

Ḥudhayfah narrated:

1

We were at ‘Umar’s when he said: “Who of you heard God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) mention temptations?”

2

Some people said: “We heard it”. He said: “Perhaps you mean the temptation a man may have in respect of his family or neighbours?” They said: “Yes”. He said: “These are erased by prayer, fasting and charity.

4

Who of you heard the Prophet mention the temptations that are like sea waves?” Ḥudhayfah said: “The people there remained silent, but I said: I did”. ‘Umar said: “You did; how good of you”.

5

Ḥudhayfah said: “I heard God’s Messenger (peace be upon him) say: ‘Temptations are held before hearts, one by one, like a straw mat.

6

A heart which takes one will have a black spot and a heart which rejects one will have a white spot

7

until there are two types of heart: one is white and solid like al-Ṣafā which will not be shaken by any test as long as the heavens and earth endure, and the other is black with a little whiteness, like an overturned cup which neither distinguishes what is good nor rejects what is evil, except what it may fancy”.

8

Ḥudhayfah said: “And I told him: Between you and such temptations is a closed door which is about to be broken”. ‘Umar said: “You mean it will be broken? Were it to be opened, it may be closed again”. I said: “No. It will be broken. And I told him that this door is a man who will be killed or will die. That is a statement that is free from error”.<sup>(1)</sup>

1 Related by Muslim, 2948.

### From the Qur’an

﴿Although they may see every sign, they do not believe in it. If they see the path of righteousness, they do not choose to follow it, but if they see the path of error, they choose it for their path; because they disbelieve in Our revelations and pay no heed to them.﴾ (7: 146)

﴿Beware of temptation that does not lure only those among you who are wrongdoers. Know that God is severe in retribution.﴾ (8: 25)

﴿Attend to your prayers at both ends of the day and in the early watches of the night. Surely, good deeds erase evil ones. This is a reminder for those who are thoughtful.﴾ (11: 114)

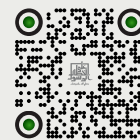
﴿Consider the one who takes his own desires as his deity, and whom God has [therefore] let go astray despite his knowledge [of the truth], sealing his ears and heart and placing a cover on his eyes: who can guide such a person after God [has abandoned him]? Will you not, then, take heed?﴾ (45: 23)

### The Narrator

Abu ‘Abdullāh Ḥudhayfah ibn al-Yamān ibn Ḥisil ibn Jābir migrated with his father to join the Prophet (peace be upon him). They wanted to join the Muslim army which fought the Battle of Badr, but the unbelievers prevented them. He took part in the Battle of Uhud and in the Encounter of the Moat, i.e., al-Khandaq, as well as the later military expeditions. He died in Year 36 AH 657 CE.

### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) states that prayers, ṣadaqah or charity, and good deeds wipe away committed sins. He also states that temptations may occur to a person. If one yields to them, his heart will blacken so that he no longer recognizes right from wrong. He will only follow his own desire. If he steers away from them, his heart will be clear, unperturbed.



# Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet's companions were diligent in learning about Islam and memorizing the Prophet's hadiths. The present hadith mentions that 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb himself discussed with other companions of the Prophet such hadiths. In this case the subject of discussion was the hadith speaking of temptation. His purpose was either mutual remembrance or giving a reminder and admonition.

2

Some of those present said that they heard the hadith he referred to when the Prophet mentioned it. 'Umar asked whether they meant the hadith mentioning the temptation of various matters in which the Prophet says: 'The temptations a person feels concerning one's family, property, oneself, one's children and neighbour are erased through fasting, prayer, ṣadaqah, enjoying what is right and forbidding what is evil'. When they confirmed that this is what they meant, 'Umar told them that such temptations are of the easy type as they are erased by prayer, fasting and charity. They are included in the hadith that quotes the Prophet as saying: 'The five [obligatory] prayers, and Friday Prayer to Friday Prayer, and Ramadan to Ramadan will wipe away what is committed between them unless major sins are committed'.

The temptation a person experiences with regard to his family, wealth and children is that they may lead him to commit what incurs God's displeasure, committing sin and neglecting obligations. This confirms what God says: 'Your wealth and children are only a trial and a temptation, whereas with God there is a great reward'. (64: 15)

As for one's neighbour, the temptation is that a person envies his neighbour the blessings he has, or that he watches his faults which are unknown to others.

3

'Umar said that he was referring to something else. He was looking for the hadith that mentions the general temptations that affect all people and come in quick succession like sea waves. He wondered whether any of the people present had memorized this hadith. All those present remained silent, as they had no knowledge of what the caliph was asking about. Ḥudhayfah, however, stood up and said that he heard the hadith from the Prophet. 'Umar was delighted and said to him: 'How good you are'. This is a free translation of the phrase 'Umar said which, in Arabic, was *lillāh abūk*. Literally, it may be translated as: 'May God be pleased with your father'. Yet the phrase is never used in its literal sense. It is merely a word of praise which uses God's name to add an extra sense of honour. It is the praise of a father for having brought up such a son.



Ḥudhayfah narrated the hadith which mentions that temptations attack people's hearts in succession, one after the other, like the lines of a straw mat. The mat maker brings the straws close together and sews them, leaving no gap between them.



