**TAFAKKUR (REFLECTION)**



**7:23.** They said (straightaway): "Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we will surely be among those who have lost!"(1)



**3:190.** Surely in the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the alternation of night and day (with their periods shortening and lengthening), there are signs (manifesting the truth) for the people of discernment.(2)

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, once stated that a believer’s silence should be reflection (*tafakkur*) and his speaking should be wisdom.”(3)

Tafakkur literally means to think on a subject deeply, systematically, and in great detail. In this context, it signifies reflection, which is the heart's lamp, the spirit's food, the spirit of knowledge, and the essence and light of the Islamic way of life. Reflection is the light in the heart that allows the believer to discern what is good and evil, beneficial and harmful, beautiful and ugly. Again, it is through reflection that the universe becomes a book to study, and the verses of the Qur'an disclose their deeper meanings and secrets more clearly. Without reflection, the heart is darkened, the spirit is exasperated, and Islam is lived at such a superficial level that it is devoid of meaning and profundity.

Reflection is a vital step in becoming aware of what is going on around us and of drawing conclusions from it. It is a golden key to open the door of experience, a seedbed where the trees of truth are planted, and the opening of pupil of the heart’s eye. Due to this, the greatest representative of humanity, the foremost in reflection and all other virtues, upon him be peace and blessings, states: No act of worship is as meritorious as reflection. So reflect on the God’s bounties and the works of His Power, but do not try to reflect on His Essence, for you will never be able to do that. [1] By these words, in addition to pointing out the merit of reflection, the glory of mankind, upon him be peace and blessings, determines the limits of reflection and reminds us of our limits.

In order to draw attention to the same point, the writer of Al-Minhaj (The Way Traced) writes:

Reflection on bounties is a condition of following this way, While reflection on the Divine Essence is a manifest sin. It is both false and useless to doubt and think about Him, And also means seeking to obtain something already obtained.

The verse: They reflect on the creation of the heavens and Earth (3:190) presents the book of the universe with its way of creation, the peculiarities of its letters and words, the harmony and coherence of its sentences, and its firmness as a whole. By drawing our attention to the universe and calling us to reflect upon it, the Qur’an shows us one of the most beneficial methods of reflection: to reflect on and study the Qur’an, and to follow it in all our thoughts and actions; to discover the Divine mysteries in the book of the universe and, through every new discovery that deepens and unfolds the true believer, to live a life full of spiritual pleasure along a way of light extending from belief to knowledge of God and therefrom to love of God; and then to progress to the Hereafter and God’s pleasure and approval this is the way to become a perfect, universal human being.

One can use reflection in every scientific field. However, the rational and experimental sciences are only a first step or a means to reach the final target of reflection, which is knowledge of God, provided that one’s mind has not been filled with wrong conceptions and premises. Studying existence as if it were a book to be reflected upon can engender the desired results and provide ceaseless information and inspiration, but only if one admits that all things and their attributes are created by God. This is what is sought and should be done by those who attribute all things to God, and who have attained spiritual contentment through the knowledge, love, and remembrance of God.

Reflection must be based on and start with belief in God as the Originator of creation. If not, one might reach God at some stage of the journey, but will not progress beyond the conviction of God’s Existence and Unity. Reflection based on and starting with belief in God as the Creator and unique Administrator of all creation enables continuous progression and increased depths, for new discoveries develop into further dimensions (love of God, “annihilation in and subsistence with God,” discovering Divine realities behind things and events). In other words, reflection starting with awareness of God having the Names of “the First” and “the Outer” and progressing toward Him as “the Last” and “the Inner,” will enable one to progress uninterruptedly and without end. Encouraging people to engage in reflection focused upon a determined aim entails urging them to learn and use the methods of sciences that study how existence is manifested.

Since everything in the heavens and Earth are the property and kingdom of God, studying every incident, item, and quality also means studying how the exalted Creator deals with existence. The believer who studies and accurately comprehends this book of existence, and then designs his or her life accordingly, will follow the way of guidance and righteousness all the way to the final station of Paradise, where he or she will drink of kawthar the blessed water of Paradise.

