

30. Greed

Allah, the Wise, has said:

إِنَّ الْإِنْسَانَ خُلِقَ هَلُوعًا

“Surely man is created of a hasty temperament.”¹

The Noble Prophet (S) said:

يَشِيبُ ابْنُ آدَمَ وَ تَشَبُّ فِيهِ خَصْلَتَانِ: الْحِرْصُ وَ طُولُ الْأَمَلِ.

“(As) man becomes old, two attributes in him turn young – greed and lofty aspirations.”²

Short Expalantion

If man is greedy in acquiring things, he shall not possess the proximity of Allah, since he has abandoned the attribute of tawakkul (trust in Allah), is not content with what Allah has appointed for him and has adopted hastiness, which is an attribute of Satan.

Allah has created the world similar to a shadow; following the shadow yields nothing except for exhaustion and fatigue. If one seeks the world in excess of what is necessary, not only does he not acquire it but also suffers troubles and hardships.

The Noble Prophet (S) has said: “A greedy person (always) remains excluded.” And an excluded person is hated and reproached.

A greedy person’s thoughts are disturbed and his troubles numerous – constantly involved in seeking and computing riches, neither at peace in this world nor inclined towards the Hereafter.³

1) The Mud from a Grave is a Greedy Person's Medicine

Sa'di relates: "I had heard that a trader who owned forty slaves and one hundred and fifty camel-loads of goods used to travel from city to city for the purpose of trade. One night, on the island of Kish, he invited me into his room.

I went to his room but throughout that night, he was restless. He kept rambling on ceaselessly and would say: "Such and such storeroom of mine is in Turkistan, a certain cargo of mine is in India, this is the deed of sale of a particular land, another cargo is held up due to some merchandise, such and such person is the guarantor for a loan... I am contemplating travelling to Alexandria, but the Mediterranean Sea is stormy at the moment...

O' Sa'di! I have another journey before me, which if I were to accomplish, I would spend the rest of my life in solitude and never embark upon any more journeys, ever."

"Which is that journey after which you will never undertake any other journey?" I asked him.

He replied, "I wish to take Iranian sulphur to China, for I have heard that it sells at a very high price there; from China, I shall take porcelain bowls to Rome; in Rome I shall purchase the exquisite Roman silk for selling it in India; in India, I shall take Indian iron to Halab (Syria) from where I shall purchase the Halabi mirror and glass, and proceed towards Yemen; there, I shall purchase Yemeni clothes and bring them to Iran after which I shall quit travelling and settle down to manage a shop."

He continued on to such an extent that he was eventually overcome with exhaustion and, unable to speak any more, he said to me: "O' Sa'di! Tell me what you think of what you have just heard."

I said, "You surely know that at a very far place from the land of Ghour (between Hirat and Ghaznah) when a trader fell off his mount and died, a person commented: "Only two things can satiate a greedy world-loving person – contentment or the earth of a grave."4

2) Greedy for Pleasure

Yazid Ibn 'Abdul Malik (the tenth Umayyad caliph) became caliph after 'Umar Ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz. Contrary to his predecessor, he used to engage himself, day and night, in feasting, festive gatherings, drinking and merry-making in the company of two of his slave-girls, Salamah and Hababah, who were beautiful singers.

Hababah eventually brushed aside her rival Salamah and took the reins of the caliph in her hands. Maslamah Ibn 'Abdul Malik, approached his brother Yazid and said: "'Umar Ibn 'Abdul 'Aziz was extremely just whereas you, in contrast, drink and engage yourself in various pleasures and have handed over the kingdom to a singer, Hababah. Moreover, while the people are keen to catch a glimpse of you, you have dropped yourself into her arms. Leave her aside and pay attention to the affairs of the

caliphate.”

Yazid resolved to heed his brother’s counselling and decided to lead the Friday prayers. Meanwhile, Hababah had instructed her slave-girls to inform her the moment the caliph stepped out. As soon as the slave-girls informed her that the caliph had come out, she appeared before him and, with a lute in hand and in a melodious and enchanting voice, recited the following poem: “If an enamoured one has lost his intelligence, do not censure him; the poor thing is exhibiting patience due to the intensity of his anguish.”

