

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

1: Fight Shaytan & His Whispers

Have you ever started praying and then found yourself suddenly remembering an item you thought you'd lost or a message you'd forgotten to reply to?

The Prophet ﷺ stated that these recollections during ṣalāh are the work of Shayṭān. Shayṭān is always busy trying to preoccupy you with thoughts of everything other than Allah ('azza wa jall). He ﷺ said, "When the call to prayer is announced, Shayṭān takes to his heels and passes wind loudly so that he does not hear the adhān. When the adhān finishes, he comes back. When the iqāmah is proclaimed, he takes to his heel (again). When the iqāmah finishes, he comes back so that he can obstruct the person's heart with his whispers, saying 'Remember such and such, remember such and such,' things which he did not remember before, to the extent that the person no longer knows how much he has prayed" (Bukhārī).

Ṣalāh is a link (ṣilah) to your Lord which your archenemy, Shayṭān, strives to break by any means. Therefore, he comes to you with all kinds of whispers and doubts.

Shaytan: The Biggest Thief

Shayṭān is like a relentless highway robber. The harder the slave tries to turn to Allah, the harder Shayṭān tries to rob him and divert him from this noble path. It is for this reason that when one of the predecessors (raḥimahullāh) was asked, "Indeed the Jews and Christians say that they do not experience these whispers (in their acts of worship)," he remarked, "They are telling the truth. What will Shayṭān do with a demolished house?"

Anyone who turns to Allah ('azza wa jall) will be assaulted with these kinds of whispers, particularly during the beginning of your journey where Shayṭān will try his best to divert you. At the start of your journey to Allah ('azza wa jall), Shayṭān will have a greater 'share' of your ṣalāh than you. You will then compete with him, going back and forth, until you secure half of it. You must then continue to fight until you can secure all of your ṣalāh. The Prophet ﷺ said, "A man returns from his prayer and only a tenth, ninth, eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth, fourth, third or half of it, is recorded for him" (Abū Dāwūd).

The initial stages of ṣalāh are the period when Shayṭān will try to convince you that this is a lost battle and there is no hope. Do not give up. Remain steadfast and continue to work on your khushū' in ṣalāh.

Shayṭān will not go near the person whose heart has khushū'." – Sahl al-Tustarī (raḥimahullāh)

The Deep Concern of the Sahabah

'Uthmān b. Abī al-'Āṣ (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) came to the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and said, "O Messenger of Allah, indeed Shayṭān comes in between me and my ṣalāh and my recitation of the Qur'ān and causes me to doubt." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ told him, "That is a shayṭān known as Khinzab. When you feel his presence, seek Allah's protection from him and spit lightly to your left three times." He says, "I did that and then Allah made him go away from me" (Muslim).

The aforementioned ḥadīth indicates the importance the Companions (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhum) gave to ṣalāh and the matter of khushū'. It also highlights the existence of a specific shayṭān who is assigned just for this task, showing us the severity of this matter.

Mentally prepare yourself before ṣalāh, and remember you are in a fight with Khinzab. Always be on guard and remember that your enemy is lurking, ready to ambush.

How To Fight Whispers

1. Say: **أَعُوذُ بِاللَّهِ مِنَ الشَّيْطَانِ الرَّجِيمِ** and spit lightly to your left three times as mentioned in the above ḥadīth. Continue to do this whenever you feel his presence, and not just once in a while. (Avoid spitting during the congregational prayers).

2. Ignore the whispers and carry on praying. Fight back the whispers and do not let them drag you down.

3. Try hard not to yawn during prayer, and if this is not possible, then cover your mouth. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "If one of you yawns during ṣalāh, let him suppress it as much as he can as Shayṭān enters (the mouth)" (Muslim).

4. Force yourself to think of what you are saying.

5. Work hard on the other ways of attaining khushū'. They will all aid you in combatting the whispers during your ṣalāh.

Some people mentioned to 'Āmir b. 'Abdillāh b. Qays (raḥimahullāh) that sometimes they lose concentration during ṣalāh. He went on to ask them, "Do you experience this?" They replied, "Yes." He replied, "By Allah, I would rather be struck with spears in my stomach than for this to happen to me in my ṣalāh."

"If you are in ṣalāh and Shayṭān says to you 'You are showing off!' then make your ṣalāh longer." – Ḥarīth b. Qays (raḥimahullāh)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

2: Understand The Meaning & Loftiness Of What You Are Saying

Understanding what you are saying in your ṣalāh will have a profound impact on your khushū'.

To do this, try your best to learn Arabic and understand the meaning of what you say. This will make it easier to focus, thereby enhancing your ṣalāh. Along with understanding what you say, be fully mindful when saying it. Ibn 'Abbās (radiy Allāhu 'anhumā) said, "Only that which you were mindful of in your ṣalāh will be accepted from you."

In every prayer of mine, my only concern has been what I am saying and what is being said to me." – al-Rabī' (raḥimahullāh)

Think back to the last time you found yourself in a foreign country where you barely understood the language. Did you feel lost? Similarly, if you do not understand what you are saying in your ṣalāh, you will feel out of place and not find the peace, belonging and desire to remain in ṣalāh.

Some people avoid learning Arabic as they think it is 'too difficult'. However, this is not true. Like any other language, it will require effort, commitment and time; but the outcome will be sweet.

If you cannot learn Arabic, then, at the bare minimum, memorise and reflect on the meaning of what you say in ṣalāh. This includes: (1) the meanings of the adhkār and (2) the meanings of the small sūrahs.

Moreover, even if the above is not currently possible, then think of death and the Day of Judgement. Think of how it will feel to stand before Allah ('azza wa jall) on that terrifying day. Recall and reflect on the greatness of Allah ('azza wa jall) and bear in mind that He is watching you.

I am amazed at the one who recites the Qur'ān and yet does not know its meaning. How can he enjoy its recitation?" – al-Tabarī (raḥimahullāh)

Move your lips when reciting

Move your lips and tongue when reciting the Qur'ān and the adhkār of ṣalāh. Ensure that you are physically uttering the words in a way that you can hear yourself (assuming you can hear soundly and it is a quiet environment). Merely 'reciting' in your mind is not sufficient and renders your ṣalāh invalid. Reciting in this manner will help you to concentrate and to repel the whispers of Shayṭān.

There is a misconception amongst some that reciting Qur'ān solely in the mind is acceptable (during and outside ṣalāh) and considered 'recitation'. Others are embarrassed to recite audibly due to fear that their tajwīd is not perfect. However, reciting audibly is the best way to feel the beauty and serenity in Allah's words. Remember, even if you are struggling with the recitation, Allah al-Ra'ūf (the Most Compassionate) will grant you two rewards: one reward for the recitation, and another for struggling!

Reflect on what you are saying

Develop khushū' by reflecting on the weight and gravity of what you are uttering. The words may be easy to pronounce, and may roll off your tongue effortlessly, but they are in themselves mighty and heavy. The Prophet ﷺ said that subḥānallāh and alḥamdulillāh fill up what is in between the heavens and the earth (Muslim).

Though it may be difficult to understand, the words of praise and glorification leave the worldly realms and travel up to the Throne of Allah. These words gather around His throne "buzzing like bees, mentioning to Allah the person who uttered them" (Ibn Mājah). Try to imagine that! Visualise the words that you utter ascending upwards and acting as your representatives. And this is only in the world. Imagine their impact in the hereafter, where they will come to your rescue, protect you from the Hell-fire and guide you to Paradise!

