

بسم الله الرحمن الرحيم

THE BROTHER OF DEATH

Too much of it results in lethargy, too little of it causes fatigue, yet sleep is an undeniably priceless bounty from Allah.

و هو الذى جعل لكم الليل لباسا و النوم سباتا و جعل النهار نشورا

It is He who made the night (like) a mantle for you, the night for repose and the day for rising.¹

و جعلنا نومكم سباتا

And He made your sleep for repose.²

Just as these *aayaat* indicate that sleep is a bounty from Allah, they also allude to the primary purpose of sleep i.e. relaxation. Nevertheless, there is another purpose of sleep.

The Brother of Death

The Arabs often use sleep in the meaning of death and vice versa. They also describe sleep as *Minor Death* and the *Brother of Death*. The incentive being departure of the *rooh* (soul) from the body in both, except that in sleep such departure does not terminate life.³ This notion is evident in the Qur'aan and *sunnah* too.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي يَتَوَفَّاكُم بِاللَّيْلِ وَيَعْلَمُ مَا جَرَحْتُم بِالنَّهَارِ ثُمَّ يَبْعَثُكُمْ فِيهِ لِيُقْضَىٰ أَجَلٌ مُّسَمًّى

¹ Surah Al-Furqaan, Aayah 47

² Surah An-Naba, Aayah 9

³ Tafseer Al-Qurtubi, V.7 Pg.46 and Rooh-ul-Ma'aani, V.4 Pg.22

He is the one who takes you away (grants you sleep) at night and (He) knows what you earn in the day. He then awakens you in the day so that a fixed time may be completed . . .⁴

اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا وَالَّتِي لَمْ تَمُتْ فِي مَنَامِهَا

Allah takes the souls when they die as well as those (souls) who do not die in their sleep . . .⁵

The underlined words in the above *aayaat* are derived from *wafaat* which generally means death. In these *aayaat*, however, they have been utilised in the meaning of sleep. Similarly, when Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* was asked whether there would be sleep in Jannah, he replied: “No! Sleep is the *Brother of Death* and there will be no death in Jannah.”⁶ The du’aas Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* read before sleeping and upon awakening reflect the same sentiment.

اللهم باسمك أموت و أحي

O Allah, with your name do I die and come back to life.⁷

الحمد لله الذى أحيانا بعد ما أماتنا و إليه النشور

All praise is to Allah who restored us to life after giving us death, and unto Him is the resurrection.⁸

Accordingly, this is one of the reasons why Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* used to sleep on his right, facing the *qiblah*.

⁴ Surah Al-An’aam, Aayah 60

⁵ Surah Az-Zumar, Aayah 39

⁶ Tabraani, *Al-Mu’jam Al-Awsat* V.1 Pg.282

⁷

⁸

(Because sleep is a form of death, and that is how the dead are placed their graves.)⁹ Anyway, having understood that sleep is the *Brother of Death*, we conclude that another objective in sleep is to remind man of death and resurrection. In the words of Ibn-ul-'Arabi (ra), Allah created sleep so that man would know the manner of transfer from one condition to another and the mode of exiting one abode to another.¹⁰

Does Allah Sleep?

When the Bani Isra-eel asked Moosa (as) whether Allah sleeps, Allah said to him: "O Moosa! They ask you whether your Rabb sleeps. Hold two glasses in your hands and stand the whole night." After one third of the night, Moosa (as) dozed off and fell on his knees but immediately woke up and caught the glasses. In the latter part of the night, however, he fell asleep and dropped the glasses which broke to pieces. Thus, Allah said to him: "O Moosa! If I were to sleep, the skies and earth would perish just as these glasses perished in your hands."¹¹ Allah says in this regard:

لَا تَأْخُذُهُ سِنَّةٌ وَلَا نَوْمٌ

*Neither drowsiness nor sleep overcomes Him.*¹²

⁹ Mulla 'Ali Al-Qaari, *Jam-'ul-Wasaa'il*, V.2 Pg.74

¹⁰ Abu Bakr bin Al-'Arabi, *Qanoon At-Ta'weel*, Pg.136

¹¹ Tafseer Ibn Katheer, V.1 Pg.331

¹² Surah Al-Baqarah, Aayah 255

The Sleep of the *Ambiyaa*

In his footnotes on the *Jalaalayn*, Shaikh Ahmad As-Saawi (ra) defined *sinah* (the Arabic word for drowsiness in the above *aayah*) as sleepiness of the eye (the eyes are asleep but the heart is still awake). This, he adds, is the sleep of the *Ambiyaa*.¹³ Since the dreams of the *Ambiyaa* are *wahi*, their hearts never sleep. Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said about himself:

