He should not allow people’s words to affect him if those words lead to forsaking what is permissible, or doing what is impermissible. Allaah told His Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection),

² Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (2935), Saheeh Muslim (2165).

³ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (3533).

⁴ This paragraph is the meaning of Arabic poetry that was cited.

⁵ Soorah al-Qasas (28):55.



﴿ وَلَقَدْ نَعَلْنَاكَ أَنْكَ يَضِيقُ صَدْرُكَ بِمَا يَقُولُونَ ﴿١٧﴾ فَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ وَكُنْ مِنَ السَّجِدِينَ ﴿١٨﴾ وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّىٰ يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ ﴾

“We know that your heart becomes constricted because of all they say. Nonetheless, glorify and praise your Lord, be among those who bow down to Him in prostration, and continue to worship Him until the certainty of death comes to you.”⁶ This was the directive given by our Lord concerning how to deal with things people say, and it provides effective treatment for any harm experienced. It consists of mentioning Allaah much, praying, and continuing to worship Allaah until the end of one’s life.

When a person regularly looks away from his aim, he will be heedless many times, and his time will be wasted. He must realize that every time he gets diverted hinders his progress and weakens his proficiency. He should make his motto: “Accept what people do readily, instruct them to do what is correct, and turn away from the insolent.”⁷ A truly intelligent individual proceeds along the course he charts for himself, in accordance with his noble objectives. The only time he turns aside from moving ahead is to review his actions, correct them, and improve them. Diversions without reason may obstruct him from where he is headed, prevent him from achieving his aims, cause him to procrastinate, and lead him to neglect his obligations.

Servants of Allaah, along with not letting oneself be diverted, you must also realize that when people make you the subject of their disparagement, you still need to examine what they say. If their criticism of you is correct, you must take that positively, improve yourself, and make amends for your shortcomings. That is the approach that would enable you to rise and attain the best outcome by Allaah’s permission.

Dear people of Islaam, our Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) wanted all that was best for his followers. Part of that lies in the fact that he explained to them how being diverted can sometimes detrimentally affect a person by depriving him of goodness and reward. A hadeeth in Saheeh al-Bukhaaree states that ‘Aa’ishah (may Allaah be pleased with her) had asked the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) about glancing around while praying and he replied, “That is a portion of a person’s prayer that is stolen by shaytaan.”⁸ Additionally, Aboo Tharr (may Allaah be pleased with him) narrated that Allaah’s Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said, “Allaah continues to face His servant as he prays, so long as he does not glance elsewhere. If he turns his face elsewhere, Allaah turns away from him.” This was collected by Ahmad, Aboo Daawood, and an-Nasaa’ee.⁹ Allowing oneself to be diverted during prayer also includes having one’s heart become preoccupied with things of this world instead of focusing on sincerely turning one’s face and body towards Allaah, the Almighty and Most Majestic. Being diverted in either way – body or heart – reduces the reward one attains from prayers performed. Although many people make it a point to not be diverted in body, it must be recognized that not being diverted in heart is a far greater matter. In fact, this is why it is permissible to divert one’s glance elsewhere during prayer if a legitimate need ever arises. As for the heart, it is supposed to always remain focused on being directed towards Allaah alone. If an individual bears this in mind while praying, it would lead him to keep his heart present and humble while standing before his Lord, not being diverted to anyone besides Him.

It is unfortunate that some people are diverted in their prayers by glancing around and moving about often without any need to do so. There are also others who turn their necks all the way to the

⁶ Soorah al-Hijr (15):97-99.

⁷ Soorah al-A’raaf (7):199.

⁸ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (751).

⁹ Sunan Abee Daawood (909), Sunan an-Nasaa’ee (1195). Graded da’eef by al-Albaanee.



right and left as the Imaam concludes prayer, and perhaps they look all the way behind them without any need to do so. There are individuals who make this a habit of theirs to which they constantly adhere, especially some of the elderly. Consequently, their minds become preoccupied with other things after prayers, and they do not remain focused on the prescribed words of thikr or contemplating their meanings.