A Companion (radiy Allāhu 'anhu) once uttered a sentence of praise in ṣalāh. After the ṣalāh finished, the Prophet ﷺ said that more than 30 angels were competing with each other to ascend with these words to Allah. On another occasion, he ﷺ said that the doors of the heaven opened for a single utterance of the Companion (radiy Allāhu 'anhu) in his ṣalāh! Can you imagine this? One single utterance resulted in the doors of the heaven being opened.

Ibn al-Qayyim (raḥimahullāh) wrote, "By Allah, if you could hear the sound of the pens of the angels writing your name amongst those who remember Allah, you would die out of joy."

Likewise, the Qur'ān is the mighty word of Allah ('azza wa jall). Allah refers to it as a "weighty discourse" (73:5). It is a lofty book, revealed by the Most High from above. Stored in a lofty place, a lofty angel brought it down and conveyed it to the heart of a lofty man: Muḥammad ﷺ. Therefore, whoever becomes of its people -the people of the Qur'ān- becomes lofty in the sight of Allah ('azza wa jall).

The Companion Usayd b. al-Ḥuḍayr (radiy Allāhu 'anhu) was reciting Qur'ān at night. His horse became startled and disturbed, so he stopped reciting. The horse calmed down. When he resumed his recitation, the horse once again became agitated. When this happened a few times, he stopped reciting out of fear that his son, who was lying nearby, would be hurt. After completing his prayer, he looked up at the sky and saw something which resembled a cloud with shimmering lamps dangling from the sky to the earth. The next day he came and related what had occurred to the Prophet ﷺ. The Prophet ﷺ told him, "Those were angels who had drawn near you to hear you recite the Qur'ān. If you had continued, by Allah, you would have witnessed astounding things" (Composite: Bukhārī and Ḥākim).

In summary, reflect on the greatness of Who you are speaking to and reflect on the greatness of what you are saying.

When uttering the adhkār (everything other than the Qur'ān in your ṣalāh), reflect on what each utterance means. Praise Allah ('azza wa jall) with your tongue and heart. Try to feel the depth of the words you are uttering in your heart. When reciting the Qur'ān, remember that you are reciting His words in His presence; so recite them with utmost reverence. When reading the āyāt about Allah ('azza wa jall), let your heart be overcome with humility, awe and love. On reading the āyāt about the stories of the past, reflect on the lessons that they convey. When you read the āyāt of aḥkām (legal rulings), take note of what Allah is asking you to do and make a firm resolution to obey Him. (Adapted from al-'Izz b. 'Abd al-Salām's Maqāṣid al-'Ibādāt)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

3: Vary The Adhkar & Surahs You Recite

What adhkar do you recite in ṣalāh? Are they always the same adhkar? Do you tend to repeat the ones you memorised when you first learnt how to pray?

To avoid monotony in your ṣalāh, try to memorise and pray the different adhkar and du'ās within your ṣalāh (particularly in voluntary prayers). This will increase your khushū', help you to taste the sweetness of ṣalāh, and encourage you to reflect on the words you are saying. The adhkar of the Prophet ﷺ are very powerful and comprehensive. It would be a huge loss to pass a lifetime without having ever invoked Allah (ʿazza wa jall) with these adhkar in your ṣalāh.

Try to alternate the sūrahs you recite during ṣalāh. This will mean making an effort to memorise more of the Qur'ān. Also, make a conscious decision before the ṣalāh to choose which sūrah/dhikr/du'ā you will pray. By the will of Allah (ʿazza wa jall), this will also help to increase your khushū'.

Reflect on the meanings of the various adhkar

Once you have memorised the adhkar, try to reflect on their meanings in each ṣalāh. Your ṣalāh will become lengthier, and the connection between your heart and Allah (ʿazza wa jall) will deepen.

Three Benefits of Varying Your Adhkar

1. Follow the Sunnah more comprehensively.
2. It is a means of reviving the (abandoned adhkar of the) Sunnah.
3. It becomes easier to reflect on the meanings, in comparison to reading out of habit.

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

4: Reflect & Interact With The Qur'an

A powerful way to attain khushū' in ṣalāh is to reflect upon the Qur'ān. This is known as 'tadabbur' in Arabic.

The Qur'ān is the eternal book of guidance. It is a cure for every disease – be it spiritual or physical. It is a light which illuminates the path of truth amidst the darkneses of falsehood. The Qur'ān contains legal rulings for a human to live on Allah's earth, as His subservient slaves. It is a book of blessings and eternal wisdom; a warner and a giver of good news.

Accordingly, reciting the Qur'ān or memorising its words is in itself not enough. Although both of these acts are essential, they must be accompanied by reflection and a deep commitment to 'live' the Qur'ān.

We find that the majority of the Muslims today have limited themselves to repeating the words (of the Qur'ān) and chanting it melodiously in funerals, graveyards and homes, and to carrying muṣḥafs or abandoning them in the homes. And they forgot – or appeared to forget- that the greatest blessing of the Qur'ān is in fact in reflecting upon its verses, seeking to understand it, embodying it as one's character, acting upon its commands and staying away from its prohibitions.” (al-Zarqānī (raḥimahullāh)

Allah says, “ Do they not, then, ponder upon the Qur'ān? Had it been from someone other than Allah, they would have found in it a great deal of discrepancy” (4:82). and “This is a blessed Book which We revealed to you, so that they reflect upon its verses, and those with understanding may take heed” (38:29);

Imām al-Qurtubī (raḥimahullāh) writes, “And this āyah contains the proof for the obligation of knowing the Qur'ān's meanings; and a proof that reciting slowly is better than reciting fast, as tadabbur cannot be performed correctly with fast recitation.”

Al-Sa'dī (raḥimahullāh) explained, “Allah has commanded His servants to reflect on His Book, to ponder on its meanings, and to ponder deeply on its principles and lessons, along with pursuing whatever is necessary to achieve this noble aim. Reflecting on the book of Allah is the key to knowledge and all sciences. It is the source of all good and the fountain of all the sciences. It increases the īmān in one's heart and makes it firmly rooted in it.

The Qur'ān gives the slave the ma'rifah (knowledge and deep awareness) of his Lord; how all attributes of perfection belong to Him, and how He is pure from all deficiencies and shortcomings. It sets out the path that leads to Him, describes the characteristics of the people who are treading this path and what they will attain when they come to Him in the hereafter.

It informs about the real enemy, the path which will lead to punishment, the characteristics of the people who are treading this path, and how they will be justly punished. The more the slave ponders upon the Qur'ān, the more he will increase in knowledge, good deeds and insight.”

For the Messenger of Allah ﷺ and the pious predecessors, tadabbur was not a practice limited to Ramaḍān. It was their way of life. It was how they prayed.

For without tadabbur, there is no ṣalāh.

Reflect: The Qur'ān and You

How would you describe your relationship with the Qur'ān?

When you recite the Qur'ān, do its words pierce your mind?

Do its meanings penetrate your heart?

Does its beauty mesmerise you?

What does the Qur'ān mean to you?

‘From the greatest of voluntary acts through which Allah's Love is earned, is reciting and pondering upon Qur'ān.’ (Ibn Rajab)

The Prophet of Allah ﷺ and Tadabbur

Once Abū Bakr (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) said to the Prophet ﷺ, “O Messenger of Allah, you have become old.” He ﷺ said, “(The sūrahs) Hūd, al-Wāqī'ah, al-Mursalāt, 'Amma Yatasā'alūn and Ithā al-Shamsu Kuwwirat have aged me” (Tirmidhī).