تنام عيني ولا ينام قلبي

*My eye sleeps but not my heart.*¹⁴

The Different Levels of Sleep

Initially it may seem that there are fifteen synonyms for sleep in the Arabic language. Arab linguists have, however, identified minute differences between them. The result is that there are ten levels of sleep.

Level 1	النعاس	When man starts feeling sleepy.
Level 2	الوسن	When the need to sleep increases.
Level 3	الترنيق	When the eyes become droopy
Level 4	العمى ، الكرى	When man is half asleep.
Level 5	التغفيق	When man is asleep but he can still hear the people around him.
Level 6	الإغفاء	A light sleep.
Level 7	التهميم ، الغرار ، التهجاع	A short sleep.

¹³ *Haashiyah As-Saawi*, V.1 Pg.112

¹⁴ *Saheeh-ul-Bukhaari*, Hadith 3569

Level 8	الرقاد	A long sleep.
Level 9	المجود ، المبحوع ، المبعوع	A deep sleep.
Level 10	التسبيخ	The deepest sleep. ¹⁵

The reason for mentioning these levels of sleep and the terms used for each is to give the reader a glimpse into the richness of the Arabic language.

Sleep in the Qur'aan

With regards the Sleepers who slept in a cave for more than three hundred years, Allah said:

فَضَرَبْنَا عَلَى آذَانِهِمْ فِي الْكَهْفِ سِنِينَ عَدَدًا

Many translate this *aayah* as: *We put them to sleep for many years in the cave.*¹⁶ Although this translation is correct, it does not convey the beauty of the rhetoric of the Qur'aan. Considering the words used for: *We put them to sleep*, a more appropriate translation would be: *We drew a curtain over their ears for many years in the cave.* In the light of Arabic rhetoric, this *aayah* is comparing the act of making somebody sleep to the drawing of a curtain. This is called *isti'arah tab'iyyah*.¹⁷ Alternatively, it is comparing the ears of a sleeping person to a window, doorway etc. This is called *isti'arah makniyyah*. Certainly this is not the occasion to elaborate on these

¹⁵ Abu Mansoor Tha'aalabi, *Fiqh-ul-Lughah*, Pg.128

¹⁶ Surah Al-Kahf, Aayah 11

¹⁷ *Haashiyah As-Saawi*, V.2 Pg.6

phenomena. Nevertheless, the reason for raising the issue is to highlight the benefit of the Qur'aanic expression. It does not merely mean: We put them to sleep. Instead, it means: We caused them to fall into a deep sleep. In the early stages of sleep, the eyes are shut but sounds are still audible. Should we say: *the eyes are asleep but not the ears*? People who fall asleep in the classroom or in a pre-*khutbah* talk would easily identify with this. In short, inaudibility of sound indicates deep sleep. Furthermore, sleep is mostly disturbed by sound (noise) and sound is heard by the ear. Thus, Qurtubi (ra) says: *The ear is the organ through which sleep is disturbed most.*¹⁸

People suffering from certain illnesses (e.g. diabetes) often suffer from interrupted sleep. Thus, although he slept for seven hours (from 9am to 4pm), he woke up twice in-between. However, we understand from the same *aayah* that the Sleepers slept for more than three hundred years uninterrupted. Abu Hayyaan (ra) explained that the word *darabna* indicates *luzoom*.¹⁹ We generally translate *luzoom* as attachment. In the context of our discussion, it would mean uninterrupted sleep.