When a person yields to temptation, a black spot is placed on his heart. If he rejects it and seeks God's refuge from it, his heart is marked with a white spot.

The black spots are the rust that may cover people's hearts. God says: 'Their own deeds have cast a layer of rust over their hearts'. (83: 14)



Thus, temptations come thick and fast, leaving their effect on people's hearts. A believer receives a white spot on his heart for resisting temptation, while an unbeliever receives a black spot for yielding to it. Thus, people end up with two types of hearts: one is clearly white, like a smooth stone. Such a heart is unaffected by any temptation in the same way that a smooth stone is unaffected by rain or dust. God says: 'Such a person is like a smooth rock covered with earth. Then heavy rain falls on it and it leaves it hard and bare'. (2: 264) The other type of heart is dark, totally black, covered with earth. It is useless, like an overturned cup that cannot retain water. Temptations leave their cumulative effect on such a heart, altering its nature. It no longer distinguishes right from wrong. A person with such a heart pursues his own desires, coveting what is sinful and turning away from what pleases God.



Ḥudhayfah reassures 'Umar that he need not fear such temptations. He is shielded from them by a closed door that keeps them away. However, this protective door was to be broken at some point in the near future. 'Umar asked him whether it would be broken or opened. If it was to be opened, it may be locked again. Ḥudhayfah told him that it would be broken. Once it was so broken, nothing would protect people from temptation and strife. The door was a symbol referring to a man who prevents temptations. When that man dies, temptations come quick. What Ḥudhayfah said was something he learnt from the Prophet (peace be upon him). It was not anything like people's unfounded thinking and superstition. Nor was it anything learnt from Jews or Christians.

Other versions of this hadith mention that people asked Ḥudhayfah about that door. He said: 'The door is 'Umar himself'. He also told them that 'Umar was well aware of this.

This hadith provides more evidence confirming Muhammad's prophethood. When 'Umar was killed, his death ushered in several events that caused much strife. The first of these was the rebellion against 'Uthmān and his assassination. This was followed by the conflict among the Prophet's companions during 'Alī's reign. Then groups like al-Khawārij and the extremist Shia started to emerge.

# Implementation

1

The Prophet's companions were keen to study the Prophet's hadiths and acquire better knowledge of their faith. They did not allow life's preoccupations to divert them from such study. It behoves every Muslim to follow their example of pursuing knowledge.

2

Every educator and advocate of Islam should discuss the Prophet's hadith with people. This gives them greater benefit and keeps them more attentive.

3

Scholars, speakers and advocates should focus on important subjects that address people's needs. Marginal issues and details that have no great relevance in people's lives need not be given undue importance.

4

It is appropriate that a person pursues a particular branch of learning after having acquired the necessary information that every Muslim needs. When a student has gathered such necessary Islamic knowledge, he may proceed to specialize in any useful discipline, such as linguistics, medicine, engineering, etc. Alternatively, he may go ahead and specialize in a particular field of Islamic Studies, such as Fiqh, Qur'anic commentary, Hadith, theology, etc. 'Umar was keen to learn the hadiths mentioning temptation in particular, and Hudhayfah took care to learn such hadiths, fearing that he may yield to temptation.

5

No companion of the Prophet ever tried to attribute to the Prophet something he did not hear directly from him. When 'Umar asked them about a particular hadith, they remained silent. No one may give a ruling unless it is based on sound knowledge. Nor should anyone argue a point without knowledge.

6

No matter how many sins one has committed, one should turn to God in repentance and do good deeds so that these will wipe away earlier bad ones.

7

It is not right for a scholar to feel too shy to answer questions or give rulings on what he has clear knowledge of. Nothing should stop him from doing so.

8

Educators and advocates of Islam should reward their students and encourage them to continue to pursue their studies. The minimum they do is verbal encouragement and praying for them.

9

Temptations come thick and fast. The only protection against them is faith. Every Muslim should turn to God when he is in comfortable circumstances so that He will help him when he is facing adversity.



Muslims should beware of temptations and sinful actions. They continue to place black spots on a person's heart until he is totally wretched.



Whoever commits a sin should not fail to turn to God in repentance, so that He will erase the black spot the sinful action cast on his heart.



Everyone should always try to do more good deeds and keep themselves clear of temptation, whether great or small. This is the way to ensure that hearts remain white, uncoloured by desire or temptation.



A Muslim should seek God's refuge from people who are immersed in sin. They only see what is wrong and follow their own erring whims.



No one should think lightly of temptations and sinful actions. They will work on a person until they totally corrupt his heart and nature. He will then be a slave to his own desires.



There are four types of heart: 1. A clear heart in which a lantern is kindled. This is the heart of a true believer. 2. A sealed heart, which is the heart of a disbeliever. 3. A corrupted heart which belongs to a hypocrite who receives true knowledge but then denies it. He sees the truth then becomes blinded to it. 4. A heart which receives two calls: one of faith and one of hypocrisy. The end result is that which one's heart is more receptive to. Everyone should choose the heart he wants.



A believer should strengthen his faith, confirming his belief in God and His Messenger who never spoke out of his own desire. His hadiths are full of evidence confirming his status as God's Messenger and Prophet.