

## ...As If You Were a Stranger<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ibn Rajab Al-Hanbalee's book, "Jaami' Al-'Uloom wal-Hikam", is an explanation of the forty-two famous Hadeeths collected by Imaam An-Nawawee. The Hadeeth explained in this translations is number forty.  
[T.N – Translator's Note]

## The Hadeeth

Ibn 'Umar (رضي الله عنه) said: Allaah's Messenger (ﷺ) took me by my shoulder and said:

كُنْ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَأَنَّكَ غَرِيبٌ أَوْ عَابِرُ سَبِيلٍ

"Be in this life as if you were a stranger or a traveler on a path."

And Ibn 'Umar used to say:

إِذَا أَمْسَيْتَ فَلَا تَتَنَظَّرُ الصَّبَاحَ وَإِذَا أَصْبَحْتَ فَلَا تَتَنَظَّرُ الْمَسَاءَ وَخُذْ مِنْ صِحَّتِكَ

لِمَرَضِكَ وَمِنْ حَيَاتِكَ لِمَوْتِكَ

"If you reach the evening, then don't expect to reach the morning, and if you reach the morning, don't expect to reach the evening. Take from your health before your sickness, and from your life before your death."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Recorded by Al-Bukhaaree (no. 6416).

## Explanation of the Hadeeth

This Hadeeth is a foundation for limiting one's hope in this life. A believer shouldn't consider this life as his homeland or permanent residence, his heart being completely tranquil and at ease within it. Rather, he should stay in it as if he were on a journey, preparing himself to leave. The advice of the prophets and their followers encourage this.

Allaah said, narrating from a believer at the time of Pharaoh that he said:

﴿يَا قَوْمِ إِنَّمَا هَذِهِ الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا مَتَاعٌ وَإِنَّ الْآخِرَةَ هِيَ دَارُ الْقَرَارِ﴾

**“Oh my people, surely this worldly life is nothing but a (quick, passing) enjoyment, and certainly, the hereafter - that’s the home that will last forever.” [Soorah Ghafir 40:39]**

‘Alee Ibn Abi Taalib used to say, “This life has begun traveling away, and the hereafter has begun traveling forward, and each has its children. So, be one of the children of the hereafter, and don't be one of the children of this life. For today there's action with no account, and tomorrow there will be account with no action.”

‘Umar Ibn ‘Abdul-‘Azeez said in a sermon, “This life is not your permanent abode. Allaah has prescribed that it will come to an end and He's prescribed for its people to depart from it. How often has a thriving population been ruined for something so insignificant, and how often has a joyful resident been made to depart something so insignificant? So, prepare well, may Allaah have mercy on you, for the journey with your best preparations. And take provisions, for the best provision is a conscience that's fearful of Allaah.”

If this life is not a permanent residence or homeland for a believer, then a believer's condition in it must be either one of two states: 1) either as if he were a stranger residing in a strange land with his main concern to take provisions for his return to his real homeland; or 2) as if he were a traveler, in no way residing in it, but instead spending every night and day going towards his land of residence.

For this, the Prophet (ﷺ) advised Ibn ‘Umar to live in this life in one of these two states:

*The First State – As a Stranger*

In this state, the believer is abandoned as if he were a stranger in this life, appearing to be a resident, yet really in a strange land. His heart's not attached to this strange land. Instead, his heart is attached to his real homeland that he's returning to. He's only staying in this life to fulfill his objective – preparing for his return to his home.

Al-Fudhayl Ibn 'Iyyaadh said, "A believer in this life is worried and sad. His worry is the objective of preparing himself. And whoever's condition in this life is such, then he has no concern other than taking provisions from what will benefit him during the return to his homeland. He doesn't compete with the people of the land, among whom he's merely a stranger, in what they consider honorable. And he doesn't become worried if he seems insignificant among them." Al-Hasan (Al-Basree) said, "The believer is like a stranger. He's neither worried about being insignificant in it (this life), nor does he compete for honor in it. He's in one state and most other people in another. Whenever Allaah created Aadam (ﷺ), He made him and his wife live in Paradise. Then he was put out of it, yet promised to return – him and his righteous offspring. So, the believer's always longing for this, his first homeland..."<sup>3</sup>

### *The Second State - As a Traveler*

In this state, the believer considers himself in this life as a traveler, not permanently residing in it. He's only moving along at one of the many points of his journey until he ends his travels, which is death. Whoever's condition is like that then his main concern is nothing more than to acquire provisions for his journey. He's not concerned with an abundance of enjoyment in this life. For this reason, the Prophet (ﷺ) advised a group of his Companions that their main objective in this life should be to obtain the provision of a traveler.

