

40

عَنِ ابْنِ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا قَالَ : أَخَذَ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ بِمَنْكِبِي . فَقَالَ : كُنْ فِي الدُّنْيَا كَأَنَّكَ غَرِيبٌ أَوْ عَابِرُ سَبِيلٍ . وَكَانَ ابْنُ عُمَرَ رَضِيَ اللَّهُ عَنْهُمَا يَقُولُ : إِذَا أَمْسَيْتَ فَلَا تَنْتَظِرِ الصَّبَاحَ ، وَإِذَا أَصْبَحْتَ فَلَا تَنْتَظِرِ الْمَسَاءَ ، وَخُذْ مِنْ صِحَّتِكَ لِمَرَضِكَ وَمِنْ حَيَاتِكَ لِمَوْتِكَ - رَوَاهُ الْبُخَارِيُّ .

On the authority of Ibn 'Umar, radiyallahu 'anhuma, who said: The Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ), took me by the shoulder and said: "Be in this world as though you were a stranger or a traveler/wayfarer."

Ibn 'Umar used to say: "When evening comes, do not expect (to live till) morning, and when morning comes, do not expect (to live till) evening. Take from your health (a preparation) for your illness, and from your life for your death." [Al-Bukhari]

Background

There are so many verses in the Qur'an that make comparisons between the worldly life and the Hereafter. The priority and emphasis is made on the Hereafter where it is described as the real life and the worldly life as a life of nothing but entertainment and amusement. Allah says in Surah al-An'am, Ayah 32:

And the worldly life is not but amusement and diversion but the home of Hereafter is best for those who fear Allah. Will you not then reason?

And in Surah al-'Ankabut, Ayah 64, Allah expresses the same meaning mentioned in the previous ayah. The same meaning is also expressed in other ayahs such as in Surah Muhammad Ayah 36, Surah Yunus Ayah 26, Surah al-Kahf Ayah 45 -46, Surah Fater Ayah 5, Surah al-A'la Ayah 16-17, and Surah al-Isra' Ayah 18-19.

In all of the above mentioned ayahs, Allah draws the attention of the believers toward the Hereafter to remind them that it is the final destination and the real life and enjoyment of the believers. Allah also comments on this life as nothing but amusement and diversion. It is a life of a test and trial. It is a life used as a means of getting us forward to the Hereafter.

In Islam there is no nullification of life as some people may misunderstand. There is a balance and adjustment between this life and the Hereafter. There should be no polarization or what Islam is - rahbanah or extremism. There should be no conflict between this life and the next life. There is a kind of moderate conception about this life and the Hereafter. Islam also makes it an obligation that the believers cultivate the earth and make it as an amanah for them to establish the Islamic civilization which is based on Tawhid, good morals and values. This civilization is guided by revelation. This is considered an obligation.

Furthermore, the concept of 'ubdiyyah (worshipping Allah) is a comprehensive concept where everything we do in this life, if it is guided by revelation and is done with a good intention, becomes a form of worship even though it is a worldly matter. If the thing is done in accordance with the teachings of shari'ah and the main guidelines of revelation, then there will be the adjustment and the harmony between this life and the Hereafter. The Muslim's life in this world and the Hereafter should be in total submission and devotion to the will of Allah. The Muslim should establish a good life, improve his way of life and aim for the Hereafter at the same time. By doing so, he is obeying Allah, being guided by His guidance and instructions. He will still enjoy this life but at the same time whatever he does will be recorded by Allah as his good deeds. Consequently, he will get the pleasure of Allah.

Lessons

The hadith starts with Abdullah bin 'Umar (Ibn 'Umar), radiyallahu 'anhuma, saying: "The Messenger of Allah, (ﷺ), took me by the shoulder and said." Here we can learn many lessons as teachers and educators. We have to show care and attention to our audience if we want to be good educators or teachers. This can be achieved in many different ways. The Prophet, (ﷺ), used to follow different approaches when dealing with his audience. Sometimes he called upon the name of a certain person and in other times, like in this hadith, he gets closer to the person he is speaking to by putting his hand on his shoulder.

Sometimes the Prophet, (ﷺ), will start his advice or teaching with a statement that attracts the attention of the audience. For example, we can see this in a previous hadith (19) that has been said on the authority of Ibn 'Abbas when the Prophet, (ﷺ), said "O young man, I will teach you some words (of wisdom)." Sometimes the Prophet, (ﷺ), used the questioning style as we saw in a number of previous hadiths. The questioning style plays a significant role in conveying the message and attracting the attention of the audience. The Prophet, (ﷺ), asks the question where the answer to that question is only known to him. The audience and the addressee will be more keen and motivated to know the answer.

In general, the Prophet, (ﷺ), used all of these approaches or means to show care to the addressee, to attract their attention, and also to stress or emphasise the meaning he wanted to convey. This is also sometimes achieved by repeating what he says. Sometimes he would draw diagrams (e.g. a circle or a square) on the ground. Other times he would use analogy to clarify or simplify a certain concept. All of the above mentioned ways can be adopted as techniques for educating.

