

Abu Hurayrah narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

1

Look at those below you

2

and do not look at those above you.

3

You will then be less likely to belittle God's favour.⁽¹⁾

From the Qur'an

- ﴿We have made all that is on earth as an adornment in order to test people as to which of them are best in conduct.﴾ (18: 7)
- ﴿Do not turn your eyes covetously towards whatever splendour of this world's life We have allowed many of them to enjoy in order that We may test them thereby. Whatever provisions your Lord may give are indeed better and longer lasting.﴾ (20: 131)
- ﴿And so he [i.e. Qārūn, or Korah] went forth before his people in all his pomp. Those who cared only for the life of this world said: 'Oh, would that we had the like of what Qārūn has been given! He is certainly a man of great fortune!' (79) But those who had been granted true knowledge said: 'Woe to you! God's reward is by far the best for any who believes and does what is right. Yet none can attain this other than those who are patient in adversity'.﴾ (28: 79-80)
- ﴿Is it they who apportion your Lord's grace? It is We who deal out to them their livelihood in the life of this world, and raise some in rank above others, so that some of them may take others into their service. Your Lord's grace is better than all that they can amass.﴾ (43: 32)

The Narrator

The best reports suggest that Abu Hurayrah's name was 'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī who emanated from a branch of the Yemeni Azd. He was born about twenty years before Hijrah and embraced Islam in the year in which the Battle of Khaybar took place, i.e. Year 7 of the Hijri calendar. He remained close to the Prophet (peace be upon him), and was satisfied to have the most simple food. He was very keen to learn and memorize the Prophet's hadiths. He was the companion who narrated the largest number of the Prophet's hadiths. He was Governor of Bahrain for a while, but spent most of his life in Madinah. He died in Madinah in Year 58 AH, 678 CE.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) orders his companions to look at people who are less favoured than themselves in life's fortunes, such as those who are poorer and weaker than them. They should not look up to those who are more favoured in their livelihood, health and other riches. If they act on the Prophet's advice, they will be better able to appreciate what God has given them.

1 Related by Muslim, 2963.



Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) urges his companions, and later Muslims, to look at those who are less favoured than them in wealth, personal qualities and abilities, etc. They should look at the lot of the poor, weak, ill and those who need special care. Then they will realize that they have much of God's blessings bestowed on them and that they are favoured above many other people.

2

The Prophet (peace be upon him) tells us not to look up to those who are richer, stronger and healthier. This is given in the same order as that in the Qur'anic verse: 'Do not turn your eyes covetously towards whatever splendour of this world's life We have allowed many of them to enjoy in order that We may test them thereby. Whatever provisions your Lord may give are indeed better and longer lasting'. (20: 131)





The Prophet explains that when people heed what he tells them, they will be less likely to despise the favours God has given them. When man looks at those who are less favoured in life's matters, he will know that God has given him more than many other people. He will then praise and thank God for His favours and blessings, help others and express his gratitude by improving his worship. If man looks at those who are richly favoured and contemplate how God has given them things in plenty, he will start comparing his lot with theirs, and this may lead him to disdain what God has given him. It may also lead him to harbouring grudges and being envious of others.

The hadith does not mean that people should ignore life's comforts or that they should not benefit by what God has given them. What it means is that a believer should not allow life's luxuries to be the focus of his interests, leading him to be discontented with what God has given him.



Implementation

1

A person may see or hear of someone who is better than himself in some aspect of life. He should deal with any unhealthy thoughts he may have as a result by looking at someone who is less favoured. The Prophet (peace be upon him) advises us: 'When any of you looks at someone who has been more favoured in wealth and form, let him look at someone who is below him over whom he is favoured'.⁽¹⁾

2

A believer should always think of the life to come. He should not give much attention to the luxuries of this present life and should not frequently look at the style of life of those who are affluent. He should remember that God 'has prepared for His devout servants what no eye has ever seen, no ear has ever heard of and no human mind has ever thought of'.⁽²⁾ If one is attracted by some luxury or feels a strong eagerness to have it, he should not dwell on such feelings, but rather remind himself of the splendid life God has prepared for His God-fearing servants.

3

We should change our value system by which we judge the things we see. We should remember that real happiness and true high status are found only in Heaven, where life is forever. In this life, things that people compete for or wish to have are always changing. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: 'No envy is acceptable except in two things: a person to whom God has granted money and enabled him to spend it in what is right and a person to whom God has granted wisdom and he rules according to it and teaches it'.⁽³⁾

4

When Qārūn, i.e. Korah, treated his people unfairly and behaved arrogantly, some weaker elements in his community looked at his riches and said: 'Oh, would that we had the like of what Qārūn has been given! He is certainly a man of great fortune!' (28: 79) They neither protected themselves against the lure of his riches, nor gained a portion of those riches. Their situation is aptly described by the well-known Arabian saying: 'You see something the like of which you cannot achieve in full; yet without it, you are unhappy with your lot'.

5

Ibn 'Awn said: 'I mixed with rich people, but I disdained my clothes and mount when I compared them to theirs. Then I mixed with poor people and I felt comfortable'.⁽⁴⁾

6

When a believer realizes that God has given people their provisions according to His wisdom, he feels easy and does not look at what God has given to all, raising some people above others.

7

What gives a Muslim a genuine feeling of true happiness is to appreciate the numerous favours God has bestowed on him, and to frequently review them and look at the situations of those who are less favoured. He should always remember the Prophet's hadith: 'Whoever wakes up in the morning feeling secure in his dwelling place, enjoying good personal health and having enough food for the day is like one who has the world at his disposal'.⁽⁵⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 6490; Muslim, 2963.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 3244; Muslim, 2824. It is Hadith 40 in this book.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 73; Muslim 816.

4 Al-'Irāqī, *Ṭarḥ al-Tathrib fī Sharḥ al-Taqrīb*, Vol. 8, pp. 146-145.

5 Related by al-Tirmidhi, 2346.

8

When man goes through some trial or suffers a calamity and he looks at those who are less favoured than himself, he feels his calamity to be lighter and the trial easier. He will then be able to endure his trial or calamity with patience and he will thank God for having spared him what is worse.

9

Unanimous religious poetry includes: 'I discovered that contentedness is a gem of riches, and I thus clung to it. It soon gave me a fine suit that always looks new. I, thus, feel rich, yet have nothing, preserving my dignity like a king'.