One of the Salaf wrote to one of his brothers, "My brother, it appears to you as if you're a resident. However, you're really only constantly traveling, and you're moving quickly. Death is heading towards you, and this life is passing behind you. What's passed of your life will not return to you (to correct it) on Resurrection Day."

Al-Fudhayl Ibn 'Iyyaadh said to a man, "How many (years) have come upon you?" He replied, "Sixty years." He said, "So then, for sixty years you've been heading to your Lord and you're about to reach Him." The man said, "To Allaah we belong and to Him we're returning!" Al-Fudhayl then asked him, "Do you know what that statement means? You're saying, 'I belong to Allaah as

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<sup>3</sup> A significant amount of Arabic poetry, due to the difficulty in translating it accurately, has been omitted. [T.N.]

a servant and I'm returning to Him.' So, whoever knows that he belongs to Allaah as a servant and that he'll return to him, then he should know that he'll be stopped. And whoever knows that he's going to be stopped, then he knows he'll be questioned. And whoever knows that he'll be questioned, then he should prepare an answer for that questioning." The man asked, "So what do I do?" He said, "It's easy." The man again asked, "So what is it?" Al-Fudhayl replied, "Do good in what remains (of your life), then what has passed should be forgiven. But if you do evil in what remains, then you could be taken to account for what passed and for what remains."

Some wise people said, "Whoever spends all his days and nights riding on his animal, then he'll be taken to his destination even if he doesn't move."

Al-Awzaa'ee wrote to one of his brothers, "You're surrounded from every side. Know that you are moving forward with each day and night. So, beware of Allaah and of standing between His hands. And your final promise is with Him. Peace."

## Explanation of the Ibn ‘Umar’s Advice

As for the advice of Ibn ‘Umar (رضي الله عنه), it’s based upon the same Hadeeth (of the Prophet ﷺ) that he himself has narrated. It (Ibn ‘Umar’s advice) includes a remedy for prolonged, irrational hope. And that if a person happens to reach the evening, he shouldn’t wait for or expect to reach the morning. And if he happens to reach the morning, then he shouldn’t wait for or expect to make it to the evening. Rather, he should assume that he’ll reach his end before that. More than one scholar has explained the concept of *Zuhd*, or abstention, in the worldly life with this same meaning.

Al-Marwathee said that Abu Abdullaah, meaning Imaam Ahmad (Ibn Hanbal), was asked, “What is the meaning of having Zuhd in this life?” He replied, “Not prolonging hope too much – he who says when he wakes up, ‘I doubt I’ll even reach this evening.’” He then said, “And Sufyaan (Ath-Thawree) said likewise.” Abu Abdullaah was then asked, “How do we get help in not prolonging our hope too much?” He answered, “We don’t know; it’s only by success exclusively granted by Allaah.”

As for his (Ibn ‘Umar’s) statement: “Take from your health before your sickness, and from your life before your death.” Meaning: Take advantage of being capable of doing righteous deeds with what remains of your health before sickness prevents you from doing them, and from your life before death prevents you.

And in another narration: “Surely, oh servant of Allaah, you don’t even know what your own name will be tomorrow.” Meaning: Maybe tomorrow you will be one of the dead, not the living.

A similar meaning of his advice has been reported from the Prophet (ﷺ) from a different perspective. In “Saheeh al-Bukhaaree”, it’s recorded that Ibn ‘Abbaas (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

نِعْمَتَانِ مَغْبُورٌ فِيهِمَا كَثِيرٌ مِنَ النَّاسِ الصِّحَّةُ وَالْفَرَاغُ

“There are two blessing that many people are deprived of: health and free time.”<sup>4</sup>

And in the “Mustadrak” of Al-Haakim, it’s recorded that Ibn ‘Abbaas (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the

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<sup>4</sup> Reported by al-Bukhaaree, vol. 11, pg. 229 (in Fath al-Baaree).