Imām al-Munāwī (raḥimahullāh) mentioned that these sūrahs took a toll on the Prophet ﷺ because they contained descriptions of the horrors of the Day of Judgement and the punishments meted out to earlier nations. They prematurely aged him because he feared similar punishments afflicting his ummah.

Therefore, the Qur'ān cannot just be recited or chanted only for the sake of blessings. Rather, it has to be read with reflection and contemplation. The above ḥadīth demonstrates that the Qur'ān did not just enter the heart of the Prophet ﷺ, but that its impact was so profound that it physically affected him.

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

4: Reflect & Interact With The Qur'an

Why Your Heart Needs Tadabbur

Ibn al-Qayyim (rahimahullāh) wrote, “There is nothing more beneficial for the heart than reading the Qur'an with contemplation and reflection. This is what inspires love and longing for Allah. It generates fear of Him and hope in Him. It makes one turn in repentance to Him and rely on Him. It causes one to fully submit to him, leave matters in His Hands and be pleased with His Decree. It inspires patience and gratitude and is a means of acquiring all of the characteristics which give life to and perfect the heart.

If people knew what recitation of the Qur'an with contemplation contains, they would devote themselves to it at the expense of anything else. When one reads with reflection and comes across an āyah that he needs to cure his heart, he repeats it. He may repeat it a hundred times, or even throughout the entire night, as was reported about the Prophet ﷺ and the early predecessors. Hence, reciting a single āyah of the Qur'an with contemplation and reflection is better than reciting the entire Qur'an without any contemplation or reflection.

This is more beneficial for the heart, more likely to increase one's imān and leads one to taste the sweetness of imān and the Qur'an. This was the habit of the early predecessors, whereby one of them would repeat the same āyah throughout the night until morning came. Likewise, it has been reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ stood repeating one āyah till morning came.”

Abū Dharr (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) said, “The Prophet ﷺ stood reciting an āyah and repeating it until morning came. The āyah was, ‘If You punish them, they are Your slaves, and if You forgive them, indeed You, only You, are the Almighty, the All-Wise’ (5:118)” (Ibn Mājah).

‘ “Do not scatter the Qur'an (i.e. read it hurriedly) like poor-quality dates are scattered, and do not recite it quickly like poetry is recited. Take a pause at its wonders, move the hearts with it, and do not let your concern be to (merely) reach the end of the sūrah.” (‘Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu)

Tadabbur: The Route to Discovering the Secrets of the Qur'an

Spending long hours with the book of Allah and reflecting on it will help us discover its amazing meanings and hidden insights.

Ibn 'Āshūr (rahimahullāh) wrote, “Tadabbur is reflection and pondering, through which a person gains knowledge of the intended meanings. This only occurs in speech which is concise, yet comprehensive in meaning; so that the more a person reflects, the more he discovers meanings which were previously not apparent to him.”

As for the one who does not reflect, ponder and is not blessed with Allah's help in this regard, he will remain ignorant of the amazing secrets mentioned in this Magnificent Qur'an.” (Imām al-Rāzī (rahimahullāh)

‘I have not seen anything that nourishes the mind and soul, protects the body, and guarantees success more than constantly engaging with the Book of Allah.’ (Ibn Taymiyyah)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

4: Reflect & Interact With The Qur'an

Tips for Reflecting Upon the Qur'an

a) Think of Who is talking to you

When you begin reciting the Qur'an, Imām al-Ghazālī (rahimahullāh) advised that you should bring the Greatness of the One who is addressing you to the forefront of your mind. The words you are reciting did not originate from a human being; they are the words of the Lord of the worlds.

“I said to my nafs: ‘O nafs, recite the Qur'an as though you (personally) heard it from Allah when He uttered it.’ I then felt the sweetness (of reciting the Qur'an).” (Sulaymān b. Maymūn (rahimahullāh))

b) Personalise it to Your Life

Ibn al-Qayyim (rahimahullāh) said, “If you want to benefit from the Qur'an, gather your heart when it is recited, focus your hearing, and act like you are being directly addressed by Allah, as it is an address from Him to you upon the tongue of His Messenger ﷺ. Allah said, ‘Indeed there is a reminder in that for whoever has a heart or whoever listens attentively with his heart present’ (50:37).”

Imām al-Ghazālī (rahimahullāh) said, “One is to assume that he is the one who is being addressed in every statement in the Qur'an. Hence if he hears a command or prohibition, he assumes that he is the one who is being commanded and prohibited.

If he hears a promise or threat, he does the same. If he hears the stories of the past and those of prophets, he realises that entertainment is not the objective, but rather, it is for him to take lessons, and to extract from its content what he needs.”

Try to personalise the Qur'an to your situation whilst reciting it. Relate it to your own life and your own experiences. Ask yourself: what is Allah telling me? What is Allah asking me to do? How can I apply it to my life?

The āyah above also alludes to the importance of having a healthy and sound heart. The Qur'an can only benefit you if it finds a suitable recipient to enter: a pure heart. Your heart must be purified from shirk, sins, and the diseases of the heart (e.g. envy, pride, hatred, hypocrisy).

Those before you saw the Qur'an as a correspondence from their Lord; they would ponder upon it at night and review it in the day.” (al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (rahimahullāh))

c) Visualise

Think deeply about the words you are reciting and try to visualise the meaning they are conveying. For instance, when reading about the descriptions of Hell-fire in Juz 'Amma, make the imagery come alive in your mind. To achieve this, repeat the āyāt wherever necessary.

d) Feel the emotion and repeat the āyah

The Qur'an was sent down for us to derive guidance from it and to increase our īmān in Allah, the Prophet ﷺ and the hereafter. Allah says, “And when His āyāt are recited to them, it increases them in īmān” (8:2).

Accordingly, when reciting an āyah about Paradise, feel your longing for Paradise increasing. On feeling this effect in your heart, continue to repeat this āyah.

Similarly, when reciting an āyah about Hell-fire, feel fear in your heart. On feeling this effect, keep repeating the āyah. Let it move you to the point of crying over it.

Similarly, when reading an āyah about the greatness of Allah, feel shyness and awe before Him. Keep repeating this āyah until you feel the effect of it in your heart.

Try to recall the last time you heard Sūrah Yusuf in tarāwīḥ. Did you hear sniffing and people rummaging in their pockets for tissues when the imām recited the latter āyāt of the story? Even though our īmān is weak and we find it easier to cry at the stories which tug at our hearts, the principle is the same.

Whether your recitation includes a touching story or an āyah about the creative power of Allah, let it move you emotionally.

Let it pierce your heart.

“Son of Ādam, how will your heart soften when your only concern is to reach the end of the sūrah?” (al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (rahimahullāh))

Mālik b. Dīnār (rahimahullāh) used to recite the āyah, ‘Had We sent down this Qur'an to a mountain, you would have seen it humbled, burst apart from the awe for Allah...’ (59:21), and then say, “I swear to you, no slave truly believes in the Qur'an except that his heart bursts open.”

e) Interact with the āyāt

Strive to emulate the Messenger of Allah ﷺ by interacting with the āyāt you are reciting during voluntary prayers. When you come across an āyah about mercy, stop and ask Allah for His mercy. When you come across an āyah about punishment, stop and ask Allah's protection. When you come across an āyah where you can make a du'ā', stop and ask Allah.

