

150516 - What is meant by thinking positively of Allah, and practical examples thereof

the question

Allah, may He be exalted, says in the hadith qudsi: "I am as My slave thinks I am..." Does this mean that if a person thinks that Allah's mercy is greater than His punishment, he will be dealt with on the basis of mercy more than on the basis of punishment, and vice versa? How should he strike the balance in the light of this hadith?

Detailed answer

Firstly:

Thinking positively of Allah, may He be exalted, is a great act of worship of the heart, but many people have not understood it correctly. We will explain the view of Ahl as-Sunnah wa'l-Jamaa'ah with regard to this act of worship, and explain how the early generations understood it and put it into practice:

Thinking positively of Allah, may He be exalted, means: believing in what is appropriate to Allah, may He be exalted, of names, attributes and actions; believing in the great impact that they have on His creation, such as believing that Allah, may He be exalted, bestows mercy on those who deserve it, and pardons them if they repent and turn to Him, and He accepts their deeds of obedience and worship; believing that Allah, may He be exalted, has great wisdom in all that He wills and decrees.

Whoever thinks that thinking positively of Allah, may He be exalted does not have to be connected to striving is mistaken and has not understood this act of worship correctly. Thinking positively of Allah cannot be sound when one is not doing obligatory deeds or when one is committing sins. Whoever thinks that is deceived, his hope is blameworthy hope, he is resembling the Murji'ah who were innovators, and he is feeling secure from the plan of Allah; all of these are serious problems which will lead one to doom.

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

This highlights the difference between thinking positively of Allah and being deceived. If thinking positively of Allah motivates a person to strive in righteous deeds and it prompts him, helps him and drives him to do such deeds, then it is sound. If it causes him to be lazy and to persist in sin, then he is deceived. Thinking positively of Allah is hope, so if a person's hope in Allah prompts him to be obedient to Him and deters him from disobeying Him, then it is sound hope; if he justifies his negligence on the basis of hope, and his hope prompts him to be negligent and heedless, then he is deceived.

Al-Jawaab al-Kaafi (p. 24).

Shaykh Saalih al-Fawzaan (may Allah preserve him) said:

Thinking positively of Allah must be accompanied by avoidance of sin, otherwise it comes under the heading of feeling secure from the plan of Allah. Thinking positively of Allah whilst taking measures that lead to good and refraining from measures that lead to evil comes under the heading of praiseworthy hope.

As for thinking positively of Allah whilst failing to do obligatory duties and doing haraam actions, that comes under the heading of blameworthy hope and feeling secure from the plan of Allah.

Al-Muntaqa min Fataawa ash-Shaykh al-Fawzaan (2/269).

Secondly:

The basic principle concerning the Muslim is that he should always think positively of his Lord, may He be exalted. The situations in which it is most required of the Muslim to think positively of his Lord, may He be exalted, are two:

1. When doing acts of obedience

It was narrated that Abu Hurayrah (may Allah be pleased with him) said: The Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Allah, may He be exalted, says: 'I am as

My slave thinks I am, and I am with him when he remembers Me. If he remembers me to himself, I remember him to Myself; if he remembers Me in a gathering, I remember him in a gathering better than it; if he draws near to Me a handspan, I draw near to him an arm's length; if he draws near to me an arm's length, I draw near to him a fathom's length; if he comes to Me walking, I go to him at speed.'"

Narrated by al-Bukhaari (7405) and Muslim (2675).

It may be noted that in this hadith, the connection between thinking positively of Allah and doing righteous deeds is very clear, and it is followed by encouragement to remember Allah, may He be glorified and exalted, and to draw close to Him by doing acts of obedience. So whoever thinks positively of his Lord, may He be exalted, that will motivate him to do good deeds.

Al-Hasan al-Basri (may Allah have mercy on him) said: Verily the believer thinks positively of his Lord, therefore he does righteous deeds, and the evildoer thinks negatively of his Lord, therefore he does evil deeds.

Narrated by Ahmad in az-Zuhd (p. 402).

Ibn al-Qayyim (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

Whoever reflects upon the matter properly will realize that thinking positively of Allah will lead to doing righteous deeds, because the only reason for doing righteous deeds is his thinking positively of his Lord and believing that He will reward him for his deeds and accept them from him. So what motivates him to do good deeds is his thinking positively of Allah. Hence the more he thinks positively of Allah, the better his deeds will be. But thinking positively of Allah whilst following whims and desires is a kind of failure....

To sum up: Thinking positively of Allah can only be accompanied by taking measures and striving to save oneself. But if a person is following the path of doom, that cannot be called thinking positively of Allah.

Al-Jawaab al-Kaafi (p. 13-15).

Abu'l-'Abbaas al-Qurtubi (may Allah have mercy on him) said:

It was said that what is meant is thinking positively that Allah will respond when offering supplication (du'aa'); thinking positively that He will accept one's repentance when repenting; thinking positively that He will forgive when seeking His forgiveness; thinking positively that He will accept good deeds when doing them according to the prescribed conditions, believing strongly that His promise is true and His grace is abundant.

I say: This is supported by the words of the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him): "Call upon Allah being certain of a response." Narrated by at-Tirmidhi with a saheeh isnaad. This attitude is also necessary in the case of repentance and seeking forgiveness, and striving to do what is required, being certain that Allah, may He be exalted, will accept one's deeds and to forgive one's sins, for Allah, may He be exalted, has promised to accept sincere repentance and righteous deeds.

But if a person does these deeds believing or thinking that Allah, may He be exalted, will not accept them and that they will not benefit him, this comes under the heading of despairing of the mercy and grace of Allah, which is one of the gravest of major sins, and the one who dies in that state will meet the fate that he expected.

As for expecting forgiveness and mercy whilst persisting in sin, that is pure ignorance and deceit, and it is akin to the way of the Murji'ah.

Al-Mufhim Sharh Muslim (7/5,6).

1. At times of calamity and when death approaches

It was narrated that Jaabir (may Allah be pleased with him) said: I heard the Prophet (blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) say, three days before he died: "No one of you should die except thinking positively of Allah." Narrated by Muslim (2877).

In al-Mawsoo'ah al-Fiqhiyyah (10/220) it says:

The believer is obliged to think positively of Allah, may He be exalted, and the time when it is most essential to think positively of Allah is when calamity strikes and at the time of death. Al-Hattaaab said: It is recommended for the one who is dying to think positively of Allah, may He be exalted. Although thinking positively of Allah is particularly emphasized at the time of death and during sickness, the accountable person should think positively of Allah at all times. End quote.

See: Sharh Muslim by an-Nawawi (17/10).

From the above, it is clear that thinking positively of Allah, may He be exalted, should not be accompanied by failing to do obligatory duties or committing sins. Whoever thinks that that will benefit him has not affirmed for Allah, may He be exalted, the names, attributes and actions that are appropriate to Him in the proper manner, and he is thereby following a path that will lead to doom. As for the believers who know their Lord, they do good deeds and think positively of their Lord, believing that He will accept those deeds from them, and they think positively of their Lord at the time of death, believing that He will pardon them and have mercy on them, even though they have shortcomings; so they have the hope that He, may He be exalted, will grant them that as He has promised them.

And Allah knows best.