

تَزْكِيَةُ النَّفْسِ

SPIRITUAL PURIFICATION RETREAT

TABATTUL

(A STATE OF ABSTINENCE IN WORSHIP)

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Tabattul

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بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ



Our topic, Tabattul, is a topic that really doesn't get much attention. But it's one of the important ranks for the forerunners on their journey to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. And the purpose of engaging in the discussions that we've been having — like this topic today or the related topics that we've been talking about — the purpose of that is to purify one's heart. It's similar to how you would use a mirror to adjust your outer, physical appearance. The topics that we've explored these meanings, they served as a reflection to enhance your inner self.

Tabattul is abstinence. It refers to a state of detachment in the context of 'Ibādah. It signifies detachment from everything with complete devolution to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and turning towards him in Ibādah. It's the detachment of the heart from worldly beings. It's complete, deep love of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and an alignment with what draws one closer to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى in what fulfils His pleasure. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى told his Messenger,

وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا

Devote yourself to Him with complete devotion.

So it's devotion, and it's not just devotion, it's complete, full devotion. The Messenger ﷺ was never unaware of Tabattul. He knew it. How do we know he knew it? It was evident when he was inspired to worship in Ghār Hirā, where he received the revelation and the mission. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى still told him,

وَاذْكُرْ اسْمَ رَبِّكَ وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا

Remember the Name of your Lord, and devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly.

Even though he knew it. He was inspired of it, even before messagehood. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى ordered him to do Tabattul even though he already knew of it, to emphasize to the Messenger ﷺ to continue on that path, to continue doing it.

Tabattul is to be attached to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and to worship Him at all times until death.

وَأَعْبُدْ رَبَّكَ حَتَّى يَأْتِيَكَ الْيَقِينُ

And worship your Lord until the inevitable comes your way.

It's not to worship Allāh سبحانه وتعالى until a person gets what he wants and then he stops. There's a difference between someone who serves another just for a payment and a return and someone who serves continuously, non-stop, out of loyalty, out of love, out of fear, or out of the combination of all of that. A hired worker, for example, the plumber or electrician that you bring to do the job for you, as soon as you pay him after he finishes his job, he's gone. A servant or a slave *stays*. Tabattul means you're a slave of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, so you dedicate your entire life to being a slave of Allāh, an 'Abdullāh. A loyal slave of Allāh never leaves when he gets what he desires, because he's the slave of Allāh, and a slave never runs away from his master, because they may fear the master. Imagine when you're the slave of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. The decision of a slave to remain and not flee is influenced not only by fear, but it could be by love as well, or the combination of both. In Junior High, when they taught us about slavery in the United States, it was noted that sometimes during attempts to escape, some enslaved individuals would inform their masters about the planned flight. Why? Because they felt a sense of loyalty to them due to their kindness. Their masters were kind to them. Considering the immense kindness and Ni'am of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى that He bestows on all of us — who would ever wish to flee from Him? And

beyond that, who would desire to escape the great privilege and honor of being a servant of Allāh, an ‘Abdullāh? A Mutabattil consciously decides to serve Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, recognizing that being a servant of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى is the greatest honor that one can attain.

Ibn Al-Qayyim رحمه الله تعالى in Madārij As-Sālikīn said that Tabattul has two key aspects or elements. It requires a connection and a disconnection. Both are essential to attain the status of Tabattul. الانفصال, disconnection or separation — and what he means by that is that one's heart must detach from personal desires or anything that competes with what Allāh سبحانه وتعالى wants from you. It's disconnection or separation from distractions that draw one's heart away from Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, whether it's out of fear or desire or any other reason — anything that diverts the heart away from Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. After الانفصال you need to connect, which is الاتصال. That can only happen after the disconnection. الاتصال, the connection, is about the hearts bond and connection with Allāh سبحانه سبحانه وتعالى. It's connecting to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى by turning towards Allāh سبحانه وتعالى with your heart sincerely and completely in love, fear, repentance, reliance, and in everything else. You disconnect your heart and free it from attachment to others. True detachment is not merely letting go of worldly possessions while still holding them in your heart. It's about removing the desire for them from your heart even while you still possess them. How many men can testify that their hearts are truly attached to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى alone? How many mothers can say that their real attachment is not to their husbands or their children, and their real attachment is to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى alone? Anyone who disconnects from Allāh سبحانه وتعالى ends up being humiliated and a slave of creation like himself.