Imām al-Nawawī mentions that this is mustaḥabb for everyone reciting Qur'an, whether it is within ṣalāh or outside of ṣalāh; whether you are leading the congregation, part of the congregation or are praying alone.

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

4: Reflect & Interact With The Qur'an

f) Study the Qur'an

To achieve the above (points a-e), you will have to make an effort to study and understand the meanings and message of the Qur'an. Some ways you can do this are:

- ✚ Learn Arabic. This will open the door to understanding the meaning of the Qur'an.
- ✚ Learn the meaning of the Qur'an. There are many classes, books, apps and videos dedicated to this subject. Even reading a simple translation is better than not reading one at all.
- ✚ Attend Qur'an classes. Increase your knowledge of the Qur'an by studying it along with the other sciences of the dīn.
- ✚ Listen to reliable tafsīr (explanation of the Qur'an) lectures.
- ✚ Read reliable tafsīr books. Some of these have been translated into English
- ✚ Whenever you are reflecting on the words of the Qur'an, always take heed not to fall into the trap of interpreting the book of Allah according to your own whims and desires, or speaking about His words without knowledge..

Once you have studied the meanings of an āyah and have understood its context and lessons, then you should memorise it, if you have not done so already. Thereafter, recite those āyāt in your ṣalāh – especially in tahajjud. Allah willing, you will feel a huge difference in the sweetness of your ṣalāh. Remember to: (1) personalise, (2) feel the emotion and (3) interact with the āyāt!

“Whoever desires knowledge should read the Qur'an, for indeed it contains the knowledge of the earlier ones and the latter ones.” (‘Abdullāh b. Mas‘ūd raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhu)

“But I am not a scholar...?”

There is a misconception amongst some people that tadabbur is limited to scholars. This is not true. The disbelievers were condemned in the Qur'an for not doing tadabbur. Allah said, “Then do they not reflect upon the Qur'an, or are there locks upon (their) hearts” (47:24)?

Therefore, as believers, we have no excuse for failing to perform tadabbur. Tadabbur is essential to our lives and for building a strong connection with Allah.

Amongst Shaytān's plots is to deter the slaves of Allah from pondering over the Qur'an (tadabbur). This is because he knows that guidance is attained through tadabbur.” (Ibn Hubayrah (raḥimahullāh))

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

5: Recite the Qur'an Slowly And Beautifully

Increase your khushū' in ṣalāh by reciting the Qur'ān clearly and slowly. Beautify your voice as much as you can.

Recite with tartīl

When reciting the Qur'ān, the Prophet ﷺ was instructed by Allah to recite with 'tartīl' (73:4).

Tartīl refers to reciting slowly and calmly, making each word distinct, and not exceeding the limits. Reciting like this ensures that the tongue, heart and the limbs and organs are in perfect harmony with each other. To recite with tartīl, an effort must be made to learn tajwīd. Reciting with tartīl will also help you do 'tadabbur' (reflect on the Qur'ān).

Qatādah (raḥimahullāh) narrated that Anas b. Mālik (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) was asked, "How was the recitation of the Prophet ﷺ?" He replied, "It was elongated. He then recited بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ, elongating بِسْمِ اللَّهِ, elongating الرحمن and elongating الرحيم" (Bukhārī).

Pausing at the end of each āyah is essential as it gives you sufficient time to ponder the words you are reciting. Umm Salamah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anha) said that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ would break down his recitation of Sūrah al-Fātiḥah and would pause at the end of each āyah (Abū Dāwūd).

Ḥafṣah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anha) said, "I never saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ praying voluntary prayers (nawāfil) sitting, until a year before his death. He would pray his voluntary prayers sitting. He would recite the sūrah slowly and distinctly until it would seem to be longer than other sūrahs which were actually longer than it" (Muslim).

Sometimes we recite very fast to complete a sūrah. Similarly, we may witness 'super high speeds' in the tarāwīḥ prayers during Ramaḍān. However, this is contrary to the sunnah and does not help attain the objectives of the Qur'ān. Slow recitation is vital for absorbing the message of the Qur'ān and for reflecting on what Allah is saying.

Repeating certain āyāt is critical if you want to strengthen your īmān through the Qur'ān. This, however, is impossible if your aim is just to reach the end of a sūrah, juz or even the whole of the Qur'ān.

A man came to 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) and said, "I recite all the mufaṣṣal sūrahs in one rak'ah." Upon this 'Abdullāh said, "(Do you recite it) hastily like the recitation of poetry? Indeed, there are people who recite the Qur'ān, but it does not go down beyond their collar bones. However, it benefits when it enters the heart and becomes deeply-rooted in it.

The best of (the actions) in ṣalāh are bowing and prostration. I am quite aware of the similar sūrahs which the Messenger of Allah ﷺ used to combine together: two sūrahs in every rak'ah" (Muslim).

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "There will emerge people from my ummah who will drink the Qur'ān as they drink milk." (Ṭabarānī)

Explaining this ḥadīth, al-Munāwī (raḥimahullāh) wrote, "They recite it quickly with their tongues, without pondering on its meanings, nor reflecting on its commands. Rather, it passes over their tongues just as when milk is drunk, it quickly passes over their tongues."

Beautify your voice

Strive to beautify your voice whilst reciting the Qur'ān, as the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Beautify the Qur'ān with your voices" (Abū Dāwūd). He ﷺ also said, "He who does not recite the Qur'ān melodiously is not one of us" (Abū Dāwūd).

Have you ever wondered what it would be like to hear the Prophet ﷺ recite the Qur'ān? His companion al-Barā' b. 'Āzib (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah ﷺ reciting والتين والزيتون in 'Ishā' and I have never heard anyone who had a better voice or recitation than his" (Bukhārī).

The spiritual intensity of his recitation is indicated in the following ḥadīth: "Allah does not listen to anything as He listens to the recitation of the Qur'ān by a Prophet who recites the Qur'ān audibly and melodiously" (Bukhārī).

Numerous accounts from the companions give us a glimpse into their relationship with the Qur'ān and their beautiful recitation of it.

Once the Prophet ﷺ said to Abū Mūsā al-Ash'arī (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu), "If you were to see me, as I was listening to your recitation last night (you would have felt delighted). You have certainly been given a 'flute' from the flutes of the family of Dāwūd ('alayhis-salām) [i.e. a great melodious voice]" (Muslim).

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

5: Recite the Qur'an Slowly And Beautifully

Cry Whilst Reciting

The purpose of melodious recitation is not merely to ensure the reciting of the Qur'an sounds good; instead, it is to ensure that the recitation is beautiful, with complete focus and khushu'. Such a recitation would inevitably result in the heart being moved. It should increase your fear of Allah and provide peace.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Of those who recite the Qur'an with the best voice is the one who, when you hear him recite, you think that he fears Allah" (Ibn Mājah).

When reciting the Qur'an, try to cry as this was the practice of the pious people of the past. Allah says,

إِذَا تَتْلَىٰ عَلَيْهِمْ آيَاتُ الرَّحْمَنِ خَرُّوا سُجَّدًا وَبُكِيًّا

"When the āyāt of the Most Merciful were recited before them, they used to fall down in prostration, weeping"

The Prophet ﷺ said, "Indeed, this Qur'an has descended with sadness. So, when you recite it, cry. If you cannot cry, then try hard to do so. And recite it melodiously, for he who does not recite it melodiously is not one of us" (Ibn Mājah).