إِغْتَنِمْ خَمْسًا قَبْلَ خَمْسٍ ، شَبَابَكَ قَبْلَ هَرَمِكَ ، وَصِحَّتَكَ قَبْلَ سَقَمِكَ ، وَغِنَاكَ قَبْلَ

فَقْرِكَ ، وَفَرَاغَكَ قَبْلَ شُغْلِكَ ، وَحَيَاتَكَ قَبْلَ مَوْتِكَ

“Take advantage of five things before five other things: from your youth before your old age, your health before your sickness, your wealth before your poverty, your free time before you become occupied, and from your life before your death.”<sup>5</sup>

The meaning of this is that all these things can delay or prevent someone from doing good things. Some things personally preoccupy the person such as his poverty, richness, sickness, his old age, or his death. Others are more general like the establishment of the Last Hour, the appearance of the Dajjaal, and other disturbing trials as is mentioned in the Hadeeth:

بَادِرُوا بِالْأَعْمَالِ فِتْنًا كَقِطْعِ اللَّيْلِ الْمُظْلِمِ

“Take the initiative to do (good) deeds before trials come like a piece of a dark night (unexpectedly, unnoticeably).”<sup>6</sup>

After the appearance of some of these more general events, no deeds will be of any benefit as Allaah said:

﴿يَوْمَ يَأْتِي بَعْضُ آيَاتِ رَبِّكَ لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ آمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ

فِي إِيْمَانِهَا خَيْرًا﴾

**The day some signs of your Lord come, no good will it do a person to believe then if he neither believed before nor earned good (did good deeds) through his faith.**

[Soorah Al-An'am 6:158]

<sup>5</sup> Reported by al-Haakim, vol. 4, no. 306. He declared it to be Saheeh according to the condition of the two Shaykhs (al-Bukhaaree and Muslim) and ath-Thahabee agreed with him as well as our Shaykh (al-Albaanee) in the checking of the Hadeeth s of "Iqtidaa al-I'Im al-A'mal," no. 170.

<sup>6</sup> Reported by Muslim, no. 118.

In the two Saheehs (Al-Bukhaaree and Muslim), Abu Hurayrah (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

لَا تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ حَتَّى تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ مِنْ مَغْرِبِهَا فَإِذَا طَلَعَتْ وَرَأَاهَا النَّاسُ آمَنُوا  
أَجْمَعُونَ وَذَلِكَ حِينَ لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا

“The Hour will not be established until the sun rises from the west. When it does rise and the people see it, they will all believe. That’s when the faith of a person will not benefit him.”<sup>7</sup>

And in “Saheeh Muslim”, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

ثَلَاثٌ إِذَا خَرَجْنَ لَا يَنْفَعُ نَفْسًا إِيْمَانُهَا لَمْ تَكُنْ آمَنَتْ مِنْ قَبْلُ أَوْ كَسَبَتْ فِي إِيْمَانِهَا  
خَيْرًا طُلُوعُ الشَّمْسِ مِنْ مَغْرِبِهَا وَالدَّجَالُ وَدَابَّةُ الْأَرْضِ

“There are three events that, when they happen, the faith of a person will not benefit him if he didn’t believed before or didn’t earned good by his faith: the rising of the sun from the west, the Dajjaal, and when the Beast emerges from the earth.”<sup>8</sup>

Also in “Saheeh Muslim”, the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

مَنْ تَابَ قَبْلَ أَنْ تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ مِنْ مَغْرِبِهَا تَابَ اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ

“Whoever repents before the sun rises from the west, Allaah will accept his repentance.”<sup>9</sup>

Abu Moosaa (رضي الله عنه) narrated that the Prophet (ﷺ) said:

<sup>7</sup> Reported by al-Bukhaaree, vol. 8, pg. 296-297 (in Fath al-Baaree) and Muslim, no. 157.

<sup>8</sup> Reported by Muslim, no. 158.

<sup>9</sup> Reported by Muslim, no. 2703.



إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزَّ وَجَلَّ يَبْسُطُ يَدَهُ بِاللَّيْلِ لِيَتُوبَ مُسِيءُ النَّهَارِ وَيَبْسُطُ يَدَهُ بِالنَّهَارِ لِيَتُوبَ

مُسِيءُ اللَّيْلِ حَتَّى تَطْلُعَ الشَّمْسُ مِنْ مَغْرِبِهَا

“Allaah extends his hand during the night to accept the repentance of the sinner of the day, and He extends his hand during the day to accept the repentance of the sinner of the night; this continues until the sun rises from the west.”<sup>10</sup>

So, a believer should take the initiative in performing righteous deeds before he's overtaken by destiny and prevented from doing them, either because of sickness, death, or by some of these signs reaching him after which no deed will be accepted.

