

Abu Mūsā al-Ash'arī narrated, saying: 'God's Messenger (peace be upon him) addressed us stating five points. He said:

- 1 "God, the Mighty and Exalted, does not sleep
- 2 and it is not for Him to sleep.
- 3 He puts the balance down and up.
- 4 The works of the night are presented to Him before the works of the day, and the works of the day before the works of the night.
- 5 His screen is light". (In a different narration: the fire.)
- 6 Were He to remove it, the light and splendour of His face would have burnt all creatures in His sight'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Muslim, 179.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿God: there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master of all. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him.﴾ (2: 255)
- ﴿Yet there are guardians watching over you, (10) noble recorders, (11) who know all that you do.﴾ (82: 10-12)
- ﴿To Him ascends all good words, and He exalts the good deed.﴾ (35: 10)
- ﴿God is the light of the heavens and the earth. His light may be compared to a niche containing a lamp; the lamp within a glass, the glass like a radiant star; lit from a blessed tree – an olive tree that is neither of the east nor of the west. Its very oil would almost give light even though no fire had touched it. Light upon light! God guides to His light him that wills [to be guided]. God propounds parables for all people, since God alone has full knowledge of all things.﴾ (24: 35)
- ﴿When his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He sent it crashing down. Moses fell down senseless.﴾ (7: 143)

The Narrator

Abu Mūsā, 'Abdullāh ibn Qays ibn Salīm al- Ash'arī (named after Ash'ar, an ancestor of the clan) was a prominent imam and renowned scholar. He was a companion of the Prophet who migrated twice, both to Abyssinia and to Madinah. He was appointed Governor of Basrah during 'Umar's reign. He taught the people of Basrah, helping them to acquire an insight into Islam, the Qur'an and its recitation. His recitation of the Qur'an reflected that his was the best and more melodious voice among the Prophet's companions. He died in Year 50 AH, 670 CE.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us some of the attributes of God, Mighty and Exalted. One such attribute is that He does not sleep. Indeed sleep does not apply to Him, because sleep is a quality of weakness and no weakness may attach to God. He accepts good deeds, elevating these to Himself, and rejects those that are not good. The angels present to Him the deeds done during the night before the start of the day, and present the deeds of the day before the start of the night. The Prophet further tells us that God's screen from His creation is made of light – or from fire. Were He to remove it, the light of His face would burn all creation.



Message and Meaning

The Prophet (peace be upon him) addressed the people, and five points of his address speak of God, the Exalted. These are:



The first is that God does not sleep. Sleep is indicative of weakness, and no weakness may affect God or be attributed to Him. A created being needs sleep because of tiredness and fatigue, but none such applies to God. He created the universe without feeling any tiredness. He says of Himself: ‘God: there is no deity but Him, the Ever-Living, the Eternal Master of all. Neither slumber nor sleep overtakes Him’. (2: 255)



The second statement confirms the first, and the Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us that it is impossible for sleep to affect God. Thus, the first statement means that sleep does not occur to God, while the second means that this is impossible in the first place. It is impossible because sleep involves absence of attention, which is contrary to His awareness of all His creation at all times, and that He holds the heavens in His hand. Were He to sleep, heaven would fall on earth and the system of the universe would become dysfunctional.



The third point states another attribute, namely that He conducts matters fairly. He grants some people abundant sustenance while giving others in scant measure, or He may give some people high position while keeping others in humble positions, but all this He does according to His wisdom and justice. Likewise, He fairly weighs people’s deeds which are presented to Him, elevating the good deeds and rejecting those that are not good. He says: ‘To Him ascends all good words, and He exalts the good deed’. (35: 10)



Point number four tells us that all people’s deeds are presented to Him every day. The angels whose task it is to record people’s deeds done during the day present these to God, Mighty and Exalted, before the start of the night, while the deeds done during the night are presented to Him before the start of the day. There is no delay or slackness. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘Angels take turns in attending you through the night and through the day. They meet together during the Fajr and ‘Aṣr Prayers. Then those who were with you during the night ascend. Their Lord will ask them, yet He knows better than them: How did you leave My servants? They will say: “We left them praying, and they were praying when we joined them”’.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 555; Muslim, 632.