Servants of Allaah, the exception that applies to diverting one's glance during prayer is when there is a need for doing so. Evidence for this can be found in a hadeeth in Saheeh al-Bukhaaree. It mentions that when Aboo Bakr (may Allaah be pleased with him) was leading the Companions in prayer, Allaah's Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) came while they were praying. As a result, some of the Companions clapped to alert Aboo Bakr, but he did not let that divert him since he was not someone who diverted his focus from the prayer he was performing. However, when the clapping continued, he diverted his glance. Subsequently, the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) explained that if something comes up during prayer, the men should say "Subhaanallaah (Allaah is perfect in every way)" while clapping the hands is what the women should do.¹⁰

When saying that Aboo Bakr was not someone who diverted his focus from the prayer he was performing, this means that he was known for this quality: remaining focused on his prayer and not looking right or left.

My dear brothers, a prohibition from diverting one's glance was mentioned in Allaah's statement,

﴿ قَالُوا يَلُوطُ إِنَّا رُسُلُ رَبِّكَ لَنْ يَصِلُوا إِلَيْكَ فَأَسْرِبْ بِهِم بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ وَلَا يَلْنَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا أَمْرَانِكَ ﴾

"You are to leave this town, travelling with your family for a part of the night, and none of you are to look back. As for your wife, she will remain behind."¹¹ One may wonder about what wisdom lies behind this prohibition. Some of the scholars have mentioned that the response to this query is that Allaah, the Most Exalted, gave His Prophet Loot this instruction so that they would proceed along their course as they travelled, hasten to depart from their town, make their focus attaining salvation from what would afflict the other people, and not be hindered from any of that by diverting their glances as they departed. Additionally, Allaah said,

﴿ فَأَسْرِبْ بِهِم بِقِطْعٍ مِّنَ اللَّيْلِ وَاتَّبِعْ أَدْبَرَهُمْ وَلَا يَلْنَفِتْ مِنْكُمْ أَحَدٌ وَامْضُوا حَيْثُ تُؤْمَرُونَ ﴾

"Thus, you are to travel for part of the night with your family. You are to stay at the rear and none of you are to look back. Rather, proceed to where you are instructed."¹² This statement of Allaah contains a very important principle established in the Qur'aan. There was the prohibition, "none of you are to look back" and there was also the command "proceed". This directs an individual to close the pages of a painful past that should not be mentioned, including events, individuals, moments, stages, pains, suffering, and sorrows. When a person diverts his glance away from his objective, that obstructs him from proceeding; however, when he remains focused, that assists him.

Servants of Allaah, the prohibition in the statement of Allaah "none of you are to look back" also conforms with an element found in the narrative about the Prophet Ibraaheem when he came to Makkah. The hadeeth about that mentions that Ibraaheem turned to depart after leaving Haajar and

¹⁰ See Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (684), Saheeh Muslim (421).

¹¹ Soorah Hood (11):81.

¹² Soorah al-Hijr (15):65.



Ismaa'eel where Allaah had instructed him. Haajar followed Ibraaheem and asked, "Ibraaheem, where are you now going after leaving us in this valley that contains neither people nor anything else?" She repeated that several times but Ibraaheem did not turn to her. She then asked, "Did Allaah instruct you to do this?" He replied, "Yes." She then said, "In that case, He will not neglect us" and she then returned to where Ibraaheem had left her.¹³

In this instance, the Prophet Ibraaheem "did not turn to her"; rather, he proceeded ahead where he was instructed and was not diverted from his duty to Allaah inwardly or outwardly.

A further related instance was collected in Saheeh Muslim from Aboo Hurayrah (may Allaah be pleased with him). He narrated that Allaah's Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) said on the day of Khaybar, "I will most surely give the banner to a man who loves Allaah and His Messenger, and at whose hands Allaah will grant victory." He gave the banner to 'Alee ibn Abee Taalib and told him, "Proceed and do not turn back until Allaah grants you victory." 'Alee proceeded for a bit and then paused to ask a question, but did not turn back.¹⁴

Here we note that 'Alee was not diverted from his duty inwardly or outwardly. The meaning that all these instances share is the prohibition of being diverted so as to not become preoccupied with anything that hinders a person from fulfilling his task.