Isn't the discussion on this *aayah* amazing? No wonder Qurtubi (ra) said that this *aayah* is among the literary marvels of the

¹⁸ *Tafseer-ul-Qurtubi*, V.10 Pg.235

¹⁹ *Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet*, V.7 Pg.144

Qur'aan regarding which the Arabs acknowledged inability to compose anything similar.²⁰

Shaytaan Urinated in His Ears

Usage of blocked or shut ears in the meaning of sleep is also found in *hadith*. Referring to a person who does not wake up for *salaah*, Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* said:

ذاك رجل بال الشيطان في أذنه

*That is a man in whose ear Shaytaan has urinated.*²¹

Some scholars aver that this *hadith* is a metaphorical reference to sleep, comparable to the meaning of the above *aayah*. Hence, its meaning is merely that: *Shaytaan has made him sleep so long.*²²

Yet They Were Asleep

Scholars of *tafseer* write that when the Sleepers fell asleep, they did so with their eyes open. Hence, Allah says:

و تحسبهم أيقاظا و هم زُقود

*You would think that they were awake yet they were asleep.*²³

²⁰ *Tafseer-ul-Qurtubi*, V.10 Pg.234

²¹ Saheeh-ul-Bukhaari, Hadith

²² *Tafseer-ul-Qurtubi* (V.10 Pg.235) *Al-Bahr-ul-Muheet* (V.7 Pg.144) *Fath-ul-Baari* V.2 Pg.35)

²³ Surah Al-Kahf, Aayah 18

The reason for using the word *ruqood* instead of a derivative of *nawm* (the most common word for sleep) is noteworthy. *Ruqood* is the plural of *raaqid* which is derived from the verbal noun *ruqaad*. If you refer to the different levels of sleep, you would see that *ruqaad* is used for a long sleep.²⁴ Considering that the Sleepers slept for more than three hundred years, is this not more appropriate? This is an example of one of the secrets of the Qur'aanic miracle – most accurate choice of words. Anyway, this means that a more accurate translation of the above *aayah* would be: *You would think that they were awake yet they were sleeping for a long time.*

Another Opinion

Some linguists translate *ruqaad* as a sweet but short sleep. They then explain that although the sleepers slept for more than three centuries, Allah describes their sleep as *ruqaad* because the people of the Sleepers (their families, neighbours etc.) thought they had died and compared to death, sleep is short.²⁵

The People of Taqwa

Among the salient qualities of the people of *taqwa* is that they spend most of the night in *nafl salaah*. The result being that they hardly sleep at night. Thus, Allah says about them:

²⁴ Abu Mansoor Tha'aalabi, *Fiqh-ul-Lughah*, Pg.128

²⁵ Raaghib Asfahaani, *Mufradaat-ul-Qur'aan*, Pg.201

كانوا قليلا من الليل ما يهجعون

*They sleep little during the night.*²⁶

In this *aayah* Allah used the word *hujoo'* instead of *nawm* for sleep. Considering that the meaning of *hujoo'* is to sleep at night,²⁷ the reason is obvious. Some experts translate *hujoo'* as a deep sleep. Its usage in this *aayah* is still very appropriate. They sleep so little at night that the seldom enjoy a deep sleep. This is yet another example of the accurate choice of words in the Qur'aan.

Alluding to the same meaning (that the people of *taqwa* hardly sleep during the night), Allah says in another *aayah*:

تتجافى جنوبهم عن المضاجع

*Their sides are aloof from the beds . . .*²⁸

Engrossed in *nafl salaah*, they do not sleep. Hence, their sides are *aloof from the beds*. In Arabic, figurative speech of this type is called *kinaayah*.

Beneficial and Non-Beneficial Sleep

The following has been abridged from *Madaarij-us-Saalikeen* and *Zaad-ul-Ma'aad* of Ibn-ul-Qayyim (ra).²⁹

²⁶ Surah Adh-Dhaariyaat, Aayah

²⁷ Raaghib Asfahaani, *Mufradaat-ul-Qur'aan*, Pg.537

²⁸ Surah As-Sajdah, Aayah 17

1. Sleep is only beneficial when one is tired. Sleeping when one is not tired has an adverse effect on the body resulting in lethargy.
2. One should sleep eight hours daily. More or less than this may be harmful.
3. Sleeping in the early part of the night is more beneficial than sleeping in the latter part of the night.
4. The most beneficial sleep is between the first half and last sixth of the night.
5. Sleeping in the middle of the day is better than sleeping in its two ends. The benefit of sleep decreases and its harm increases according to its closeness to the two ends of the day, especially after *'asr* and in the early morning. This, however, does not apply to a person who stays awake the whole night.
6. Sleeping between the *fajr salaah* and sunrise is disliked because:
 - a. It is an excellent and extremely virtuous time for *'ibaadah*.
 - b. This is when *rizq* (sustenance) and *barakah* (blessings) descend.
 - ~ Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* made *du'aa* that Allah gives his followers *barakah* in this part of

²⁹ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Madaarij-us-Saaliheen* (Pg.325) and *Zaad-ul-Ma'aad* (V.4 Pg.227)

the day. Hence, he would dispatch his armies in this part of the day.

