

Anas ibn Mālik narrated that the Prophet (peace be upon him) said:

1

There shall be no disease transmission

2

and no ill omen.

3

I like good omens. People asked: 'What is a good omen?' He said: 'A good word'.<sup>(1)</sup>

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿Do not, with your own hands, throw yourselves to ruin.﴾ (2: 195)
- ﴿Whenever something fine came their way, they would say: 'This is our due', but whenever affliction befell them, they attributed their ill omen to Moses and those who followed him. Surely, whatever befalls them has been decreed by God, though most of them do not know it.﴾ (7: 131)
- ﴿Say: 'Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us. He is our guardian. In God alone should the believers place their trust'.﴾ (9: 51)
- ﴿No incident can take place, either on earth or in yourselves, unless it be recorded in a decree before We bring it into being – that is easy for God.﴾ (57: 22)

#### The Narrator

Abu Ḥamzah, or perhaps Abu Thumāmah, Anas ibn Mālik ibn al-Naḍr of the Anṣār, was born ten years before the Prophet's migration to Madinah. He was the servant of God's Messenger for ten years. The Prophet prayed to God to bless his life, give him an abundance of wealth and children, give him a long life and to forgive him his sins. Anas became very rich and had many children. He was the last of the Prophet's companions to die in Baṣrah. He died in Year 93 AH 712 CE.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) corrected people's beliefs inherited from the time of ignorance. He states in this hadith that diseases are not transmitted by nature. Their transmission is rather by God's will. He prohibited associating ill thoughts with any particular time, place or person. He liked optimism and having a good feeling when hearing a good word.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 5776; Muslim, 2224.



# Message and Meaning

God sent Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) to call on people to worship God alone and to eradicate all traces of ignorant beliefs. This hadith highlights some of these.



The first thing the Prophet corrects is the notion of disease transmission. He tells us that we must not attribute the transmission of disease from a patient to a healthy person to the disease itself. The hadith does not negate that some diseases are contagious, but simply states that they are not transmitted by themselves or by their nature. It rather happens by God's will. This is confirmed by the fact that if God wills the disease to be transmitted from a patient to a particular healthy person, it will; and if he wills to keep the healthy person safe, the disease will not be transmitted to him through contact. Other evidence of this is that the first outbreak of the disease was not through such contact.

Muslims are commanded to take all beneficial and necessary measures, and to abandon whatever causes harm. Hence, the Prophet (peace be upon him) instructs us to care for our health and to stay away from people who have contracted communicable diseases. He said: 'Run away from a leper as you run away from a lion'.<sup>(1)</sup> He also said: 'If you hear of the plague spreading in a certain land, do not go in, and if it breaks out where you are, do not leave to escape it'.<sup>(2)</sup> He also said: 'No sick flock should be brought close to healthy ones'. This means that no ill person or animal should be brought close to a healthy one, causing his illness to be transmitted to the healthy one.

The message here is that a Muslim should take both measures. He should avoid risk, as God said: 'Do not, with your own hands, throw yourselves to ruin'. (2: 195) Furthermore, he should continue to believe that nothing happens to a person other than what God has willed for him or her, as God says: 'Say: 'Nothing will befall us except what God has decreed for us. He is our guardian. In God alone should the believers place their trust'. (9: 51)



'And no bad omen.' This is an order that we must not be pessimistic and have ill thoughts as a result of anything we see or hear. For example, a person may intend to travel to another country, but he sees a crow or hears of some accident or death or anything similar. He will treat this as an omen and become pessimistic, abandoning his intention to travel, or perhaps continue to entertain forebodings while he is on his journey.

The Arabic word for 'bad omen' is *ṭiyarah*, a word derived from a root that refers to birds and flying. In pre-Islamic days, the Arabs took their omens from birds. If they were about to undertake a serious matter, such as going on a journey, they would get a bird and scare it. If it flew to the right, they thought this was a good omen and they would go ahead with their journey. If it flew to the left, they would take it as a bad sign and abandon their journey. They also associated certain birds, such as the crow and the owl, with bad omens. If a crow cawed on top of a house, they thought it was an announcement of a death in that house. The Prophet also said: 'There shall be

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 5707.