Imām al-Nawawī (rahimahullāh) says that crying during the recitation of the Qur'an is, "A quality of those who have a deep awareness of Allah (ma'rifah) and it is a distinguishing feature of the pious servants of Allah... It has been reported that 'Umar b al-Khaṭṭāb led the congregation in the morning prayer, and recited Sūrah Yusuf. He wept until his tears flowed over his collarbone. Another narration of the report mentions that this occurred during 'Ishā', indicating that this happened repeatedly. Another narration mentions that he cried until the people in the rows behind him heard his weeping."

It is mustahabb (recommended) to cry whilst reciting the Qur'an, and when it is being recited. The way to achieve this is to evoke sadness in the heart by reflecting on the severe threats, warnings and promises; and then reflecting on one's shortcomings regarding them. And if this does not evoke sadness and crying, as it does to the elite (worshippers), then he should cry over the lack of (being able to cry), as this is one of the greatest calamities." (Imām al-Ghazālī (rahimahullāh)

Rate your recitation:

Would the Prophet ﷺ stand and listen to you recite?

'Ā'ishah (radīy Allāhu 'anha) said, "One night, at the time of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ I was late returning from 'Ishā'. When I came after some time, he ﷺ said, 'Where were you?' I said, 'I was listening to the recitation of a man from your companions; I have never heard a recitation or a voice like his from anyone.'"

She says, "So he got up and I got up with him, to go and listen to him. Then he turned to me and said, 'This is Sālim, the freed slave of Abū Ḥudhayfah. All praise is for Allah who has created such men amongst my ummah'" (Ibn Mājah).

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

6: Be Calm & Lengthen Your Salah

Calmness and Tranquility

Attaining khushū' in ṣalāh requires time. Give each posture its due and perform it according to the Sunnah. Be calm and do not rush through your ṣalāh just to reach the end.

Abū Hurayrah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) narrated that a man entered the Masjid to pray whilst the Messenger of Allah ﷺ was in the corner of the Masjid. He then came and greeted him. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to him, "Go back and pray, for you have not prayed." The man went back and prayed and then came to greet him again. The Prophet ﷺ returned his greeting and said, "Go back and pray, for you have not prayed." On the third time, the man said, "Teach me." He ﷺ said, "When you stand up for ṣalāh, perform wuḍū thoroughly, then face the qiblah and do takbīr. Recite what is easy for you from the Qur'ān, and then bow until you feel at rest in your rukū'. Then raise your head until you stand straight. Then prostrate until you feel at rest in your sajdah. Then get up until you feel at rest in your sitting posture. Then prostrate until you feel at rest in your sajdah. Then get up and stand straight. Then do that in your entire prayer"

On another occasion, he ﷺ saw a man who did not perform rukū' properly and was pecking in his sujūd whilst he was praying. So he said, "If he was to die like this, he would die on other than the religion of Muḥammad." Then he said, "The example of the one who does not perform rukū' properly and pecks in his sujūd is like the hungry person who eats a date or two; they are not sufficient for him" (Majma' al-Zawā'id).

Just as eating one or two dates will not satisfy you, rushing through your ṣalāh will prevent you from feeling its sweetness and joy. The ṣalāh will feel laborious and constrictive, and will not nourish your soul. It is for this reason that the Prophet ﷺ forbade us from 'pecking' in our ṣalāh. Pecking refers to the time it takes a bird to peck at its food. The Prophet ﷺ said, "The ṣalāh of a man who does not straighten his back in rukū' and sujūd is not sufficient" (Tirmidhī).

Whilst praying, avoid glancing to your right or left. Do not fidget or play with a thread in your clothes. Instead, be calm, give each posture its due and keep your thoughts focused on Allah. Sa'īd b. al-Musayyib (raḥimahullāh) once saw a man playing with his beard, so he remarked, "If his heart had khushū', his limbs would also have khushū', i.e. they would be still and humble."

'Abdullāh b. Muslim (raḥimahullāh) said about his father Muslim b. Yasār (raḥimahullāh): "When he would pray, it was as though he was a pole. He would not incline like this or like that." He was also described as being like "a discarded cloth" when he would pray. He would say to his family, "Speak, as I do not hear what you say." There was once a fire in his house whilst he was praying. This was mentioned to him and he said, "I did not realise (that it happened)."

Be Eager and Lengthen Your Ṣalāh

Lengthen your ṣalāh to attain khushū'. Do this especially when you feel spiritually inspired and can ward off Shayṭān's whispers. Likewise, aim to lengthen your ṣalāh in virtuous places and during special occasions, such as in the holy cities and during Ramaḍān. Your heart will be more receptive at such times and places, so take advantage by pushing yourself to stand for long durations. Soon, inshā'Allāh, you will taste the sweetness of standing in front of Him and will rush to it eagerly.

'Ā'ishah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anha) narrated that the Prophet ﷺ used to pray (for so long) during the night that his feet would swell up. She asked him, "Why do you do this, O Messenger of Allah when Allah has already forgiven your previous and upcoming sins?" He ﷺ replied, "O 'Ā'ishah, should I not be a thankful slave?" (Muslim).

The Prophet ﷺ would stand up during the night and recite lengthy sūrahs. Ḥudhayfah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) narrates that he saw the Messenger of Allah ﷺ praying at night. He ﷺ "prayed four rak'āt and recited in them al-Baqarah, Āal 'Imrān, al-Nisā', al-Mā'idah or al-An'ām" (Abū Dāwūd).

In addition to qiyām, the Prophet ﷺ remained in rukū' and sujūd for an equally long amount of time. 'Awf b. Mālik (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) says, "I stood up to pray along with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ one night. He got up and recited Sūrah al-Baqarah. When he came to an āyah of mercy, he stopped and made du'ā', and when he came to an āyah of punishment, he stopped and asked for Allah's protection. Then he bowed for as long as he stood (reciting Sūrah al-Baqarah), saying in his rukū': سُبْحَانَ رَبِّيَ الْعَظِيمِ. Then he prostrated for as long as he stood, reciting the (above). Then he stood up and recited Sūrah Āl 'Imrān and then recited many sūrahs, one after the other" (Abū Dāwūd). In another narration, 'Ā'ishah (raḍiy Allāhu 'anha) mentioned that the duration of each of his prostrations would be equivalent to reciting fifty āyāt (Bukhārī).

The Prophet ﷺ would pray for so long that even his Companions (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhum) would become tired. 'Abdullāh b. Mas'ūd (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) said, "One night, I prayed with the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He prayed for so long that an evil thought came to me." It was said, "What was it?" He replied, "I thought of sitting down and leaving him" (Muslim).

The length of the Prophet's recitations and prostrations indicate how much joy and contentment he experienced in his ṣalāh. Following in his footsteps, the Companions (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhum) and the righteous of this ummah have also been known to spend hours conversing and pleading with their Lord. 'Uthmān (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu) would complete the entire Qur'ān in one rak'ah. Similar feats have also been reported about Tamīm al-Dārī, Sa'īd b. Jubayr and Imām Abū Ḥanīfah (raḥimahumullāh) amongst others. Such lengthy acts were only possible because Allah placed barakah in their time.