~ Sakhr bin Wadaa'ah (ra) was a wealthy Sahaabi. The cause of his wealth is that he would always dispatch his salesmen in this part of the day.³⁰

~ Ibn 'Abbaas (ra) saw one of his sons sleeping in the early morning. He reprimanded him saying, "Wake up! Do you sleep while *rizq* is being distributed?"

c. This is the *key* to the rest of the day. It determines the quality of the rest of the day.

7. Hence, pious people do not sleep until sunrise even if they were awake the whole night making '*ibaadah*. Sleeping in this time should be treated like the consumption of swine, carrion etc. And should only be resorted to when there is no other option.
8. Sleeping between '*asr salaah* and sunset is worse than sleeping between '*fajr salaah* and sunrise.
9. Sleeping in the very beginning of the night, between sunset and disappearance of the glow in the horizon, is of no benefit and was disliked by Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* also.
10. It is best to sleep on one's right. Frequent sleeping on the left is harmful for the heart.
11. Sleeping on one's back is improper. However, there is no harm in lying on one's back without falling asleep.

³⁰ Sunan Abu Da'ud (Hadith), Sunan Tirmidhi (Hadith)

12. Sleeping on one's stomach is the worst. It has been described by Rasulullah *sallallahu alaihi wasallam* as a *jahannami* form of sleep³¹ and abhorred by Allah.³²

Spiritual Inhibiter

Sleeping more than necessary is a waste of valuable time. Such sleep also results in lethargy, lack of desire to engage in '*ibaadah*', further wastage of time and ultimately a heart that is spiritually deficient or dead. Hence, scholars of *tasawwuf* regard excessive sleep as a major spiritual inhibitor. Nevertheless, insufficient sleep is also detrimental resulting in bad character, feeble understanding, inability to engage in '*ibaadah*' and even necessary worldly activity and a host of other ailments that may inhibit one's ability to benefit from his heart and body. *Existence is based on moderation. One who is moderate will receive his (full) share of goodness.*³³

Mundane or Worship?

Imaam Ghazzaali (ra) noted in his universally acclaimed *Ihya-ul-'Uloom* that actions which are merely permissible (resulting in neither reward nor punishment)³⁴ may be transformed into acts of worship or sin by means of *niyyah* (intention).³⁵ Hence,

³¹ Sunan Tirmidhi (Hadith 2769)

³²

³³ Ibn-ul-Qayyim, *Madaarij-us-Saaliheen* (Pg.325)

³⁴ The *shar'i* name for such actions is *mubaah*. They result in neither reward nor punishment.

³⁵

if a person sleeps with the intention of resting in order to be early for the *fajr salaah*, then such sleep becomes an act of worship for which he will be rewarded. Similarly, one could intend revitalising the body in order to diligently engage in 'ibaadah or da'wah in the course of the day or earning a *halaal* livelihood which is also compulsory. Considering that there are twenty four hours in a day and the average person sleeps eight hours daily, is this not a boon for the Believer? Why waste one-third of your life sleeping? Enhance this 'ibaadah of sleep even more; sleep in the *sunnah* manner (on your right, facing the qiblah), read the *du'aas* for sleeping and observe the other *aadaab* (etiquettes) of sleeping.

Finally, I terminate this discourse on sleep with a famous Arabic adage:

مَنْ أَكْثَرَ الرِّقَادِ حُرِمَ الْمَرَادِ

One who sleeps too much will be deprived of his objective.

و آخر دعوانا أن الحمد لله ربّ العا

Abu Hudhaifa Muhammed Karolia

3rd Safar 1437 / 15 November 2015

Jaami'ah Mahmoodiah

Dar-ul-Uloom, Springs