Abu Haazim said, “(Unfortunately), the merchandise of the hereafter is in little demand. It's about to be spent with no one gaining it except a few, not many.”

So, if a person's prevented from deeds, nothing remains for him except regret and sorrow. He will wish to return to the previous situation in which he was able to do good deeds. But wishing at that time won't benefit him at all.

Allaah (ﷻ) says:

﴿وَأَنِيبُوا إِلَىٰ رَبِّكُمْ وَأَسْلِمُوا لَهُ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ ثُمَّ لَا تُنصَرُونَ وَاتَّبِعُوا أَحْسَنَ مَا أُنْزِلَ إِلَيْكُمْ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَكُمُ الْعَذَابُ بَغْتَةً وَأَنْتُمْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ أَنْ تَقُولَ نَفْسُ يَا حَسْرَتَا عَلَىٰ مَا فَرَطْتُ فِي جَنْبِ اللَّهِ وَإِنْ كُنْتُ لَمِنَ السَّاجِدِينَ أَوْ تَقُولَ لَوْ أَنَّ اللَّهَ هَدَانِي لَكُنْتُ مِنَ الْمُتَّقِينَ أَوْ تَقُولَ حِينَ تَرَى الْعَذَابَ لَوْ أَنَّ لِي كَرَّةً فَأَكُونَ مِنَ الْمُحْسِنِينَ﴾

**And turn in repentance and in obedience with true faith to your Lord and submit to Him, before the torment comes upon you, then you will not be helped. And follow**

<sup>10</sup> Reported by Muslim, no. 2759.

the best of that which is sent down to you from your Lord (this Qur'aan) before the torment comes on you suddenly while you don't realize it. (This is) so a person doesn't say: "Oh my grief, I was undutiful to Allaah and was certainly one of those who mocked (the truth)." Or (unless) he should say: "If only Allah had guided me, I would've been one of the pious and righteous people." Or (unless) he should say when he sees the torment: "If only I had another chance, I'd definitely be one of the good-doers."

[Soorah Az-Zumar 39:54-58]

And He says:

﴿حَتَّىٰ إِذَا جَاءَ أَحَدَهُمُ الْمَوْتُ قَالَ رَبِّ ارْجِعُونِ لَعَلِّي أَعْمَلُ صَالِحًا فِيمَا تَرَكْتُ كَلَّا إِنَّهَا كَلِمَةٌ هُوَ قَائِلُهَا وَمِنْ وَرَائِهِمْ بَرْزَخٌ إِلَىٰ يَوْمِ يُبْعَثُونَ﴾

Until when death comes to one of them (those who worship other besides Allaah), he says: "My Lord, send me back so I can do good in that which I have left behind!" No. It is but a word that he speaks, and behind them is a barrier until the Day when they will be resurrected.

[Soorah Al-Muminoon 23:99-100]

And He (ﷻ) says:

﴿وَأَنْفِقُوا مِنْ مَا رَزَقْنَاكُمْ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ يَأْتِيَ أَحَدَكُمُ الْمَوْتُ فَيَقُولَ رَبِّ لَوْلَا أَخَّرْتَنِي إِلَىٰ أَجَلٍ قَرِيبٍ فَأَصَّدَّقَ وَأَكُنْ مِنَ الصَّالِحِينَ وَلَنْ يُؤَخِّرَ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِذَا جَاءَ أَجَلُهَا وَاللَّهُ خَبِيرٌ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ﴾

And spend (in charity) from what We have provided you before death comes to one of you and he says: "My Lord, if only You would give me respite for a little while (to return to the worldly life), then I'd give charity from my wealth and be one of the righteous." And Allaah grants respite to no one when his appointed time (death) comes. And Allaah is always aware of what you do.

[Soorah Al-Munafiqun 63:10-11]

So, since it's like this, it is incumbent for a believer to take advantage of what remains of his life.  
In explanation of this, some people say, "The remainder of a believer's life is priceless."

Sa'eed Ibn Jubayr (رحمته الله) said, "Each day a believer live is a treasure."