5

The fifth point states that God is screened from His creation with a screen of light, while another version suggests that the screen is made of fire. He describes Himself thus: 'No power of vision can encompass Him, whereas He encompasses all vision; He is above all comprehension, yet is all-aware'. (6: 103)

There is no contradiction between the two versions describing the screen as being of light or fire, because the fire has both qualities of giving light and burning. It is possible that God takes away the quality of burning, giving His screen only the quality of light, while the fire of Hell burns but has no light. By contrast, all lights of our world, whether natural like the sun or manufactured, have both qualities of light and burning.

6

Were God to remove that screen, the beauty and splendour of His face would burn everything that sees God or God sees it. This, in effect, means the burning of all creation. When He revealed Himself to the mountain, which is solid rocks, the mountain went crashing down: 'When his Lord revealed His glory to the mountain, He sent it crashing down. Moses fell down senseless'. (7: 143) What would happen if God reveals Himself to man?



Implementation

1

The best thing speakers do is to speak about God, the Exalted. It is important, therefore, for our speech to be adorned with mentioning Him, speaking at times about His names and attributes and at others about his commands and prohibitions. Muslims can also speak about the accounts He gives us of former people and their fate, so that we can take heed.

2

God's attributes are matters beyond our knowledge. We should take them from what God and His Messenger say. We simply take this and limit ourselves to it, even though it may appear little. We believe in these attributes, neither treating them as devoid of meaning nor comparing them to the qualities of created beings. We limit ourselves to God's own description of Himself: 'Nothing bears even the slightest comparability to Him. He alone hears all and knows all'. (42: 11)

3

When you go to bed, assign your affairs to God and go to sleep in security. God does not sleep, and sleep does not apply to Him. He is the best of guardians, and of all those who show mercy, He is the Most Merciful. Hence, the Prophet recommends us to say in our supplication as we go to bed: 'My Lord, I surrender my face to You; I submit myself to You; I place my back under Your protection; in hope and fear of You. There is no refuge and no safety from You except with You'.⁽¹⁾

4

Always remember that God is near and that He sees all. He does not sleep when an oppressor or watchguard sleeps, allowing some people to be tempted to commit some sin. Nor is He unaware of you when you wake up to spend time in night worship and pray to Him to bestow mercy on You and to grant you of His favours.

5

Be satisfied with what God determines for you, making your sustenance plentiful or scanty, or granting you success or failure, whether in study, business, reputation, job or position. God gives everyone their shares on the basis of His wisdom and justice. Muslims should always be careful to do their best in what pleases God.

6

Everyone should hasten to turn to God in repentance and seek His forgiveness of any error they might have committed, so that repentance is expressed before deeds are presented to God. Remember that the 'works of the night are presented to Him before the works of the day, and the works of the day before the works of the night'.

7

It is important to do some good every night and day. Dāwūd al-Ṭāṭī said: 'The night and day are stages at which people stop, one stage after another, until they reach the end of their journey. If you can have at each stage some provisions for what comes next, do so, because the end of your journey is really close. Indeed it is quicker than you think. Equip yourself for your journey and complete what you want of your affairs, because it may all end suddenly'.⁽²⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 247; Muslim, 2710.

2 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Hikam*, Vol. 2, p. 382.

8

People love beauty in everything, whether it is the beauty of self and qualities. None and nothing is more beautiful than God. His screen is light.

9

Be mindful to surrender yourself to God in all He says and in all His rulings. There are matters which God has determined in His infinite wisdom, but we do not know their reasons. Hence anyone may ask: Why do we not see God in this life of ours? Whoever asks this question does not know that the reason is that we are weak and lack the necessary strength for that. God's screen is light. Were this screen to be removed, the beauty and light of His face would burn everything that sees God or is seen by Him.

10

A well-known Arab maxim says: What remains after having known God except diligence in what earns His pleasure?



