

Maḥmūd ibn Labīd narrated that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said:

- 1 The thing I fear for you most is the lesser idolatry.
- 2 People said: What is the lesser idolatry, Messenger of God?
- 3 He said: Dissimulation.
- 4 When mankind are given the reward for their deeds on the Day of Judgement, God, Mighty and Exalted, will say to them:
- 5 Go to those for whom you dissimulated during your lives and find out whether they have some reward for you.⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Ahmad in *al-Musnad*, 23630; al-Bayhaqī in *Shu'ab al-Īmān*, 6412.

From the Qur'an

- ﴿Luqmān said to his son, admonishing him: 'My dear son! Do not associate any partners with God; for, to associate partners with Him is indeed a great wrong'.﴾ (31: 13)
- ﴿The hypocrites seek to deceive God, the while it is He who causes them to be deceived [by themselves]. When they rise to pray, they rise reluctantly, only to be seen by people, remembering God but seldom.﴾ (4: 142)
- ﴿Believers, do not render your charitable deeds worthless by vaunting your generosity and hurting others, as does he who spends his wealth to impress people, while he believes neither in God nor in the Last Day.﴾ (2: 264)
- ﴿It has been revealed to you, and to those before you, that if you ever associate partners with God, all your works shall certainly come to nothing, and you shall certainly be among the lost.﴾ (39: 65)
- ﴿As for those who desire only the life of this world and its bounties, We shall fully repay them in this life for all they do, and they shall suffer no diminution of their just dues. (15) It is they who, in the life to come, shall have nothing but the Fire. In vain shall be all that they have done in this world, and worthless shall be all their actions.﴾ (11: 15-16)
- ﴿Yet they were ordered to do nothing more than to serve God, to worship Him alone with sincere dedication and purity of faith.﴾ (98: 5)

The Narrator

Abu Nu'aym Maḥmūd ibn Labīd ibn 'Uqbah al-Anṣārī belonged to the clan of 'Abd al-Ashhal, a branch of the Aws tribe. He was born in Madinah during the Prophet's lifetime. He did not listen to many hadiths directly from the Prophet (peace be upon him), because he was young. He narrated more from 'Umar, 'Uthmān and Rāfi' ibn Khadij. The verse granting the concession for those who are unable to fast was revealed initially addressing the case of his father. He died in Madinah in Year 97 AH 716 CE.

Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) warns against dissimulation and the lack of sincere devotion to God Almighty. He states that dissimulation makes a person's good work unacceptable to God. As such, God will not reward such action on the Day of Judgement because the person concerned did not dedicate it to Him alone, but rather addressed it to others as well.



Message and Meaning

1 The Prophet (peace be upon him) warns against something very serious, which ruins good work and renders it worthless. The Prophet (peace be upon him) called it 'the lesser idolatry' to distinguish it from full idolatry, which puts a person out of Islam altogether.