"If your hearts were pure, they would never have enough of reciting Allah's words." – 'Uthmān b. 'Affān (raḍiy Allāhu 'anhu)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

7: Remember Death & The Hereafter In & Outside Salah

Whenever you stand to pray, pray as though this ṣalāh is your final ṣalāh. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Remember death in your ṣalāh because when an individual remembers death in his ṣalāh, he is more likely to perfect his ṣalāh. And pray the ṣalāh of an individual who thinks he is not going to be able to perform another prayer” (Daylamī).

Whilst praying ṣalāh, imagine that you are standing before Allah (‘azza wa jall) and your reckoning is about to take place. Imagine you are on the Ṣirāṭ (the bridge): try to visualise Paradise in front of you and the Hell-fire beneath you.

During congregational prayers, try to visualise yourself on the Day of Judgement when you are standing in front of Allah (‘azza wa jall) as He says, “And they will be presented before your Lord in rows...” (18:48).

A predecessor (raḥimahullāh) said, “If only you had witnessed one of them when he stood up to pray; when he would stand in his place of prayer and commence with the words of his Master, it would cross his mind that he is now standing in the station where the people will stand in front of the Lord of the worlds. This would rip his heart open and make him forget everything else.”

Allah (‘azza wa jall) says, “And seek help through patience and prayer, and indeed, it is difficult except for those who have khushū’; those who are certain that they will meet their Lord and that they will return to Him” (2:45-6).

This āyah states that in order to enjoy khushū’, you must firmly believe that you will meet Allah (‘azza wa jall). To attain khushū’, strengthen your īmān in the hereafter and in meeting Him. Develop the yearning (shawq) and eagerness to meet Him and see Him in Jannah.

Death

Remembering death is vital to eliminate the love of this world from our hearts and getting closer to Allah. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “Frequently remember the destroyer of pleasures” i.e. death (Tirmidhī).

An effective way to remember death is to visit graveyards. The Prophet ﷺ said, “I used to forbid you from visiting graves, but now go and visit them; for this softens the heart, makes the eyes weep and reminds one of the Hereafter” (Ḥākim).

Whilst visiting the graveyard, Imām al-Qurṭubī (raḥimahullāh) advises one to ponder and think about the lives and deaths of those who have gone. Reflect on how they achieved their worldly ambitions and gathered wealth, but were then cut off from it all. It is no longer of any use. Consider how the earth has wiped away the beauty of their faces; how they have disintegrated in their graves; and how their wives have become widows and their children orphans. Reflect on the folly of being deceived by material means, relying on good health and youth, and attaching oneself to entertainment and leisure. Reflect on the inevitability of ending up where they have ended up. Ponder on the state of the deceased: his legs are destroyed, his eyes have liquified, the worms have eaten his tongue, and the earth has consumed his teeth (adapted from al-Tadhkirah).

Sa‘īd b. ‘Abd al-‘Azīz (raḥimahullāh) used to weep when he would pray and tears would drip onto the mat. **When praying on the mat, the person beside him would hear his weeping**. He was asked, “What is this crying that you do during your ṣalāh?” He said, “Son, why are you asking me this?” The questioner replied, “I am hoping that Allah will benefit me through it.” Sa‘īd said, “I have never stood up to pray except that Hell-fire appears in front of me.”

It was as though he could see Hell-fire burning and raging in front of him, whilst its inhabitants cry out, “‘Lord, let us out, and we will do righteous deeds, not what we did before!’ – ‘Did We not give you lives long enough so that whoever wanted to be mindful could have done so? The warner came to you, now taste the punishment.’ The evildoers will have nobody to help them” (35:37).

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

8: Always Be Mindful That You Are Talking To Allah & That He Is Responding To You

In ṣalāh, you are conversing with your Lord. As you talk to Him, He responds to you. Being mindful of this will increase your khushū' in ṣalāh.

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Indeed, when one of you stands to pray, he stands up and privately converses with his Lord. Therefore, he should be careful in how he converses with Him" (Ḥākim).

Allāhu Akbar! Ṣalāh is your chance to privately converse with your Lord, your Master and your Creator.

This is demonstrated beautifully in the following ḥadīth:

The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "Allah, the Most High, said, 'I have divided the prayer (i.e. the Fātiḥah) between Myself and My slave equally and My slave shall have what he asked for.' Therefore, when the slave says, 'All praises and thanks are due to Allah, the Lord of the worlds,' Allah says, 'My slave has praised Me.' When he says, 'The All-Merciful, the Very Merciful,' Allah says, 'My slave has extolled Me.' When he says, 'Master of the Day of Judgement,' Allah says, 'My slave has glorified Me.' (In another narration, he says, 'My slave has entrusted his affairs to Me.'). When he says, 'You Alone we worship and You Alone we ask for help,' Allah says, 'This is between Me and My slave and My slave shall have what he asked for.' When he says, 'Guide us to the Straight Path, the Path of those whom You have favoured, not of those who incur [Your] anger, nor of those who have gone astray,' Allah says, 'This is for My slave and My slave shall have what he asked for'" (Muslim).

Imagine this! Each time you read an āyah, Allah responds to you. Though you may be a weak, sinful and broken slave, Allah (‘azza wa jall) listens to you! Not only does He listen, but He responds. Continuous awareness of Allah being present, listening and responding will increase your khushū' in ṣalāh.

Ibn al-Qayyim (raḥimahullāh) said, "How extreme is the delight and happiness of the slave when his Lord says 'My slave' three times. By Allah, if the hearts were not clouded by the smoke of desires and lusts, they would erupt from joy and delight when their Lord, Creator and God says, 'My servant has praised Me, My servant has extolled me, My servant has glorified Me.'"

Once, the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said to Ubayy b. Ka‘b (raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhu), "Indeed Allah has commanded me to recite the Qur’ān to you." Ubayy asked him, "Did Allah mention me to you by my name?" The Messenger ﷺ replied, "Allah mentioned you by your name." Upon hearing this, Ubayy started crying (Bukhārī). On hearing that Allah had mentioned him by name to His Prophet, Ubayy was overwhelmed with joy. Similarly, you should feel deep happiness and privileged to have Allah call you "My slave".

To be in direct conversation with the King of kings is truly a privilege. Bakr b. ‘Abdillāh al-Muzanī (raḥimahullāh) said, "Who is like you, O son of Ādam? If you wish to enter upon your Master without permission, you can do so." He was asked, "How so?" He replied, "By perfecting your wuḍū and entering your place of prayer, you have entered upon your Master to speak to Him without any intermediaries."

"It is disliked for a person to stand up for prayer whilst he is feeling lazy. Rather, he should stand up for it happily, eagerly and enthusiastically, as he is conversing with Allah. Truly, Allah (‘azza wa jall) is in front of Him, forgives him and responds to him when he asks from Him."- ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Abbās (raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhumā)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

9: Bring Your Heart To Salah: Love, Hope & Fear

Think of the human being you love the most. Imagine a situation where you have not met for a year. Now is the time for you to finally reunite.

How will you feel? What will be running through your mind? How fast will your heart be beating?

Similarly, every ṣalāh is an occasion in which you reunite with Allah (‘azza wa jall) after having been parted. You should feel the same trepidation and excitement at its arrival. As you journey towards Allah (‘azza wa jall), in and outside of your ṣalāh, there are three primary emotions you should try to cultivate in your heart: hope, fear and love.

