

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

- 1 **Whoever relieves a believer from one distress of this life, God will relieve him from a distress of the Day of Resurrection.**
- 2 **Whoever makes it easier for someone in straightened circumstances, God will make things easier for him in this life and the next.**
- 3 **Whoever shields a Muslim, God will shield him in this life and the life to come.**
- 4 **God will help a person as long as that person helps his brother.**
- 5 **Whoever takes a way seeking knowledge, God will facilitate for him a way to Heaven.**
- 6 **Whenever a group of people meet in one of God's houses to recite God's Book and study it together, they will be granted serenity; mercy will be bestowed on them; angels will be around them; and God will mention them to those who are with Him.**
- 7 **The one whose work keeps him slow gains no speed through his ancestry.<sup>(1)</sup>**

1 Related by Muslim, 2699.

#### From the Qur'an

- ﴿Help one another in furthering righteousness and piety, and do not help one another in furthering evil and aggression. (5: 2)﴾
- ﴿Those who recite God's Book, attend regularly to prayer, and give in charity, secretly and openly, from what We have provided for them, look forward to a bargain that can never fail, (29) for He will grant them their just rewards, and give them yet more out of His bounty. He is indeed much-forgiving, most-thankful.﴾ (35: 29-30)
- ﴿Truly, the noblest of you in the sight of God is the one who is most genuinely God-fearing.﴾ (49: 13)
- ﴿God will elevate, by many degrees, those of you who believe and those who have been given knowledge.﴾ (58: 11)

#### The Narrator

'Abd al-Raḥmān ibn Ṣakhr al-Dawsī al-Azdī of Yemen was better known by his appellation, Abu Hurayrah. This is what is best known about his name and his father's name. He 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, eager to learn, and he accompanied the Prophet wherever he went. He was one of the best memorizers among the Prophet's companions and the one who narrated the largest number of hadiths. Al-Bukhari mentioned that more than eight hundred companions of the Prophet or those who belonged to the *tābi'īn* generation narrated hadiths from him. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb appointed him as Governor of Bahrain. Later he returned to Madinah and devoted his time to narrating the Prophet's hadiths and educating people about their faith. He died in year 58 AH, 678 CE.

#### Summary

The Prophet (peace be upon him) mentions the great merit of helping people in their life's affairs. He says that God will help a person as long as that person helps his brother. The Prophet then mentions the exceptional merit of seeking knowledge and that its pursuer will receive God's mercy as well as a feeling of serenity. God will mention him to the Highest Company. The Prophet then states that what elevates people is their deeds, not their lineage.



# Message and Meaning

1

The Prophet (peace be upon him) refers to the reward granted to those who help people in whatever they need and who lighten their burden. He states that whoever relieves a believer of a weighty hardship, God will relieve him or her of one of the severe hardships of the Day of Judgement. Needless to say, the hardship that people will endure on the Day of Judgement is indeed great. It is described by God in the following terms: ‘Mankind! Have fear of your Lord. The violent convulsion at the Last Hour will be awesome indeed. (1) On the Day when it comes, every suckling mother will utterly forget her nursling, and every woman heavy with child will cast her burden; and it will seem to you that all mankind are drunk, although they are not drunk. But severe indeed will be God’s punishment’. (22: 1-2)

2

Whoever eases the trouble of a debtor who is in straitened circumstances, unable to repay his debt will earn God’s reward. Easing a debtor’s difficulty may be by giving him a period of grace, until he is able to repay, or writing off his debt in full or in part, or giving what removes his hardship. The reward is such that God will make things easy for him. Whenever he encounters a hardship in this present life, God will lighten it for him, and then in the life to come, God will make the reckoning of his deeds easier, bestowing His mercy and forgiveness on him. God says: ‘If [the debtor] is in straitened circumstances, grant him a delay until a time of ease. And if you waive [the debt entirely] as a gift of charity, it will be better for you, if you but knew it’. (2: 280) The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A man used to lend people. He used to tell his servants: “If you find someone in straitened circumstances, pardon him. God may hopefully pardon us”. When he met God, He pardoned him’.<sup>(1)</sup>

3

The Prophet then mentions that whoever shields a Muslim will, in turn, be shielded by God. This will occur in this present life, so that he is not exposed and his shortfalls and sins remain covered, unknown to other people. On the Day of Judgement, He grants him His shield allowing no one to hear anything of his reckoning. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: ‘A believer is brought close to his Lord, Mighty and Exalted, until he is under His mercy. He is then made to acknowledge his sins [as he is asked]: “Do you recognize this? Do you remember that sin?” He will say: “I do. My Lord”. When He got him to admit his sins, and the man is certain that he is doomed, God will say to him: “I kept them secret in the first life and today I forgive you them”. His record of good deeds is then given to him. As for the unbelievers and the hypocrites, it will be stated aloud, in front of all: “These are the ones who lied against their Lord”. Gods’ curse is on the wrongdoers’.<sup>(2)</sup>