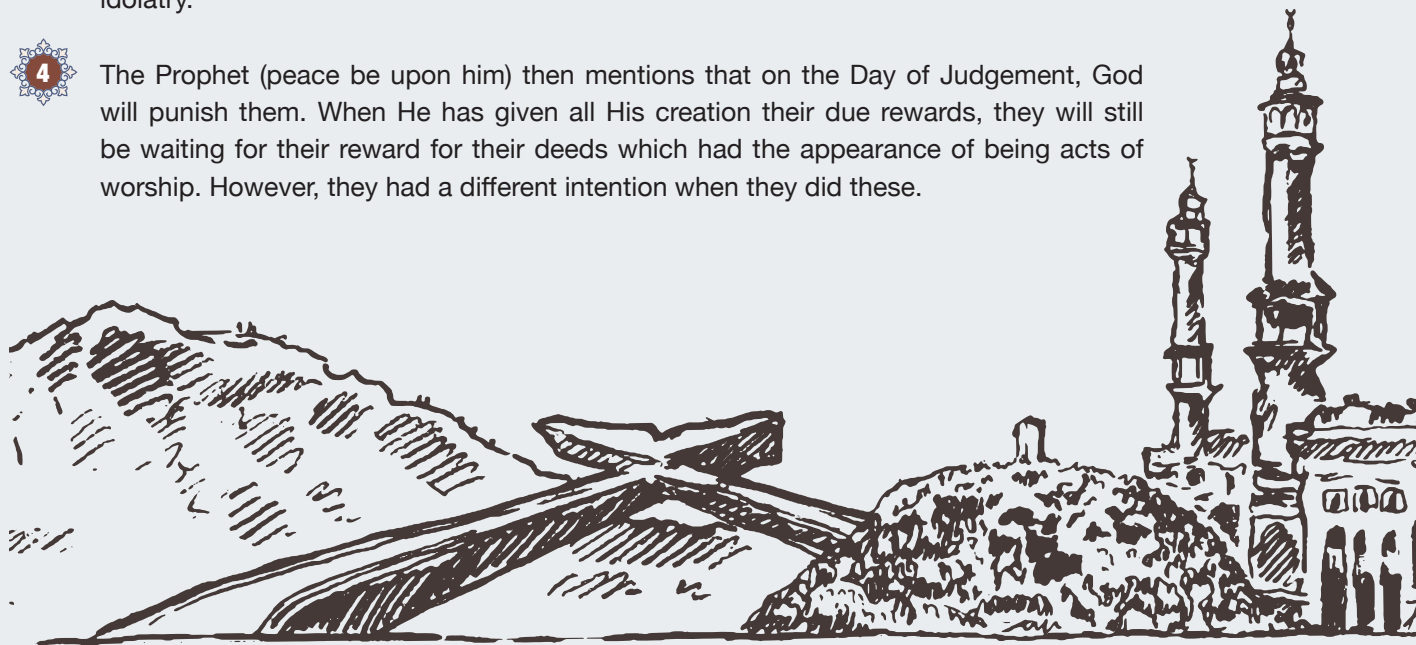
2 The Prophet's companions asked him to explain what this lesser idolatry meant. They knew what full idolatry meant, which is to associate partners with God in whatever does not apply to anyone other than God. However, distinguishing a lesser form from a larger one requires definition, or the citation of an example.

3 God's Messenger (peace be upon him) gave them an example, stating that what he feared most for them was dissimulation. In such a situation, a person may publicize his worship so that people know his deed and praise him for it.

This is an example of lesser idolatry. Other examples include saying an oath by someone other than God, or to say: 'as God and so-and-so will', acting on a bad omen, using unsound supplications for recovery, etc. These are not totally and absolutely contrary to belief in God's oneness, but they are aspects of lesser idolatry.

However, such actions may lead a person to full idolatry. A person swears by someone other than God believing in his superiority; or he believes fortune tellers thinking that they know what is beyond the realm of perception; or dissimulate in all matters or in his belief; or believes that charms and similar matters can prevent harm and cure illness, etc. All these are aspects of full idolatry.

4 The Prophet (peace be upon him) then mentions that on the Day of Judgement, God will punish them. When He has given all His creation their due rewards, they will still be waiting for their reward for their deeds which had the appearance of being acts of worship. However, they had a different intention when they did these.



5

Therefore, God will tell them to go to those before whom they did their deeds of worship so that they will be seen doing them and earn due reputation. They should find out if they have any reward for them. Needless to say, this is said sarcastically. God renders their deeds worthless and invalid. In a *qudsī* hadith, the Prophet says: ‘God, Blessed and Exalted, said: I am the least in need of having an associate. Therefore, whoever does something for someone else’s sake as well as Mine will have that action rejected by Me and left to him and his associate’.⁽¹⁾

The maximum that a dissimulator gains is some little praise, followed by humiliation. The Prophet (peace be upon him) says: ‘Whoever endeavours for reputation, God will publicize his case; and whoever acts hypocritically, God will make a display of him’.⁽²⁾ This means that a person who wants his deeds to be known by people will have it known and God will make people see what that person does. However, He may also expose him and let people learn what that person does not like them to know.⁽³⁾ The Prophet (peace be upon him) further explains that the first people to be thrown in Hell are a hypocrite, a reciter and one who goes on jihad, coveting praise. This because their deeds were only dissimulation, meant to acquire reputation. Therefore, they were worthless, earning no reward. They are unlike those whose actions are undertaken for God’s sake, with the primary purpose of earning His pleasure and acceptance.