Establishing a connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى involves engaging in various acts of ‘ibādah throughout one's day in order to foster a continuous relationship with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. A person who maintains a connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى from the moment they wake up until the moment they go to bed, while avoiding distraction on that spiritual path, they will discover Allāh سبحانه وتعالى will fulfil their needs. He will alleviate their concerns. He will instill love for Him in their hearts. He will engage their tongues in His remembrance, and

He will direct their actions towards his obedience. Engaging in various acts of ‘Ibādah strengthens your bond with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى — the connection. Remembering Allāh سبحانه وتعالى blessings strengthens your connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. The more you reflect on the blessings that Allāh سبحانه وتعالى bestowed upon you, the stronger your connection to Him will become. That will lead you to detach from worldly distractions. In times of hardship and solitude, who remains by your side when other creations depart? It’s Allāh سبحانه وتعالى who granted you all that you possess.

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ اذْكُرُوا نِعْمَتَ اللَّهِ عَلَيْكُمْ

O People! Remember Allāh’s favors upon you.

Du‘ā serves as a means of connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. When you make Du‘ā, you have a connection with Allāh and only He knows about it. In moments of uncertainty, turn to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى in Du‘ā. When you seek something, make Du‘ā. When you experience fear, rely on Du‘ā. And also following the orders of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى also strengthens your connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Following Allāh سبحانه وتعالى commands fosters a deep love for Him and it enhances your relationship with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Engaging in Salāh, Qiyām, ‘Ibādah, Hajj, ‘Umrah, and charity — all those acts bring you closer to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى.

قُلْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ

Say, [O Muḥammad], "If you should love Allāh, then follow me, [so] Allāh will love you and forgive you your sins. And Allāh is Forgiving and Merciful."

It ends up making you love Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and He will love you. So to recap, to strengthen your connection with Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, free your heart from what distracts you in your path on to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Stay in constant obedience, remember Allāh سبحانه وتعالى's blessings, and make Du'a.

And for Tabattul you also need to disconnect from your Nafs. It's impossible to completely separate yourself from your Nafs, because your Nafs is an essential part of your existence throughout your life. However, you can create a distance from the desires associated with the Nafs by continuously choosing to act contrary to those desires and in accordance to what Allāh سبحانه وتعالى wants. The Nafs is inclined towards indulgence in matters like desires, laziness, eating, drinking, and so on. Tabattul is practiced by resisting the temptations of the Nafs in ways that align with the Will of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. And it's also essential, not only to detach yourself from the desires of the Nafs and the whispering of the Shaytān, but to also eliminate any distractions that may impede your journey towards Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. When some people are completely focused on business, their main goal is to dedicate all their energy and all their efforts into business. Everything they do revolves around business. Their mind is set on it. Happiness is when they profit, sadness is when they lose. Meetings, gatherings, talks — it's all about business. They prioritize their business goals and will connect to anything that will make their business successful, and they'll disconnect from everything that goes against their business. Tabattul means to shift that focusing energy entirely to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى by letting go of anything that gets in the way. Some people live their whole lives for sports. When you see them or you talk to them, they can tell you everything about sports. Whether it's soccer, football, or any other sport. They can tell you about the players more than they can tell you about the lives of the Sahābah رضي الله عنهم أجمعين. Their laptops and their phones, both externally and internally, are filled with information and pictures about their favorite players and teams, because that's what they're truly passionate about. That's their entire world and that's their life. Their focus and goal is on the sport of the season. They connect to matters pertaining to sports and disconnect from

what doesn't pertain to sports. They put their energy into activities that don't involve Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. You sit with them and open topics other than sports and they'll show no interest. Talk about the Qur'ān and Sunnah — they're disconnected from that because they're connected to something else. A Mutabattil's mindset differs significantly from that of a businessman or a sports enthusiast or anyone with any Dunyā pursuit, no matter what it is.

A Mutabattil finds joy in his 'Ibādah and he experiences sadness when he misses out on a moment that could be spent in 'Ibādah. Their constant pursuit is to seek refuge in Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Their talk and interest is about Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. And the status of Tabattul is a constant presence in an individual's life. It remains with one at all times in every location. It's not a part-time thing. A Mutabattil might be physically among others, but their soul and spirit is wandering around the 'Arsh of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. They interact with people through their appearance and speech, but deep inside they're filled with a sense of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى Greatness and Majesty. They celebrate with others in their happiness, yet their heart is heavy with fear and respect for their Lord. They feel sorrow alongside others, but their spirit is filled with peace and joy in what Allāh سبحانه وتعالى has decreed. They're like a presence that's both there and not there. Existing among people, yet feeling a deeper connection beyond the physical presence. Some of Imām Ahmad's students said, *"We've never heard him talk about any Dunyā matters."* A practical example that's close to home, those who are familiar with my father — may Allāh سبحانه وتعالى grant him a long life full of deeds — they can attest that when he's present, he actively participates in discussions that relate to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. However, if the conversation strays from that topic — even if it's among the Halāl and Mubāh topics — you'll observe him seated at times, but it's very evident that his thoughts and expressions are elsewhere. He's there, but he's not really there. He's immersed in his own reflections, supplications, and Adhkār, or at times, he may just choose to leave and depart.