The people of loss and perdition wander in the pits of heedlessness and ingratitude to God, the true Owner of the infinite variety of beauty and bounty in the world; those following the way to Paradise, and equipped with reflection, recognize the True Giver of all bounty and obey Him, fully conscious of what believing in Him means. They travel from gratitude to being provided with all bounties, and from bounty to gratitude, in the footsteps of the angels, Prophets, and truthful and loyal believers, and seek God’s pleasure in order to thank Him for His blessings. Using the vehicle of reflection and with the help of remembering God, they surmount all obstacles and, progressing from taking necessary measures (to attain their goal), to submission, and from submission to committing their affairs to the Power of God, they fly through the heavens to their final destinations. [2]

[1] Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Husayn al-Bayhaqi, “Shu’ab al-Iman,” in Kitab al-Sunan al-Kabir, 9 vols. (Beirut, 1990), 1:136; Isma’il ibn Muhammad al-‘Ajluni, Kashf al-Khafa’ wa Muzil al-Ilbas, 2 vols. (Beirut 1351 ah / 1932 ce), 1:311.
[2] There are numerous final destinations. Some of them are entering Paradise, obtaining God’s pleasure, and being rewarded with His vision.(4)

**Chastity of Thoughts**

**Question:** Could you please elucidate the phrases “purity of ideas” or “chastity of thoughts”?

**Answer:** Thought and action are the two most important dynamics that show us the way to truly exist, help us stay as ourselves in the face of fierce storms, and help us change ourselves in the progressive sense. Although thought in its general meaning comes before actions, a certain thought with its intricate and detailed meanings develops within the very process of (putting it into) action. That is, a person can concentrate on a certain subject first, give much thought to it, and try to fathom it correctly. However, only after putting the issue into real life practice will one gain further insight into it, accept and accommodate themselves to it, and found it on a sound basis. This is because implementing what one has thought about will make one face some new situations which will, in turn, lead to deeper thoughts on the issue, and thus the general ideas at the beginning will rest upon unshakable grounds. So be it in a general context or a specific one with lots of details, the most important essential we need to pursue in all of our intentions and thoughts is “purity of ideas.” In this respect, we need to remain faithful to the purity of ideas, seeing it as part of our very character, and protect it under our wings against all odds.

**Sound Thoughts Produce Sound Conduct**

It is possible that some people may adopt negative opinion and attitudes toward us, but others’ wrong attitudes should never lead us to reflect back a similar sort of attitude. Wherever we stand with respect to our essential values, we need to stand our ground against all odds. Otherwise, once our thoughts and feelings begin to waver according to others’ attitudes and behaviors, the wavering will continue and eventually take us off the righteous course. What we need to do, however, is not even let others distract and keep us busy—let alone taking us off course—and try to keep away from every kind of influence that might serve as a provocative factor against our course and our stream of thought. We should know that the real purpose of provocations is to avert the volunteers devoted to high ideals from their path and make them change course, not with the purpose of achieving something else but for achieving this very end.

For this reason, representatives of sound thinking should never change in the face of the inconsistent and baseless claims made by others—of course with the exception of making legal claims by appealing and refuting in order to protect one’s reputation against defamation and using their lawful right to sue them for slander and other violation of rights—and always try to keep up their purity and innocence. We need to think straight at all the times so that the actions we are to build on those thoughts are right and straight. Otherwise, if we move away to one side with every storming wind, we might lose track, fall to other trails, becoming adrift in the end.

**Those Who Think Positively Take Delight in Their Lives**

The Messenger of Allah, peace and blessings be upon him, once stated that a believer’s silence should be reflection (*tafakkur*) and his speaking should be wisdom.”[Daylami, *Al-Musnad*, 1/421] Taking this radiant statement into consideration, we can say that thinking,  imagining, and shooting for good things will be counted as worship for a believer. Even though busying ourselves with seemingly impossible thoughts normally means wasting our energy, if a person cherishes a wish to transform the color and pattern of the world into a more beautiful and vivid one, I think even the dreams and imaginings of that person will take on a hue of worship. Thus, what befalls on believers is to become oriented to such beautiful considerations and lead their lives accordingly. In one of the epigrams at the end of *The* *Letters*, Bediüzzaman states: “Those who attend to the good side of everything contemplate the good; those who contemplate the good enjoy life.” Therefore, someone’s turning his life into a delightful melody and spending his life as if he were walking through the corridors of Paradise depends on his thinking beautifully. However, one’s thoughts also could take people to negative ways, such as hedonism and bohemianism, unless he uses it in a positive way. Also, even imaginings and conceptions that are not channeled toward goodness can make one face such negativities. For this reason, believers must continuously be preoccupied with thoughts that take root in their values, overflow with them, continuously read and think, and feed on their essential sources without leaving any voids in their life. At the same time, they must give their willpower its due to such an extent that they always remain close to the feelings and thoughts that are not granted a visa by their pure conscience. If they are prone to negative winds in spite of all their efforts, they should—as advised by the Messenger of God—try to free themselves from that atmosphere immediately. Otherwise, a person who sets sail into dreams that might corrupt the purity of his mind sometimes may go too far and not have the opportunity to return to the shore (of safety). Therefore, if one does not control the feelings of grudge, hatred, vengeance, and lust, they might break down barriers and thereby cause them to take wrong decisions and commit evil acts. One must give their willpower its due on one hand and ask protection from Allah (SWT) on the other. Those who can achieve this will lead their lives in a greenhouse of Divine protection. But still one should never forget that even the most upright people might topple over, and thus we must never give up our vigilance. When we stumble and lose our balance, we must turn to our Lord and ardently pray like our forefather Prophet Adam (AS) did:  “*Our Lord! We have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and do not have mercy on us, we will surely be among those who have lost*,” (al-A’raf 7:23) then straighten up, and turn toward Him again.