“The heart in its journey to Allah is like a bird. Love is its head, and fear and hope are its two wings. When the head is healthy, then the two wings will fly well. When the head is cut off, the bird will die. When either of the two wings is damaged, the bird becomes vulnerable to every hunter and predator.” – Ibn al-Qayyim (rahimahullāh)

Hope

Hope in Allah (rajā’) is the first of these three emotions. Open your heart and allow it to become overwhelmed with the mercy and kindness of Allah (‘azza wa jall). Rajā’ springs from thinking good of Him and attaching your heart to Him. In a ḥadīth qudsī, Allah stated, “I am as My slave thinks of Me” (Bukhārī).

Remember that Allah (‘azza wa jall) wants to forgive you. Allah does not want to ‘catch you out.’ Rather He ‘catches’ you when you fall, so long as you turn to Him. Allah (‘azza wa jall) wants to forgive you, shower you with His mercy and guide you to Paradise. Believe this from the bottom of your heart.

Belief in the heart is not enough however. Your belief must be accompanied by action. You must make a distinction between rajā’ and tamannī (wishful thinking). Tamannī is when you fail to take action, yet you still hope for a good outcome. Conversely, rajā’ is when you take the means and place your hope in Him.

Such a hope, or rajā’, is achieved by acknowledging everything Allah has blessed you with. Always return to the Source of every blessing in your life: Allah (‘azza wa jall), the Supreme Provider (al-Razzāq).

Another powerful way to fill your heart with hope in Allah (‘azza wa jall) is by reflecting on His Beautiful Names. The more you know Allah, the more hope you will have in Him. Allah is al-Muṣawwir (The Fashioner); He has created you in the most beautiful form. Allah is al-Raḥmān (The Extremely Merciful); His mercy encompasses all of His creation. Allah (‘azza wa jall) is The Concealer of sins (al-Sittīr); He (‘azza wa jall) will not expose you despite the multitude of your sins. Allah (‘azza wa jall) is Gentle (al-Rafīq); He loves gentleness. Allah is The Most Compassionate (al-Ra’ūf); His compassion knows no ends. Allah (‘azza wa jall) is The Most Modest (al Ḥayīyy); He feels shy to turn you back, empty-handed.

What choice do you have other than to have hope in Him?

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

9: Bring Your Heart To Salah: Love, Hope & Fear

Fear

Fear is the second emotion which should overwhelm you in ṣalāh. Fearing Allah (‘azza wa jall) should make you tremble in awe of Him and humble you in front of Him.

Some say that we should mainly focus on loving Allah (‘azza wa jall) and having hope in Him. They argue that positivity will bring people closer to the dīn. However, this is misleading and can damage our understanding and application of the dīn. Allah (‘azza wa jall) says, "...They used to race towards the good deeds and invoke Us with hope and fear; and they were humbly submissive to Us" (21:90).

In a ḥadīth qudsī, Allah (‘azza wa jall) says, "By My Glory, I will not combine two fears nor two assurances for My slave: if he feared Me in the world, I will grant him safety on the Day of Judgement. And if he felt safe from Me in the world, I will make him fear Me on the Day of Judgement." (Ibn Ḥibbān)

In life, you tend to run away from what you fear. For example, anyone who is scared of spiders or rodents will freeze or run away upon seeing them. However, fearing Allah (‘azza wa jall) is unique and beautiful. It makes you flee to Him, and not away from Him. The more you fear Him, the more you turn to Him.

A fear of worldly matters is usually accompanied by a dislike of it. However, the fear of Allah is coupled with love and respect. You are in awe of Him. Although Allah (‘azza wa jall) is beyond all worldly examples, think of an elderly grandfather or an older person who is well-respected. As soon as he enters the room, everyone falls quiet out of respect for him. The silence is not because this elder is a tyrant of the household; rather, it is because of the respect that his family accords him. This type of fear is known as haybah or khashyah, a reverential type of fear. It is this emotion that the senior Companion ‘Amr b. al-‘Āṣ (raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhu) felt when he was in the presence of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. He said even though he ﷺ was the most beloved of people to him, he could not describe him. This is because whenever he was in his company, he was unable to look directly at his blessed face. He would lower his head and humbly gaze downwards, out of deep respect and awe.

The fear of Allah (‘azza wa jall) is not an irrational fear. It is a fear built on knowledge. The more you get to know Him, the more you fear Him. You are in constant awe of His majesty, greatness and power.

When the Prophet ﷺ saw Jibrīl (‘alayhis-salām) in his original form, he had 600 wings, and his huge size filled the horizon between the sky and the earth. Jibrīl is the best of angels, who was tasked with the most prestigious responsibility of transmitting the word of Allah. Despite his physical and spiritual greatness, the Prophet ﷺ saw him on the night of Mi‘rāj (ascension) looking like "a worn-out piece of cloth due to the fear of Allah" (Ṭabarānī). Jibrīl’s knowledge of Allah’s majesty and greatness reduced him to this state.

Aim to strike a balance between excessive fear and a lack of fear. If there’s too much fear, you’ll end up in despair. And if there’s too little, you’ll become complacent and feel secure from Allah’s punishment. Fear is a deterrent. It prevents you from becoming distracted, disobeying Allah and falling off the right path.

Three steps to cultivate fear in your heart

- 1) Reflect on Allah’s greatness, grandeur and majesty.
- 2) Reflect on the gravity of standing before Allah (‘azza wa jall), the terrors of the grave, the horrors of the Day of Judgement, the sharpness of the ṣirāṭ and the torment of the Hell-fire.
- 3) Think about your sins and shortcomings. Reflect on how little you have prepared for your journey to the hereafter.

A life between hope and fear

The pious people of the past would advise that during good times, when you are more likely to forget Allah (‘azza wa jall), you should increase your fear of Him. And during difficult times, you should increase your hope in Him. Other scholars stated that throughout one’s life, fear should be dominant over hope; but towards the end of one’s life, hope should become dominant.

When Mu‘ādh b. Jabal (raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhu) was in his final moments, he turned to Allah (‘azza wa jall) and said, "O Allah, indeed I used to fear you, but now I have hope in You. O Allah, indeed, you know that I did not love the world nor want to remain in it for long to dig wells or plant trees. Rather it was to experience thirst in the midday heat during the long fasts; to struggle through standing for hours at night in prayer; and to kneel in the company of scholars in the gatherings of dhikr."

Anas (raḍiy Allāhu ‘anhu) reported that the Prophet ﷺ entered upon a young boy who was dying. The Prophet ﷺ asked him, "How are you?" The boy replied, "O Messenger of Allah, I swear by Allah that I have hope in Allah and I am scared over my sins." The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "These two (qualities) do not gather in a slave’s heart in such a moment except that Allah gives him what he hopes for, and protects him from what he is scared of." (Tirmidhī)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

9: Bring Your Heart To Salah: Love, Hope & Fear

Love

Love is the third – and most important – emotion.

Love is the greatest station the seeker on the path to Allah (‘azza wa jall) can attain. The love of Allah (‘azza wa jall) is the purest and greatest of all loves. It gives life to the heart, it is sustenance for the soul, and is the roadway to eternal success. When your heart overflows with His love, you will experience genuine bliss and contentment. Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullāh) said, “Know that there are three things that push the hearts towards Allah: love, fear, and hope. The strongest of these three is love; and it is something that is sought-after in and of itself, since it is something that is desired both in this world and the hereafter, as opposed to fear, which will disappear in the Hereafter. Allah says, ‘For certain, the friends of Allah shall have no fear, nor shall they grieve’ (10:62).”