Now keep in mind, the biggest, most significant form of Tabattul is turning away from any type of Shirk. That's the essence and meaning of Al-Hanīfiyyah and that's why after the verse about this in the Qur'ān,

وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا

And devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly

The verse after that is about Tawhīd.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقِ وَالْمَغْرِبِ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ فَاتَّخِذْهُ وَكِيلًا

[He is] the Lord of the East and the West; there is no deity except Him, so take Him as Disposer of [your] affairs.

The Lord of the East and the West, لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا هُوَ, take Him *alone* as a Wakīl. After Tabattul, Tawhīd is emphasized. A person can only be truly described as a Mutabattil if they fully dedicate themselves to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and by not looking to others beside Him or having Shirk in their 'Ibādah. If someone worships Allāh سبحانه وتعالى but also includes others in that 'Ibādah, they cannot be considered true servants of Allāh سبحانه وتعالى. Also Ibn Wahib said that Tabattul is to completely worship Allāh سبحانه وتعالى alone. To devote yourself entirely for Allāh سبحانه وتعالى,

فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ

Once you've completed your essential worldly affairs and obligations, then dedicate yourself to 'Ibādah.

Zayd Ibn Aslam and Ad-Dahhāk said فَإِذَا فَرَغْتَ فَانصَبْ is when you're done with your Jihād, then dedicated yourself to your 'Ibādah. Meaning go from 'Ibādah to 'Ibādah, back to back 'Ibādat. Tabattul is also being sincere in Da'wah. Qatadah said, *"Tabattul is to be sincere in worshipping Allāh سبحانه وتعالى and in Da'wah."*

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَىٰ بَصِيرَةٍ

Say, "This is my way; I invite to Allāh with insight..."

And Allāh سبحانه وتعالى also said,

وَمَنْ أَحْسَنُ قَوْلًا مِّمَّنْ دَعَا إِلَى اللَّهِ

And who is better in speech than one who invites to Allāh...

Ibn 'Abbās رضي الله عنهما said about Tabattul,

أَخْلَصْ لَهُ إِخْلَاصًا

Devote yourself to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى with the utmost sincerity.

وَمَا أُمِرُوا إِلَّا لِيَعْبُدُوا اللَّهَ مُخْلِصِينَ لَهُ الدِّينَ

And they were not commanded except to worship Allāh, [being] sincere to Him in religion...

Make your intention to seek the pleasure of Allāh وتعالى سبحانه alone in all visible and hidden acts of 'Ibādah in order to seek the pleasure of Allāh وتعالى سبحانه. Mujāhid said, "وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلًا" is being sincere in Du'ā," Just like the Hadīth that we went over many times,

وَإِذَا سَأَلْتَ فَاسْأَلِ اللَّهَ، وَإِذَا اسْتَعَنْتَ فَاسْتَعِنْ بِاللَّهِ

When you ask (for anything), ask it from Allah, and if you seek help, seek help from Allah.

And just like the poet said,

لَا تَسْأَلْنِ ابْنَ آدَمَ حَاجَةً .. وَسَلِ الَّذِي أَبْوَابُهُ لَا تَحْجُبُ

Do not ask the son of Adam for anything, but ask the One whose doors are never closed.

اللَّهُ يَغْضَبُ إِنْ تَرَكْتَ سُؤَالَهِ .. وَابْنُ آدَمَ حِينَ يُسْأَلُ يَغْضَبُ

Allah becomes angry if you leave asking Him, and the son of Adam becomes angry when asked.

And there's other Ahādīth that deter from Tabattul. There's other Ahādīth where Tabattul is not praiseworthy. The practice of entirely withdrawing from

marriage as a form of ‘Ibādah, similar to what is in some of the Christian traditions where they abstain from marriage and go to the monastery. That, in Islām, is deterred from. That can be referred to as Tabattul from marriage, but it’s not the proper, permissible, praiseworthy Tabattul. Abstaining from marriage, even though it’s not a proper ‘Ibādah, was referenced by the term of Tabattul in a Hadīth. It was referred to as Tabattul because, as we said, the literal meaning of Tabattul is abstinence. Maryam عليه السلام for example was called Maryam Al-Batūl. Al-Batūl comes from the same root word that we’ve been talking about. She abstained from men, or she abstained from Dunyā. In Bukhāri and Muslim, Sa’d Ibn Abi Waqās said,

رَدَّ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ ﷺ عَلَى عُثْمَانَ بْنِ مَظْعُونٍ التَّبَتُّلَ وَلَوْ أَدِنَ لَهُ لَا خُتَصَيْنَا

Allāh’s Messenger objected to ‘Uthmān Ibn Maz’ūn living in celibacy. If he had given him permission we would have had ourselves castrated.