**Desires and Fancies in Guise of Ideas**

Another point to raise in terms of chastity of thoughts is that there is always the possibility of desires and fancies masquerading as ideas to misguide a person. The touchstone to distinguish desires and fancies from true ideas is the religious criteria. For example, if you feel enraged when someone’s words and attitudes bother you, you first need to determine whether there is anything that goes against the Truth. If this is not the case, it means that you are getting angry in the name of your carnal self, which shows that the angered reaction stems from personal desires and fancies. The criterion to use in the face of evil as decreed in the Qur’an is to  “*repel evil with what is better (or best)*” (Fussilat 41:34). Accordingly, if someone does evil to you, the primary response towards him or her must be a smiling face intended to defuse the intensity of their strong dislike and malice. But if the evil in question is directly related to sacred values or public interest, as an individual, we do not have the right to forgive his or her act; one can only forgive and show tolerance towards violations against his or her personal rights. Allah Almighty did not assign anybody as a substitute authorized to forgive violations of His rights. No one should dare make such claims, which are clearly disrespectful of Allah’s rights.

Getting back to our main subject, desires and fancies with no sound base sometimes present themselves in the guise of ideas and try to misguide people, in cooperation with the devil and our carnal soul. One might commit certain wrongs in consequence. You can clearly see this on some debate programs where people try to outwit one another. As if they are fixed on controversy, they always try to say the opposite of what the people before them say, not caring whether it is right or wrong. Let us suppose that one of the people with whom such a person argues says, “Now I am going to show you, by Allah’s grace and permission, a way directly leading to Paradise.” If the gates of Paradise miraculously and suddenly appear wide open before him and enable him to see the wonderful blessings beyond imagination, he will still say, “No, we do not want to enter Paradise. We are trying to win here, and you are trying to stop us and push us to inactivity.” That is, such a person will try to respond with demagogy even against the most plausible words and thoughts. Such words actually stem from one’s desires and fancies and are uttered under the influence of the devil. However, people mistake all of them as stemming from their own thoughts and ideas.

Sometimes, people from among believers can also fall for this trap of the devil and carnal soul. When you ask help from such a person, he might say that he needs to stay where he is so that he can guide many others, attempting to hide his desire for spending more time with his family and enjoying worldly life under the guise of altruism. However, a sincere believer burns with a desire for reunion with Allah (SWT), overflows with a desire for meeting the noble Prophet, and wishes to sit at the table of the Rightly Guided Caliphs and share their atmosphere. In spite of these feelings, a sincere believer watches his step and says: “O Allah, I do not know whether I served my time in this world or not. Therefore, I am afraid of committing disrespect towards You.” The conscience is a very important reference point here. For this reason, one must always judge the words one utters with his or her conscience and seek its righteous counseling at every choice and decision made. If someone can achieve this, he or she will be saved from confusing fancies with guidance and carnal desires with commonsense.

May Allah (SWT) help us purify our thoughts and act sincerely. (5)

**References**

**(1) 7:23.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

**(2) 3:190.The Quran with Annotated Interpretation in Modern English by Ali Unal**

 **(3)** **[Daylami, Al-Musnad, 1/421]**

**(4)Fountain Magazine, Aug 1992, Vol 14, Issue 163**

**(5) Gulen, Muhammed Fethullah. Questions and Answers, Tughra Books Press, Inc.**