There are two aspects to shielding another Muslim: to cover his actual nakedness, giving him some clothes to cover himself, and shielding his faults and sins. When a Muslim sees his Muslim brother committing a sin, it is his duty to disapprove and to give him advice for God’s sake. It is not permissible for him to publicize his sin. On the contrary, he must let that remain secret and pray to God to guide him aright. God says: ‘Those who love that gross indecency should spread among the believers shall be visited with painful suffering both in this world and in the life to

1 Related by al-Bukhari, 2078; Muslim, 1562.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 2441; Muslim, 2768.



# Message and Meaning

come'. (24: 19) The Prophet said: 'You who have verbally said that you believe, but faith has not yet entered into your hearts: do not backbite Muslims, or try to uncover their faults. Whoever tries to uncover their faults, God will uncover his faults. When God uncovers someone's faults, He makes them known even in his own home'.<sup>(1)</sup>

Sinners are of two types: the first includes those who are not known to others, and they do not publicize what they do. Such a person must be shielded. This is clearly reflected in the following hadith: 'A man came to the Prophet (peace be upon him) and said: "Messenger of God, I have committed a sin; so punish me for it". The Prophet did not ask him about his sin, but kept silent. Then it was time for prayer and he prayed with God's Messenger (peace be upon him). When the prayer was over, he said: "Messenger of God, I have committed a sin; so apply God's Book to me". The Prophet asked him: "Did you join the prayer with us?" The man said: "Yes". The Prophet said: "You have been forgiven".<sup>(2)</sup> It should be noted that the Prophet (peace be upon him) did not ask the man for any details of his sin when he acknowledged it.

The other type of sinner is the one who speaks openly about his sins, caring little who knows about him. Such a person is not shielded. His case should be put to the relevant authority so that deterrent measures are taken.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then mentions that God will help a Muslim as long as he helps other Muslims. The Prophet says: 'God will help a person as long as that person helps his brother'.<sup>(3)</sup> He also said: 'The person that God loves best is the one who benefits people most. The deed God loves most is that you make another Muslim happy by relieving his distress, paying off his debt or feeding him to remove his hunger. To walk with my brother to help him with something he needs is dearer to me than I spend a month in this mosque (meaning the Prophet's Mosque in Madinah) in worship... And whoever walks with his brother to attend to something he needs, until it is done, God will make his feet firm on the Day when feet slip'.<sup>(4)</sup>



The Prophet then explains the great merit of pursuing knowledge. He says that when a person takes a way in the pursuit of knowledge, God will facilitate for him a way to Heaven. Religious knowledge gives a person a feeling of God's power and majesty, makes him aware of God's law and what is permissible or forbidden. Thus, he will always be hoping for God's mercy and forgiveness.

The Prophet mentions 'a way', using the indefinite article so that the word covers all physical ways, such as going from the home to a mosque, school, university or some other institution. It also covers taking a journey to meet scholars and learn from them. Likewise, it includes notional or theoretical ways, such as studying books, visiting websites, discussing issues with other scholars. All these are ways to gain knowledge.

1 Related by Ahmad, 20014; Abu Dāwūd, 4880.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 6823; Muslim, 2764.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 2442; Muslim, 2580.

4 Related by al-Ṭabarānī in *al-Mu'jam al-Awsaṭ*, 6026.



In the same indefinite way, the Prophet uses the word 'knowledge', so that it includes all fields of knowledge. It is not limited to Islamic Studies, even though these are the best and most rewarding. It also includes any amount of knowledge, whether much or little. Even when a person takes a way seeking to know the ruling on a particular case or question, the same reward is granted for his endeavour.



The Prophet (peace be upon him) then mentions group meetings in mosques to recite and study the Qur'an. Serenity covers the group and mercy is bestowed on them. Angels surround them in all directions so as to protect their circle from devils. They will be mentioned by God to the Supreme Society with the angels. God says: 'In houses which God has sanctioned to be raised so that His name be remembered in them, there are [such as] extol His limitless glory, morning and evening (36) – people whom neither commerce nor profit can divert from the remembrance of God, and from attending regularly to prayer, and from paying their zakat; who are filled with fear of the day when all hearts and eyes will be convulsed; (37) who [only hope] that God may reward them in accordance with the best that they ever did, and lavish His grace upon them. God gives to whom He wills beyond all reckoning'. (24: 36-38)



The Prophet then makes clear that it is deeds that are considered on the Day of Judgement, not families and relations. Whoever has fallen short and their good deeds are not enough to save them from the Fire and to be admitted into Heaven will benefit nothing by their ancestry. Even a son of a prophet will not benefit by his relation. Had it been of any benefit, kinship would have benefitted Abraham's father, Noah's son and wife, Lot's wife, Prophet Muhammad's uncle, etc. God says: 'Then, when the Trumpet is sounded, there will be no ties of kinship between them on that Day, nor will they ask about one another. (101) Those whose weight [of good deeds] is heavy in the scales will be successful; (102) but those whose weight is light will have lost their souls and will abide in Hell. (103) The Fire will scorch their faces, and therein they will look gloomy'. (23: 101-104)

# Implementation

1

Reward for what is done is of the same type as the deed itself. A person who relieves his brother of some distress will be relieved of his own distress by God. Whoever extends mercy to people will receive God's mercy, and whoever makes it hard for people, God will make it harder for him. Whoever shields a Muslim will be shielded. Therefore, each of us may choose.