The Messenger ﷺ rejected the idea of celibacy. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى told his Messenger,

وَتَبَتَّلْ إِلَيْهِ تَبْتِيلاً

And devote yourself to Him wholeheartedly

The Messenger ﷺ showed us the proper Tabattul and the disparaged, improper, wrong Tabattul. If you overexert yourself in ‘Ibādah to the point of fatigue, in certain situations, that may be deterred from. Especially if one drains himself to

the point where he doesn't continue with the 'Ibādah. In Bukhāri and in Muslim, when the Messenger ﷺ entered the Masjid, he saw a rope hanging in between two pillars. He said, "What is this?" They said, "This rope is for Zaynab رضي الله عنها. When she gets tired from standing in Salāh she holds onto the rope so she can remain standing in Salāh." The Messenger ﷺ said,

حُلُوهُ، لِيُصَلَّ أَحَدُكُمْ نَشَاطَهُ، فَإِذَا قَتَرَ فَلْيَتَعَدَّ

"Remove the rope. Pray as long as you feel active. When you get tired, relax and sit down."

The reason 'Ibādāt like that would be disliked is so a person doesn't stop doing them in the future. In Sahīh Bukhāri and Muslim, the Messenger ﷺ entered upon Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها and she had a woman from Bani Asad and the Messenger ﷺ asked her who she was. Ā'ishah رضي الله عنها said, "She's a woman who does not sleep at night because she's engaged in prayer all night long." And the Messenger ﷺ disapproved of that. He said,

مَهْ عَلَيْكُمْ مَا تُطِيقُونَ مِنَ الْأَعْمَالِ، فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَمَلُّ حَتَّى تَمَلُّوا

Do good deeds that are within your capacity. Allāh سبحانه وتعالى never gets tired of giving reward until you get tired of doing your deeds.

Similar in meaning is the Hadīth that's in Bukhāri and Muslim,

يَا أَيُّهَا النَّاسُ عَلَيْكُمْ مِنَ الْأَعْمَالِ مَا تَطِيقُونَ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يَمَلُّ حَتَّى تَمَلُّوا وَإِنَّ أَحَبَّ الْأَعْمَالِ إِلَى اللَّهِ مَا دُوِّمَ عَلَيْهِ وَإِنْ قَلَّ

O people, perform such acts as you are capable of doing, for Allah does not grow weary but you will get tired. The acts most pleasing to Allah are those which are done continuously, even if they are small.

He mentioned the reason why it's disliked. It's disliked if it's over one's capacity and ability. The acts most pleasing to Allāh وتعالى سبحانه are those that are done continuously, even if they're not much, even if they amount to little. As long as they're continuous. The reason why the Messenger ﷺ disapproved of what Zaynab رضي الله عنها or what that women from Bani Asad did, the reason why he deterred from it was because they went above their capacity. It's going to wear them out, it's going to tire them out, they're going to get drained eventually, they're going to get wasted. Even if the 'Ibādah that's over one's capacity and ability seems to last for a while, it won't hold up in the long run. That's what the Hadīth is warning from. The Messenger ﷺ wants the 'Ibādah to continue.

There's a lot of other points, but the last point to mention for now is Tabattul cannot also be in innovated practices. Abstaining from marriage, like we said, as an 'Ibādah it is not an act of worship. Nor is standing in the sun, for example, or sitting, and it's even mentioned in a Hadīth in Sahīh Bukhārī. The Messenger ﷺ saw a man standing in the sun and he said, "What's wrong with him?" He was told that he vowed not to speak and he vowed not to sit in the shade. He's going to stay under the sun and he's going to stand and he's going to fast. So the Messenger ﷺ said,

مُرُوهُ فَلْيَتَكَلَّمْ وَلْيَسْتَظِلَّ وَلْيَجْلِسْ وَلْيَتِمَّ صِيَامَهُ

Tell him to speak and to seek the shade and to sit, but let him complete his Siyām.

The Messenger ﷺ ordered him to complete that which was obedience to Allāh سبحانه وتعالى, which was in Mutāba'ah to what Islam taught, and on the matters of disobedience or innovation, he was ordered not to do them.