

Hadith

'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar narrated:

1

God's Messenger (peace be upon him) held me by the shoulder and said: 'Be in this world as though you are a stranger

2

or a wayfarer'.

3

Ibn 'Umar used to say: 'At evening do not expect [to live till] morning, and at morning do not expect [to live till] evening.

4

Take from your health for your illness

5

and from your life for your death'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 6416.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Provide well for yourselves: the best provision of all is to be God-fearing.﴾ (2: 197)
- ﴿Hasten, all of you, to the achievement of your Lord's forgiveness, and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the God-fearing.﴾ (3: 133)
- ﴿Let them eat and enjoy themselves, and let their hopes beguile them. For they will surely come to know [the truth].﴾ (15: 3)
- ﴿When death approaches any of them, he says: 'My Lord! Let me return [to life], (99) so that I may act righteously in whatever I have failed to do'. By no means! It is but a word he says. Behind them there stands a barrier till the Day when all will be raised from the dead.﴾ (23: 99-100)
- ﴿Mankind! Fear your Lord and fear a day when no parent will be of any avail to his child, nor any child will in the least avail his parents! God's promise is most certainly true. Let not, then, the life of this world delude you, and let not deceptive thoughts about God delude you.﴾ (31: 33)
- ﴿Know that the life of this world is but a play, a passing delight, a beautiful show, a cause of boasting among you and a quest for more riches and children. It is like the rain that causes the plants to grow, and thus gives delight to the sowers. Then it withers, and you can see it turn yellow, and in the end it crumbles into dust. In the life to come there is terrible suffering, as well as God's forgiveness and His goodly acceptance. The life of this world is no more than an illusory pleasure.﴾ (57: 20)

The Narrator

Abu 'Abd al-Rahmān 'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb ibn Nufayl belonged to the 'Adiy branch of the Quraysh. He embraced Islam when he was young. At the time of the Battle of Uḥud, he was too young to fight. His first military effort was the Encounter of the Moat, i.e. al-Khandaq. He also participated in the pledge under the tree. He narrated much useful information from the Prophet, and also from his father 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, Abu Bakr, 'Uthmān, 'Alī, Bilāl, Ṣuhayb and other companions of the Prophet. He issued many fatwas and narrated a large number of hadiths. He died in Year 74 AH 694 CE

Summary

The hadith encourages disregard of the luxuries of this present life and recommends conducting one's life in the same way as a stranger who takes only what he needs on his journey.

'Abdullāh ibn 'Umar used to admonish people along these lines. He encouraged them not to hope for much in this life and not to give it much importance. He recommended that a person should do good deeds when he is in good health, and before he is overtaken by illness or death.



Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) holds ‘Abdullāh ibn ‘Umar by his shoulder, advising him to care little for the comforts and luxuries of this life. He should behave like a stranger living away from his family and hometown. Such a person does not care much for anyone’s friendship, and does not buy a house or build a palace in the place where he is a stranger. Nor does he hold a grudge against anyone. All he cares about is returning to his hometown. Such should be a Muslim’s life in this world, in which he is a stranger. His only care is to equip himself for the life to come, which is his original place of abode. It is where he was at first, in Heaven.

2

Since a stranger may stay for some time in his temporary home and may take up a place of residence and establish relations with its residents, the Prophet (peace be upon him) gives us an even finer perspective to look at the present life from. He tells us to take the attitude of a wayfarer who only stops for a short rest and to obtain what he needs for his journey. He neither seeks a lasting friendship nor looks for a residence. Such should be a Muslim’s attitude in this life: its pleasures do not distract him from looking ahead to reach his place of abode in Heaven.

3

Ibn ‘Umar admonished people, warning them against setting their hopes too far, without preparing for death. Indeed, a Muslim must always look at death as coming soon, within a few hours. At night, he should prepare for the life after death, as though he is going to die before the break of day. The next morning, he should be certain that he may die before nightfall. A person who prepares himself in this way will dedicate his efforts to do what improves his situation in the life to come and he will abandon the attractions and temptations of this life. Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal was asked to define ascetism. He said: ‘To think that this life is very short. It is when a person thinks in the morning that he may not see the evening’.⁽¹⁾

Hoping for a long life is the cause of error. When Satan persuaded Adam and Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, he told them that it would give them a kingdom and eternal life. God says: ‘Satan whispered to him, saying: “Adam, shall I lead you to the tree of life eternal, and to a kingdom that will never decay?”’ (20: 120) A man only treats his brother unfairly and denies him his rights in order to take more of this life’s riches and comforts.

4

Ibn ‘Umar also advised people to make the best of their time of health, before illness and earning their livelihood made it difficult for them to do good deeds for the life to come. Health is one of the greatest blessings, but many people do not make the best use of it. The Prophet says: ‘Two blessings many people handle unfairly: health and spare time’.⁽²⁾

5

He also advises people to prepare for the life to come before death overtakes them. Death means the end of what they can do. It is then that man cries out: ‘When death approaches any of them, he says: “My Lord! Let me return [to life], (99) so that I may act righteously in whatever I have failed to do”. By no means!’ (23: 99-100)

1 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi’ al-‘Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol. 2, p. 386.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 6412.