Dear people of Islaam, it is crucial for us to clearly understand that remaining focused is, in fact, a treatment for certain ailments. For example, the basis for treating shaytaan's whispers in the case of someone tested with them is to not pay any mind to them, not continue thinking about them, and not let oneself be diverted by them. One must desist from giving them consideration because that only makes them increase and take root more firmly. In this regard, some of the scholars have mentioned the principle stating that if a person regularly has doubts about issues like wudoo', ghusl, tayammum, or removing impurities, he should desist from giving those doubts any consideration.



...Dear Muslims, when a person's principles are firmly established upon the truth, nothing would divert him from his path. He would not forsake pleasing Allaah in order to please any created being or comply with their inclinations. Allaah's Prophet Yoosuf continued being seduced by the wife of the 'Azeez. She tried numerous times to incite Yoosuf's desires in order to lead him astray from what was correct, and she did all she could to entice him. However, throughout that all, Yoosuf did not divert his glance towards her. On the contrary, he fled from her, avoided the sin she encouraged him to commit, and kept himself far from engaging in what incurs Allaah's wrath. That kept Yoosuf's record of deeds clean and it also immortalized his name among those of the chaste and the righteous who remain diligent in fulfilling Allaah's commands and avoiding His prohibitions.

It was as though Yoosuf had said: when certain women of the land approached me and told me to come to them, I turned a blind eye as though I did not see them. That was because my sight was fixed on my objective. How could I ever meet Allaah, my Lord, with such a sin on the day when all people are gathered and some will end up with their hands shackled. Any pleasure by which I incur Allaah's anger is most certainly despised. "Ma'aathallaah (I seek refuge with Allaah)" were the words cried out. That was what Yoosuf said and, my dear brother, that is the same thing you should say.¹⁵

Servants of Allaah, any time a person wants to complete what he sets out to do and be foremost in accomplishing it, he must avoid all that hinders him. He must not become preoccupied with what

¹³ See Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (3364).

¹⁴ See Saheeh Muslim (2405).

¹⁵ This paragraph is the meaning of Arabic poetry that was cited.



diverts or halts him. For instance, if he embarks upon a specific task and he continues looking at his phone to check developments and keep seeing who is calling or sending messages, he will end up becoming preoccupied with the diversion. He will end up neglecting the task at hand in which he was engaged and which needs to be completed without diversion. When a person gets diverted in ways like that, he wastes his time and lets the devices he has take control of him. In contrast to that state, a person who submits to Allaah in Islaam is to be someone who directs his attention to whatever task needs to be accomplished at any given time, and he is to do so without becoming preoccupied with other things.

Servants of Allaah, there are certain dangerous phenomena by which many Muslims have been tested and, thus, led to commit a number of sins. They obstruct a person from striving in earnest and doing what is correct. Some of those include being diverted from one's responsibilities because of things people say, being afraid of people's criticism, and following inclinations and practices of others that are tantamount to disobeying Allaah. Some reach the point that they feel more apprehensive about having people say negative things about them than they do about disobeying Allaah. They do more to protect themselves from people's words than they do to protect themselves from the hellfire, and we seek refuge with Allaah from such things.

A person should reflect upon the state of many who left following sound guidance and, instead, followed paths that displease Allaah. A person should also think about the reasons behind them being involved in many things that are prohibited by Islaam's teachings such as extravagance, wastefulness, not giving attention to whether income is permissible, refusing acceptable suitors, delaying marriage, making exorbitant demands for bridal money, consuming impermissible foods and drinks, wasting time, or going to places or gatherings of obscenity and vulgarity. When a person examines the aforementioned, he would find that people are involved with those things as well as others due to being diverted from their real purpose by the words of people and the desire to please them. That is what certain individuals do although the teachings of Islaam censure such actions. It further becomes all the more alarming when we see that some of them do not suffice with perpetrating sins themselves; rather, they also speak against those who do not follow their lead and perpetrate sins just like them. In fact, they look at anyone who opposes them as though he has done something wrong or neglected some sort of obligation that he must fulfil according to Islaam.