1 Related by Muslim, 2985.

2 Related by Muslim, 2986.

3 Al-Nawawī, *Sharḥ Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, Vol. 18, p. 116. English version, Vol. 14.

Implementation

1

We will do well to learn from the Prophet's method of teaching. In this hadith, he resorts to raising a fear and starting with clear advice. Both elements are clearly apparent in his words: 'The thing I fear for you most'. This style alerts the listener and makes him focus his attention, eager to learn what will come next. Whoever wants to give advice should employ such methods of attracting attention.

2

Subtle idolatry may stealthily corrupt a person's heart, because he does not give due attention. A person may start a prayer, or a session of glorification of God or a recitation of the Qur'an, or intends to donate a *ṣadaqah*, or something similar. However, he may notice that some people are close by, and he would love that they should see his act of worship or hear him. If he strives to expel such thoughts from his mind, his action is credited intact to him. If he entertains such thoughts and allows his intention to become one of dissimulation, his action is rendered worthless. It behoves every Muslim to check how he offers his deeds and that he trains himself to keep his good deeds truly sincere.

3

Ṭalḥah ibn Muṣarrif was the leading reciter of the Qur'an in Kufah. When he felt that many people were eager to learn from him, he feared that dissimulation may creep into his work. To guard against this, he went to al-A'mash and recited the Qur'an to him, i.e. making him his teacher. Therefore, people flocked to learn the recitation from al-A'mash and left Ṭalḥah. Perhaps he meant to show them that al-A'mash was a reciter of very high standing. Ṭalḥah wanted them not to consider him the only available teacher, which might make him feel proud. He also wanted that people should learn from all those who could teach them.

4

A Muslim may do his worship publicly, but not for dissimulation. He may want to make Islamic worship known, or to revive a recommended practice that people might have forgotten, or may do something so that people might learn and practise it. None of this is dissimulation. Dissimulation means that a person does his worship primarily to show off and to give people the impression that he is sincere and devoted to his worship, earning some reputation.

5

An important factor that helps to dispel dissimulation is to remember God and His authority, sincerely relying on Him and seeking refuge with Him from all thoughts of dissimulation and hypocrisy. The Prophet (peace be upon him) warned his companions against this and ordered them to seek God's refuge from it. Abu Mūsā al-Ash'arī narrated: 'One day, God's Messenger (peace be upon him) addressed us and said: "People, guard yourselves against this type of idolatry, because it is more subtle than the sound of ants as they walk". Someone said to him: "Messenger of God, how can we guard against it when it is so subtle?" He said: "Say: Our Lord, we seek refuge with You against knowingly associating any partner with You, and seek Your forgiveness of what we may unknowingly do".⁽¹⁾

1 Related by Ahmad, 19109.

6

A Muslim may do some good deed, with sincere dedication to God, but people may see him and praise him for what he has done. He may be happy with their praise. This does not detract from his work and does not make it an act of dissimulation, as long as his intention is clear. Abu Dharr said that God's Messenger (peace be upon him) was asked: 'What about a man who does something good and people praise him for it?' The Prophet said: 'That is an early piece of good news for a believer'.⁽¹⁾

7

A person may be encouraged or feel ashamed when he is with devout people, which leads him to abandon some sins, or encourage him to do some good deeds, without intending to earn their praise. His action is not one of dissimulation. It is indeed one of the benefits of associating with devout people.

8

Were a dissimulator to see his own position he would realize that the majority of those with whom he is eager to earn a reputation do not appreciate his deeds, or they may forget him after he has gone, or they may even be aware of his hypocrisy and he, thus, loses in their esteem. God may also punish him by further exposure. Therefore, the best way to safety is to dedicate all deeds sincerely to God alone and for His sake only.



1 Related by Muslim, 2642.