The caliph, seeing his beloved one in that engaging state and hearing her captivating voice, covered his face with his hands.

“Hababah! Enough! Stop it!” he cried and then recited the following poem: “Life is nothing except living luxuriously and gratifying oneself; even if the people censure you.”

And then he shrieked: “O’ the beloved of the beloved ones! You have spoken the truth. May Allah destroy anyone who criticizes me for being in love with you! O’ Slave! Go and ask my brother Maslamah to go to the mosque and lead the prayers in my place.”

He then headed towards his pleasure-hall first, and later, for greater fun and enjoyment, proceeded towards Bait al-Rass, which is situated near Damascus. Once there, he said to his slaves: “People think that there is no pleasure without any bitterness and I wish to prove the falsity of this notion of theirs.”

He remained there in order that no news or letters ever reached him. He remained completely engrossed in merry-making without the slightest of troubles.

However, as fate would have it, one day a seed of pomegranate got stuck in Hababah’s throat and, following a bout of severe coughing, she passed away. Day and night, the caliph held the lifeless body of Hababah in his arms and shed tears over it, and it was only on the insistence of her relatives that her stinking body was eventually buried. The caliph too, after this incident, did not live for more than fifteen days and was laid to rest near the grave of Hababah.⁵

3) ‘Isa and the Greedy Person

Prophet ‘Isa (as) had been travelling in the company of another person when, after having journeyed for a period, they were overcome by hunger. They reached a village where ‘Isa (as) requested his companion to go and bring some bread, while he engaged himself in prayers.

The man returned with three loaves of bread and waited for ‘Isa (as) to join him, but since his prayers continued for a long time, the person quietly consumed one loaf of bread.

“Were there three loaves of bread?” ‘Isa (as) asked after completing his prayers.

“No, there were only two,” replied the man.

A short while after they had eaten their food, they set off again and on the way encountered a herd of deer. 'Isa (as) summoned one of the deer towards him, sacrificed it, and both the men sat down to eat it. When they had finished eating, 'Isa (as) commanded: "O' deer! Move by the permission of Allah!" The deer immediately came to life and sprinted away.

Witnessing this, the man stood dumbfounded and uttered, "Subhanallah (Glory be to Allah)."

"I put you under the oath of He, Who has manifested this sign of His power before you! Tell me what happened to the third loaf of bread?" 'Isa (as) asked him.

"There were only two loaves of bread!" the man insisted.

They continued on their journey and soon reached the outskirts of a large village where they happened to see three gold bricks lying before them.

"There appears to be great wealth here!" the man remarked.

"Yes. One brick is for you, the second for me and I shall hand over the third to the person who ate the third loaf of bread," said 'Isa (as).

The greedy man blurted out, "I ate the third loaf of bread."

'Isa (as) parted company with him and handing him the bricks, said: "All three bricks are your property now."

The man sat down beside the gold bricks and was lost in thought as to how he would carry them and put them to good use, when three persons passed by. When their eyes fell upon the gold bricks, they killed the man and took possession of the bricks. As they were hungry, they decided that one of them would go to the nearby village and arrange to get some bread. The person who had gone to get the bread, thought to himself: "I shall poison the bread so that the other two are killed and then I shall have all the three bricks for myself."

In the meantime, his other two friends had also conspired to kill him upon his return so that they could divide his share of the bricks between themselves. When he returned, they killed him as planned and with great satisfaction in their actions, began eating the bread. Before long they too died as a result of the poison contained in the bread.

On his return, 'Isa (as), observing four dead persons lying near the three gold bricks remarked⁶: This is how the world conducts itself with those who covet it.⁷

4) Dhul Qarnain

Dhul Qarnain⁸, during the course of his journey, reached Dhulumat, where he came across a palace in

which he noticed a youth standing there dressed in white, face raised towards the skies and his hands placed upon his lips.

The youth, upon seeing him, asked him who he was.

“Dhul Qarnain,” came the reply.

The youth (who was the angel Israfeel) said to him, “When the Day of Judgment arrives, I shall blow the Trumpet.” Then, picking up a stone and handing it to Dhul Qarnain, he said, “If this stone becomes satiated, you too shall become satiated and if this stone happens to be hungry, you too shall be hungry!”