The Prophet, (ﷺ), tells the believers how to deal with this life, and as usual he offers his audience with more than one choice. In this hadith, the Prophet, (ﷺ), is giving two choices or levels with regards to living in this world:

1. To be as a stranger

This is usually the easier choice. The Prophet, (ﷺ), used the analogy 'to be as a stranger' because, as Ibn Rajab points out, the stranger is usually prepared to eventually go back to his original place or home town. His heart will always long for his home. His main concern will be to be in preparation to do whatever possible and beneficial for returning. A stranger does not look like the other people in his current environment - he is different. Similarly, the believer should be different from those who only care about this life and worldly matters. He should rid himself of the yearning for this materialistic world, a world where some people do not care about the spiritual aspects and the Hereafter. As believers, we should be different from the 'people of this world'.

Ibn Al-Qayyim, a famous Muslim scholar, says that a Muslim is a stranger amongst the disbelievers and the Mu'min is a stranger amongst the Muslims, and the Muhsin is a stranger amongst the Mu'mins. This means that there are different levels of being a stranger: the lowest level is Islam, the second level is Iman and the third level is Ihsan. [Refer to Hadith 2]

2. To be a traveler or wayfarer, traveling along a path

This is a higher level than the stranger. The traveler is always traveling day and night without stopping, He is heading towards his final destination. Even if he stops for a while, this is to provide himself with the needed power to continue his journey and to go farther until he achieves his main objective. A stranger might obtain and keep more things than he actually needs but the traveler takes as little as possible in terms of luggage or other things. Similarly, the believer who is in such a situation has a main objective or concern - and that is not to take more than what he needs (i.e. he should not be weighed down with materialistic things or wealth).

Another thing is the traveler needs to know that he is traveling on the right path, the straight path. For this, he needs to obtain the right knowledge (ilm). He also needs good, helpful companions to help him on his way.

Some scholars ask how would a person be contented with this life where the day distorts the month and the month distorts the year and the year will distort the age? That is how this person will be satisfied with this life if his age will lead him to his final destination and his life will lead him to death. One scholar said when a person looks back at his life since his awareness of this life until this moment, it will seem like a blink of an eye. What remains for the rest of his life is also like that 'blink of an eye'. If that is the case, the person should be careful and wise up.

Ibn 'Umar says: "When evening comes, do not expect (to live till) morning, and when morning comes, do not expect (to live till) evening." This saying is like an explanation to the hadith. Al-Bukhari mentions it because the Prophet, sallallahu 'alayhi wasallam, is talking to Ibn 'Umar.

If one still did not understand the message, Ibn 'Umar continues by saying: "Take from your health (a preparation) for your illness, and from your life for your death." This means that today you may be healthy, but you never know about the future. It is then wise and better to perform good deeds and to be closer to Allah now before being unhealthy or before dying. This meaning has been stressed by the Prophet, (ﷺ), in other hadiths where he asks us to utilise our time and to do beneficial things whether in this life or in the Hereafter. We can relate to Imam Nawawi's other hadiths that have been previously mentioned in which certain charitable acts have been emphasised.

The impact of this hadith on the life of Muslims

1. To increase the sense of responsibility in terms of our duties towards Allah, the Prophet, (ﷺ), relatives, and the community members.
2. To motivate the Muslims to enjoin what is good and to forbid what is evil.
3. To be closer to Allah at all times.
4. To minimise weaknesses, shortcomings and sinful acts.
5. To maximise self-accountability and self-reckoning.
6. To emphasise taqwa and fearing Allah the Almighty.
7. To be safeguarded from being misled or enslaved by self-interests, desires and worldly temptations.

Challenges that threaten the above mentioned concept of dealing with this life in a good way

1. The promotion of the materialistic aspects of life, especially by the media.

2. The complexity of contemporary life where there are more problems, and the engagement in life activities without proper balance.
3. Rapid life changes due to technology advancement and progress which in turn creates other problems, such as:
 - ? Adjustment between the old lifestyle and the new lifestyle.
 - ? The emergence of new values which lead to conflicts between sets of values.
 - ? Technology misuse.
 - ? The increase of social ills.
 - ? The weak religious awareness and education or spiritual training in the Islamic world (i.e. tazkiyyah).
4. The challenges of modernity.
5. The challenges of globalisation and promotion of imposed corrupted western values.

Conclusion

These challenges add to the size of the responsibilities that face the Muslims who want to implement this hadith in their lives. Most of these challenges are addressed in previous hadiths. This hadith contains a helpful piece of advice for every single Muslim which helps us to deal with this life in a proper way by offering us two choices or levels. We need to understand all the above mentioned issues. This will help us to apply the hadith in a more positive way. Some Muslims throughout history misunderstood this hadith. Consequently, they misunderstood the Islamic teachings regarding dealing with life. They understood it in a negative way. We also find other Muslims who are affected by the challenges of modernity and the excessive tension that is given to this life. We find minimum levels of good deeds. They are overwhelmed by the advancement of technology and end up with little iman or spirituality. The Islamic standpoint that should be understood is that there is no conflict or opposition between this life and the Hereafter. On the contrary, Islam establishes harmony where a Muslim lives in this life but his heart is devoted to Allah and the Hereafter. Whatever he does is with the objective of pleasing Allah and is to be done in accordance with the teachings of Islam and the guidance of revelation.