2

There are multiple types of distress on the Day of Judgement, such as traversing the narrow path, the reckoning of deeds, the approach towards the Fire, etc. Every one of us needs to relieve people of their distress in this life, in the hope that God will relieve us of those much harder distresses.

3

Giving debtors in hardship easier terms is one of the best deeds that ensures safety on the Day of Judgement. God's Messenger says: 'Whoever is pleased that God saves him from the distress of the Day of Judgement, should give respite to the one in straitened circumstances, or reduce his debt'.<sup>(1)</sup>

4

To settle the debt of someone who is insolvent or to forgo one's debt when the debtor is unable to repay is one reason for which God forgives a person his sins. The Prophet said: 'A man from a past community was brought to account. Nothing good was found to his credit, except that he used to deal with people and he was wealthy. He used to command his servants to write off [debt] for whoever was insolvent. God, Mighty and Exalted, said: "This is more suitable for Us than him. Write off [his sins]".'<sup>(2)</sup>

5

Check your tongue and eyes from pursuing people's faults and vulnerabilities, so that God will protect you from fault-finders.

6

An early scholar said: 'I knew some people who were without fault, but they discussed other people's faults. Then people began to mention them and find fault with them. I also knew other groups who had faults of their own, but did not speak about the faults of other people. Their own faults were forgotten'.

7

It is a duty to shield Muslims who are not known to indulge in sin, but they also need to be advised and any wrong actions gently pointed out to them. A devout minister said to someone who enjoins the doing of what is right: 'Make sure to shield the people who indulge in sin. Were their sins to be public knowledge, this would leave a stigma on Muslims generally. The best course of action is to cover up faults'.

8

When a Muslim becomes careless about indulging in sin, it is no longer necessary to shield him. In fact, it is better to report him to the Islamic authorities [if any] to enforce the proper punishment to him, relieve people of his evil and provide a deterrent for others.

9

If people feel the need to expose some sinners who do not publicize their sins, this may be appropriate. This is the case of the sinner being a witness in a legal case, a manager of an endowment, etc.

1 Related by Muslim, 1563.

2 Related by Muslim, 1561.

10

It is advisable not to let our tongues speak about someone else's faults; we have your own faults and other people also have tongues. If our eyes show us certain faults, we should stop and remind ourselves that other people also have eyes.

11

The Prophet (peace be upon him) loved to help people with what they needed. He used to say: 'Whoever of you is able to be of benefit to his brother, let him be so'.<sup>(1)</sup> A young maid would come and hold the Prophet's hand. He would go with her wherever she wanted.<sup>(2)</sup> His companions followed his example. Abu Bakr spent all his property for God's sake. 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb used to check at night on widows and attend to their needs. 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān bought the well called Rūmah and made it available to all Muslims as an endowment. The Prophet and his companions thus provided the model to follow.

12

Al-Ḥasan al-Baṣrī sent some of his disciples to attend to someone's need. As they were about to go, he said to them: 'Drop by Thābit al-Bunānī and tell him to join you'. They went to Thābit requesting his company, but he told them that he was devoting his time to worship in a mosque. They went back to al-Ḥasan and told him. He said: 'Tell him: you, short-sighted man! Do you not know that the effort you exert to serve your Muslim brother's need is better for you than offering the pilgrimage twice?' They returned to Thābit and told him. He stopped his devotion in the mosque and went with them.

13

The Prophet (peace be upon him) promised entry into Heaven for the one who pursues knowledge. Therefore, whoever wants to go to Heaven should follow the line of scholars.

14

To those who sit together in a mosque to glorify God, He has promised that serenity will cover them, mercy will be bestowed on them, angels will surround them and they will be mentioned by God to those who are with Him. What reward could be greater?

15

Imagine that God Almighty mentions you by name and description, raises you high before His angels and says: this servant of Mine, whose name is so-and-so is glorifying Me. What a great merit and high status in return for something easy and available to every Muslim.

16

No one should ever think that his noble lineage will be of any benefit for him in the life to come. Everyone must realize that he or she either does well and then they are safe, or they do badly and condemn themselves. 'When this verse: "Warn your nearest kindred", (26: 214) was revealed, God's Messenger (peace be upon him) said: "People of the Quraysh, buy your souls from God, for I can avail you nothing with God. Banī 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I can avail you nothing with Him. 'Abbās ibn 'Abd al-Muṭṭalib, I can avail you nothing with God. Ṣafiyyah, God's Messenger's aunt, I can avail you nothing with God. Fāṭimah, God's Messenger's daughter, ask me what you will, but I can avail you nothing with God".'<sup>(3)</sup>

1 Related by Muslim, 2199.

2 Related by al-Bukhari, 6072.

3 Related by al-Bukhari, 2753; Muslim, 204.