Dhul Qarnain carried the stone to his friends and placed it on a scale in order to weigh it, but despite weighing against a thousand similar stones, it still weighed more than all of them taken together.⁹

At that moment, Prophet Khidhr (as) came to them; placing a stone on the opposite scale, he put some earth over the stone when suddenly, all of them observed that the scales had balanced perfectly. Dhul Qarnain wanted to know the reason for this from Prophet Khidhr (as), who explained: “Allah wished to admonish you that in spite of conquering so many nations, you are still not satisfied; man can never become satiated except when a handful of earth is dropped over his face, and nothing can fill his stomach except earth.”

Dhul Qarnain began to weep and turned back.

On another occasion, he came across a man sitting near a grave and fiddling with some decayed bones and decomposed skulls that lay before him. He asked the man what he was doing.

The man replied, “I want to separate the bones of the kings from those of the poor ones but find myself unable to do so.”

Dhul Qarnain passed by and thought to himself, “That act of his was intended for me.”

He then settled down in Daumah al-Jandal¹⁰, abandoned his quest for global conquest and engaged himself in Allah’s worship.¹¹

5) Ash’ab Ibn Jubair Madani (d. 154 ah)

He was a person who was squint-eyed, bald on two sides of his head and unable to pronounce the letters ر (ra) and ل (lam). He possessed such intense greed for material wealth and food that he never seemed to be fully satisfied in this regard. When questioned about this attribute of his, he replied: “Each time I see smoke bellowing out of someone’s house, I feel as if they are preparing the food for me and I sit waiting for the food. But when, despite waiting for a very long time, there is no sign of any food, I dip dry bread in water and eat it!

And whenever I hear the adhan being recited over a deceased, I feel that the deceased has set aside one third of his wealth for me and with this thought in mind, I go to his house and assist in giving him the ablutions, covering him in his shroud and, finally participating in his burial. But when after his burial there is no sign of the wealth, I return home disappointed and dejected.

And when I walk through the streets, I spread my cloak apart in the hope that perhaps a person, while throwing a thing from his roof or window to his neighbour, may slip-up and that thing may land in my cloak.”

It is said that once while passing through a street, he came across some children engaged in playing games. He decided to tell them a lie.

“O’ Children! Why do you stand here when at a crossroad further down there is a person distributing his load of red and white apples amongst the people for free?” he told them.

Hearing this, the children immediately rushed towards the crossroad. As they ran, Ash’ab was himself overcome with greed and he too started to run towards the crossroad.

“You have fabricated the story yourself, so why do you run?” the people asked him.

He replied, “The children ran out of seriousness whereas I run out of greed. Maybe there is really someone out there distributing the apples and I do not wish to remain deprived of them.”¹²

1. Noble Qur’an, Suratul Ma’arij (70), Verse 19

2. Jame’ al-Sa’adat, Volume 2, Page 100

3. Tadhkeratul Haqaiq, Page 33

4. Hikayat-ha-e-Gulistan, Page 166

5. Rahnama-e-Sa’adat, Volume 3, Page 657; Tarikh-e-Tamaddun-e-Islam, Volume 1, Page 86

6. هَكَذَا تَفْعَلُ الدُّنْيَا بِأَهْلِهَا

7. Pand-e-Tarikh, Volume 2, Page 124; Anwarul Nu’maniyah, Page 353

8. His name has been mentioned in Suratul Kahf of the Noble Qur’an; he is the same Alexander, of the progeny of Prophet Nuh ؑ who had traveled to the east and the west of the world and constructed the city of Alexandria. Since he used to gather his hair in the form of two horns near his forehead, he came to be popularly known as Dhul Qarnain, – ‘The possessor of two horns’. He lived for nearly two centuries and had conquered around 36 countries all over the world.

9. It had been a supernatural act, performed to jolt Dhul Qarnain into awareness and lead him towards subservience and obedience of Allah.

10. Fakhr Razi states: Dhul Qarnain returned to Iraq and fell sick in the city of Zur, where he eventually passed away. (Safinatul Bihar, Volume 2, 426)

11. Namunah-e-Ma’arif, Volume 4, Page 234; Layaliul Akhbar, Page 46

12. Lataif al-Tawaif, Page 361

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