Ibn 'Umar's advice relies on what the Prophet (peace be upon him) said in this hadith and also from what he said admonishing a certain person: 'Make the best use of five things before you are overtaken by five different ones: your youth before you get to old age; your health before you fall ill; your means before you find yourself in poverty; your time before you are too busy; and your life before you are overtaken by death'.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Ibn Abi al-Dunyā in *Qīṣar al-Amal*, 111; al-Ḥākim in *al-Mustadrak*, 7846.



Implementation

1

The hadith shows how the Prophet took special care of the young ones among his companions, teaching them their religion and admonishing them to care little for this life's comforts. Educators and advocates of Islam should do likewise.

2

Advocates of Islam should concentrate on educating the young generation to give their top priority to the life to come preparing all they can for it. Essentially, they should not be taught to focus their attention on the comforts of this worldly life.

3

The Prophet held Ibn 'Umar by his shoulder in order to keep his attention focused on what he was about to tell him. Scholars and educators should use similar means to keep their audience focused.

4

'Aṭā' al-Sulaymī used to include in his supplication: 'My Lord, bestow mercy on me as I am an alien in this life; bestow mercy on me when I am lonely in the grave; and bestow mercy on me tomorrow when I am standing in front of you'.⁽¹⁾

5

The Prophet (peace be upon him) likens the status of a Muslim in this life to that of a stranger and a wayfarer. The use of similes and metaphors is very useful in making the meaning clear. Educators should always use such methods.

6

The hadith makes clear that God has made this life transitory and finite. Therefore, a believer uses it to take what he needs for his future life. Whoever conducts his life leisurely, thinking that it will last, will lose his future life.

7

'Alī ibn Abi Ṭālib used to say: 'The life of this world is on a journey going away, while the life to come is on a journey coming soon. Each of them has children. Be among the children of the life to come, not those of the present life. The present time is for action but no accounting, while tomorrow is for taking stock, but no action'.

8

The hadith does not mean that one should not work to earn one's livelihood, or that it forbids partaking of the pleasures of this world. The Prophet's own conduct and that of his companions suggest otherwise.

9

Go ahead and never slacken. If you do, you will miss out on your objective and you will perish before you reach your destination.

1 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Hikam*, Vol. 2, pp. 379-378.

10

Muslims of the early generations were always ready for the afterlife. Muhammad ibn Wāsi' was asked: 'How do you feel this morning?' He said: 'What do you think about someone who travels every day a stage towards the Hereafter?' Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī said: 'You are merely a set of days. When a day has passed, a portion of you has gone'.⁽¹⁾

11

Every Muslim should do whatever he can of good deeds without delay. He should make use of the opportunity he has through his health, spare time and life generally. He should think that in the future he may be prevented from doing so, as events, illness and preoccupations may leave him no time to do what he wants.

12

Imam al-Awzā'ī wrote in a letter addressed to a friend of his: 'Be aware that you are surrounded on all sides, and that you are taken a stage further every day and night. Be mindful of God and that you shall stand in front of Him. Be careful of how you wish to meet Him'.

13

Al-Fuḍayl ibn 'Iyāḍ said to someone: 'How old are you?' He said: 'I am sixty'. Al-Fuḍayl said: 'You have been walking towards your Lord for sixty years and you are about to reach your destination'. The man said: 'We all belong to God and to Him we shall all return'. Al-Fuḍayl said: 'Do you know what this means? You say that you are a servant of God and that you are returning to Him. A person who knows this should also know that he will be stood there, and that he will be questioned. He should prepare his answers'. The man asked: 'What is to be done?' Al-Fuḍayl said: 'Easy. Do well in what remains for you in this life, so that you will be forgiven what has passed. If you do badly in what remains for you in this life, you will incur the punishment for what has passed and what remains'.⁽²⁾

14

Ibn 'Umar who narrated this hadith used to implement it. Ṭāwūs said: 'I never saw anyone who is more righteous than Ibn 'Umar'. Nāfi' reports that Ibn 'Umar was ill and he felt a craving for grapes. I bought him a bunch for a dirham and placed it in his hand. A beggar was at the door requesting help. Ibn 'Umar told me to give the grapes to him. I said: 'Eat some of it. Taste it'. He said: 'No. give it to him'. I did that, then I bought the grapes back from the beggar for a dirham and placed them in Ibn 'Umar's hand. The beggar repeated his appeal. Ibn 'Umar told me to give it to him. I said: 'Eat some of it. Taste it'. He said: 'No. give it to him'. I did so, then I again bought the grapes back from the beggar for a dirham and placed them in Ibn 'Umar's hand. The beggar repeated his appeal a third time. Ibn 'Umar told me to give it to him. I said: 'Eat some of it. Taste it'. He said: 'No. give it to him'. I did that and said to the beggar: 'Have you no shame?' Then I bought the grapes once more from the beggar for a dirham, and took them to Ibn 'Umar. He ate them.⁽³⁾

1 Ibn Rajab, *Jāmi' al-'Ulūm wal-Ḥikam*, Vol. 2, p. 382.

2 Ibid., p. 383.

3 Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, *al-Zuhd*, p. 237.