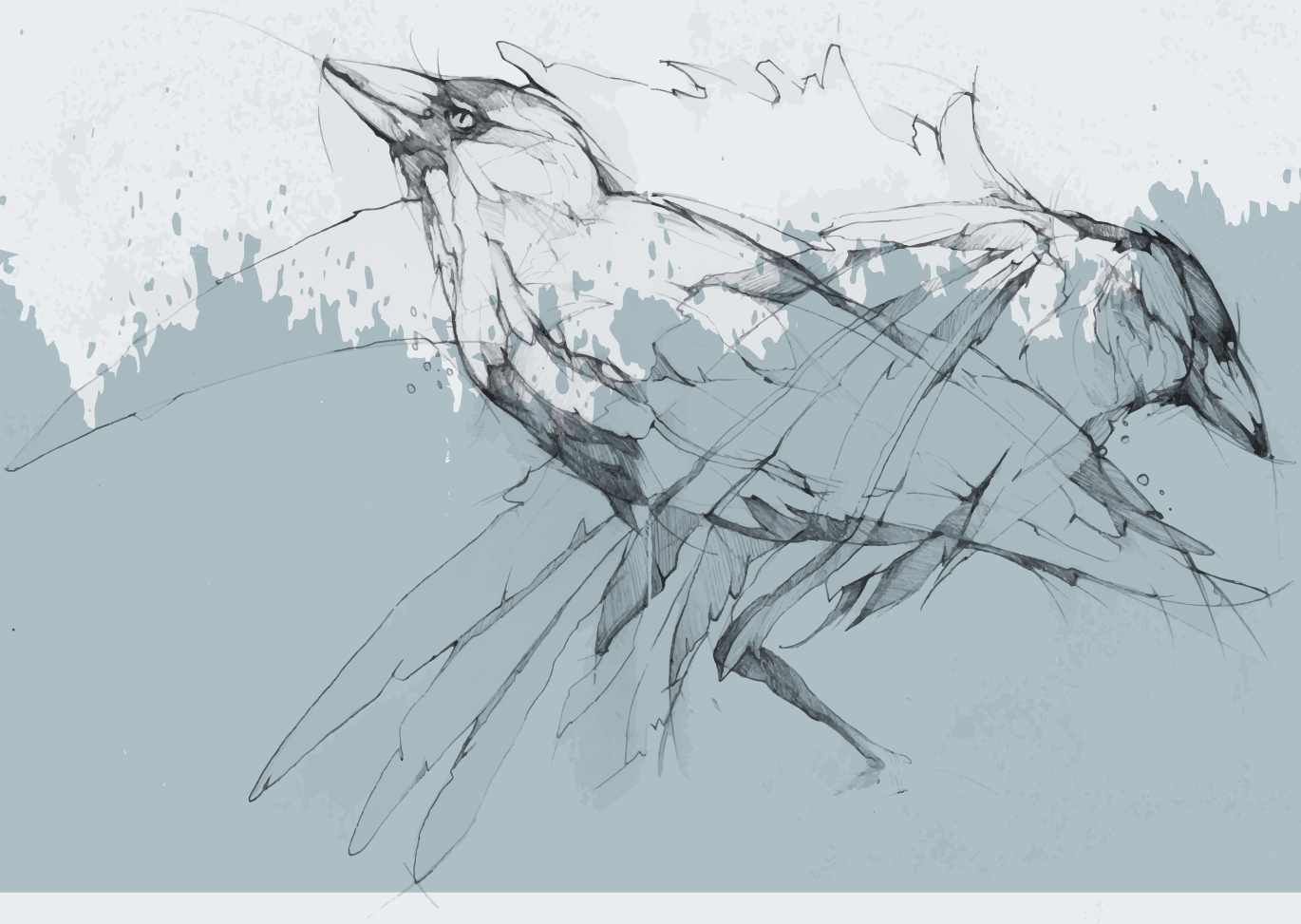
2 Related by al-Bukhari, 5728; Muslim, 2218.

no disease transmission, no ill-omen, no *hāmah*, and no *Şafar*.<sup>(1)</sup> The word *hāmah* refers to the bird bringing bad omens, while *Şafar* is the name of the second month of the lunar year. They used to think that this brought bad omens.