Our purpose in life is to worship (‘ibādah) Allah. ‘Ibādah consists of: (1) utmost humility and (2) utmost love. Without love, there is no ‘ibādah. Without love, we fail in actualising our purpose of existence. Love is the ‘soul’ of worship.

Loving Allah (‘azza wa jall) is beautiful. It cannot be compared to loving any of His creation, as His creation will cease to be, whilst He is the Ever-Lasting. His creation has limits, whilst He is the Limitless, the All-Encompassing and the Most Able. Loving Allah (‘azza wa jall) is beautiful because there is no one kinder, more giving and more appreciative than Him. As humans, we are prone to making mistakes, and we are prone to not forgiving those who have erred. On the other hand, Allah (‘azza wa jall) loves to forgive and will forgive us even if we go to Him with mountains of sins. Our fellow humans tire of our persistent questioning and begging. However, Allah (‘azza wa jall), our Generous Lord, does not stop giving and is angered when we don’t ask from Him!

“Love puts the slave on the path to his Beloved; and the speed and strength of his journey to Him is in accordance with how strong or weak this love for Him is.” – Ibn Taymiyyah (rahimahullāh)

Loving Allah (‘azza wa jall) can only be achieved when you prefer Him over everything else. You must love Him more than you love your parents, children, spouse, friends and wealth.

Love – by the consensus of the scholars – is an obligation (farḍ) and one of the fundamental aspects of the dīn. When considering matters that are farḍ in our dīn, loving Allah (‘azza wa jall) does often not cross our minds. Moreover, when we reflect on loving Allah (‘azza wa jall), we tend to equate love to obedience. We often limit our perception of Allah (‘azza wa jall) as someone Very Powerful and Scary. Yes, Allah (‘azza wa jall) is Extremely Powerful, and this should make us tremble, yet equally, there is nothing more soothing and comforting to the soul than His love.

There is a vast difference between someone who obeys Allah (‘azza wa jall) out of love for Him, and someone who obeys Him without love. When a lover obeys his beloved, the obedience is done willingly and sincerely. Such a level of obedience differs from that brought on by force. The former experiences happiness and joy in willingly complying to the orders, whereas the latter feels burdened, and may even resent the order. Love, therefore, is the driving force and the impetus of ‘ibādah.

It is this love of Allah (‘azza wa jall) that makes the slave-Creator relationship special. This love makes the servant eager to be in His company, to converse with Him and do everything possible to please Him. Obedience with love is not just a tick-box exercise that solely involves the fulfilment of obligations. Instead, it consists of a sincere desire to be with Him and remember Him. Love makes the slave eager to meet Him. Love is what makes him cry out in the depths of the night, “My Lord, do not deprive me of the greatest joy: the joy of seeing You in the Final Abode.”

The next time you stand up for your ṣalāh, fill your heart with the aforementioned emotions: hope, fear and love.

– اَللّٰهُمَّ – اِنِّيْ اَسْأَلُكَ حُبَّكَ ، وَحُبَّ مَنْ يُحِبُّكَ ، وَحُبَّ عَمَلٍ يُقَرِّبُنِيْ اِلَيْ حُبِّكَ

(O Allah), I ask You for Your love, the love of those whom You love, and the love of deeds which will bring me closer to Your love (Tirmidhī).

“Know that when the love of Allah (‘azza wa jall) becomes firm in the heart, its effects appear on the limbs: the slave diligently obeys Him, eagerly serves Him, and strives to attain His pleasure. He finds joy in privately conversing with Him, is content with His decree, and longs to meet him. He derives comfort in remembering Him, feels estranged with other than Him, flees from the people, and seeks intimacy with Him in seclusion. The world departs from his heart; he loves everything Allah loves and prefers Him over everything other than Him.” – Ibn Juzayy (rahimahullāh)

During Salah: 10 Steps to Develop Khushu'

10: The Secret Of Salah: Focus Your Heart On Him

We now arrive at the final and potentially the most important way to achieve khushū' in your ṣalāh. Ibn al-Qayyim (rahimahullāh) has described it as 'the secret and essence of ṣalāh.'

The secret of ṣalāh, and what transforms it from being a lifeless body to a real, moving and powerful force is: turning to Allah (‘azza wa jall) fully and completely with your heart. During ṣalāh it is not permissible to turn your face away from the qiblah. Similarly, as His sincere slave, it is not befitting to turn your heart away from your Lord to matters other than Him.

When placing your heart before Allah (‘azza wa jall), do it with utmost humility, as though you are seeing Him. When asked by Jibrīl (‘alayhis-salām) to define iḥsān, the Prophet ﷺ said, "That you worship Allah as though you are seeing Him; for if you cannot see Him, He truly sees you" (Muslim).

The attainment of iḥsān should be every believer's life goal. Iḥsān is to strive to worship Allah with the presence of the heart and watchful awareness (murāqabah). The reward of this will be the best of rewards: seeing Allah (‘azza wa jall) Himself in Jannah inshā'Allah.

Ṣalāh is akin to a heavily guarded treasure chest that can be opened only with a special key. That key is to turn towards Allah (‘azza wa jall) and turn away from everything other than Him.

Go to Allah (‘azza wa jall) with full presence and concentration. Incline to Him completely. Focus on Him Alone. If you turn to Him, He will turn to you. If you turn away from Him, He will turn away from you.

Achieve this by removing the world from your heart and purifying your heart from desires and doubts.

Think of a cup which is full. To add to it, you must first throw out some of its contents. Likewise, the treasures of ṣalāh cannot enter a heart that is filled with concerns for the dunyā, is steeped in desires, and is riddled with doubts. These must first be removed.

Similarly, clear your mind from all evil thoughts and ideas. Instead, steer your mind to think about Allah (‘azza wa jall): His majesty, His beauty, His kindness, His love and His Generosity.

Ḥassān b. Aṭīyyah (rahimahullāh) said, "Indeed two men can be performing the same ṣalāh, but the difference between them is as vast as the distance between the heaven and earth. This is because one of them has fully directed his heart towards Allah (‘azza wa jall), whereas the other one is heedless and inattentive."

"When you stand to pray with humility in front of Allah (‘azza wa jall), then stand as Allah has commanded you to do so. Beware of forgetfulness and being distracted. Beware of Allah (‘azza wa jall) looking at you, yet you look at other than Him. Beware of asking Your Lord for Paradise and seeking His protection from the Hell fire whilst your heart is elsewhere and has no idea of what your tongue is uttering." – al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (rahimahullāh)

The 3 components of focusing your heart on Allah

1- The focus of the heart: Safeguard your heart from desires, from the worldly thoughts and the whispers of Shayṭān as they will reduce the reward of ṣalāh.

2- The focus of iḥsān: Completely give your heart and its focus to Allah (‘azza wa jall). Worship Him as though you see Him.

3- The focus of reflection: Contemplate on the Qur'ān and each component of the ṣalāh with its distinctive characteristics.

Following this chapter's exploration of the ten ways of attaining khushū' in ṣalāh, the next chapter will take you on a journey through ṣalāh. By understanding and recollecting the significance of each posture, you will find your khushū' increasing by the will of Allah (‘azza wa jall).