The Prophet then informs us that he liked a good omen, which is a good word felt by the listener to be pleasant. For example, a person might be attending to his business when he hears a man calling his brother by his name, *Muwaffaq*, and he is pleased because the name means well-guided, successful, etc..

A good word gives a pleasant feeling and motivates a person to do what he needs. The Prophet liked such good omen because it does not contradict belief in God's oneness and does not weaken faith. When *Suhayl ibn 'Amr* came to negotiate a peace treaty with the Prophet, the Prophet felt his arrival as a good omen. He said to his companions: 'Your affair is about to get easier'. He said this because the name *Suhayl* is derived from a root that means ease.



1 Related by al-Bukhari, 5757; Muslim, 2220.

# Implementation

1

A Muslim should feel strong, ready to undertake good measures, knowing that everything happens by God's will. Man's role is to rely on God, take the necessary measures and do what he needs to do.

2

Taking the measures that protect us from diseases is perfectly legitimate and is not contrary to the firm belief in God's will, or that what happens could not have been averted. A Muslim should do what he needs to do, knowing that everything is in God's hand and by His will.

3

True reliance on God presupposes acceptance of His will and submission to His commands. Bishr al-Hāfi said that a man claims to rely on God, but in actuality his claim is false. Had he really relied on God, he would have accepted whatever God wills.

4

When an epidemic occurs, such as the plague, Muslims should observe all quarantine measures. They should not enter the affected city, and should not leave it if they happen to be there. A Muslim should always submit himself to God's will. 'Ā'ishah reported that she asked the Prophet (peace be upon him) about the plague and he told her that 'the plague was a scourge God inflicted on whomever He willed, but then He made it a cause of mercy for believers. When there is an outbreak of a plague and a believer stays patiently in his town, knowing that nothing will happen to him other than what God has willed for him, he will earn the same reward as a martyr'.<sup>(1)</sup>

5

Just as he has instructed us to take the necessary measures for safety from communicable diseases, the Prophet also urged us to protect ourselves against bad manners and morality, because these are also contagious. The Prophet told us not to mix socially with immoral people, likening such a person to one who is blowing the fire. He said: 'A good companion and a bad companion may be compared to a person carrying musk and an ironsmith blowing with bellows. The carrier of musk may give you a little of it, or you may buy from him, or you may merely perceive a pleasant scent from him. The one blowing with bellows may either burn your clothes, or you may only receive a bad smell from him'.<sup>(2)</sup>

6

Some communities associate bad omens with some animals, forms, numbers or events. These may be transmitted to Muslim societies through films or stories. If some harm occurs and it happens to fit with any of these, Satan may use it in his whispering. Only the wise reject all such associations.

7

Acting on a bad omen is not only contrary to the basic principle of submission to God and His will and decree; it is also an evil that affects one's heart and mind, deters a person from pursuing his interests, or at least keeps him unsure and confused. He is not assured that nothing happens to him except what God has willed for him. The remedy is to ignore bad omens and try to strengthen one's trust in God and submission to Him and to continue pursuing one's interests.

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 5734.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 5534; Muslim, 2628.



It may happen that a person unintentionally is pessimistic about some particular thing. This is not blameable, but what incurs blame is to accept it and act on it. Ibn Mas'ūd said: 'A bad omen is an act of *shirk*, [i.e. associating partners with God]. Every one of us may experience it, but God removes it through our reliance on Him'.



A Muslim may feel that a good word he hears marks a good omen, such as someone saying to him: 'You will be fine', or he may hear a fine name. A good omen does not repel God's will, but it gives a fine feeling and encourages action. The Prophet liked good omens.



