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38. The World

Allah, the Wise, has said:

وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا لَعِبٌ وَ لَهْوٌ

“And this world’s life is naught but a play and an idle sport.”¹

The Noble Prophet (S) stated:

مَنْ أَصْبَحَ وَ الدُّنْيَا أَكْبَرُ هَمِّهِ فَلَيْسَ مِنَ اللَّهِ فِي شَيْءٍ

“He who rises in the morning such that his greatest concern is for (the issues of) the world, shall have nothing of (the guardianship) of Allah.”²

Short Expalantion

The world is like a figure whose head is pride; its eyes, greed; its ears, covetousness; its tongue, dissimulation; its hands, lust; its legs, vanity and its heart, heedlessness. Whoever loves the world, will be dragged by it towards arrogance and pride; whoever likes the world, will be made greedy by it towards itself and whoever desires the world, will be hauled by it towards covetousness.

A person who has praised the world has cloaked himself with the garment of dissimulation; one whose goal and objective is this world, his heart gets filled with vanity, and one who trusts this world, is overcome by negligence and heedlessness (with respect to Allah). Consequently, Hell shall be the abode of the worldly people.³

1) Esteem and Humiliation

Harun Rashid, the 'Abbasid Caliph, was very fond of the Barmaki family. They were his close and special companions, generally occupying ministerial posts, and from amongst them, he was particularly fond of Ja'far Barmaki. This mutual respect and esteem continued for over 17 years. In 189 ah, due to certain events, the Barmaki family became the object of Harun's wrath and consequently, all of them went through very difficult times.

Muhammad Ibn 'Abdul Rahman Hashmi narrates: "On the day of 'Eidul Adha, I approached my mother who was having a conversation with a lady dressed in old clothes.

"Do you recognize this lady?" my mother asked me. I said I did not.

"This is 'Ubadah, the mother of Ja'far Barmaki," she said.

I moved towards 'Ubadah and spoke to her for sometime, all the while experiencing astonishment over the state she was in.

"O' My Mother! What have you seen of the wonders of the world?" I asked her.

'Ubadah replied, "O' Son! I have experienced a day of 'Eid, similar to this day ('Eidul Adha), when I had four hundred slave-girls standing before me at my service and (yet) I used to complain that my son Ja'far had not granted me my right (fully) for I should have had more slave-girls serving me. Today is another day of 'Eid but I am now faced with a situation in which the only things I require are two sheepskins – one for use as a mattress and the other for use as a blanket."

Muhammad Hashmi continued: "I gave her five hundred dirhams, which made her so happy that she almost died of delight. 'Ubadah kept coming to our house periodically, till she eventually passed away."⁴

2) Imam 'Ali and the Public Treasury

Shu'bi narrates: "Accompanying the other youths, I too entered the vast open ground of Kufah where I saw Amirul Mo'minin (as) holding a small whip in his hand and standing near two containers filled with gold and silver coins. He used the whip to keep back the huge crowd that had gathered whilst he was distributing the money.

The Imam (as) continued to distribute the money till there was nothing left for himself, and he returned home empty-handed at which point, I went home too.

"I have witnessed a very strange thing today and I fail to comprehend if this person's act was good or bad, in that he never retained anything for himself!" I said to my father.

My father inquired as to what I was talking about. I narrated to him all that I had witnessed, whereupon

my father, bursting out in tears, said to me: “Son, you have just watched the most excellent person from amongst all the people.” 5

Zadhan reports: “Qambar and I set off see Amirul Mo’minin (as). When we reached him, Qambar said: “O’ Amirul Mo’minin! Arise, for I have concealed a significant treasure for you.”

“What is the treasure?” inquired the Imam (as).

“Arise and accompany me in order that I show it to you,” insisted Qambar.

The Imam (as) got up and followed him into the house. Qambar brought out a linen bag, which was full of small sacs containing gold and silver coins.

“O’ Ali! I know that you distribute everything amongst the people and never retain anything for yourself and so, I have saved this especially for you!” said Qambar.

Imam (as) remarked, “I would have preferred you to set this house on fire and burn down everything.” As he said this, he struck the bag with his sword, causing the gold and silver coins to fall out. He then ordered us to distribute the coins among the people. After we had carried out his instructions, the Imam (as) said: “Bear witness that I have not taken anything for myself and have not been negligent with respect to the distribution of money amongst the Muslims. O’ Gold and Silver! Deceive someone other than ‘Ali.”6

3) Hadhrat Sulaiman

Sulaiman Ibn Dawud (as) was one of those very few Prophets to whom Allah had granted sovereignty over the east and the west of the world. For years, he ruled over jinn, men, animals, birds and wild beasts, and knew the language of all creatures – an authority so great and extensive that it was ineffable.

He had prayed to Allah: “Grant me a kingdom the like of which You shall never grant to anyone after me.”

After Allah had graced and honoured him with such a kingdom, Hadhrat Sulaiman (as) said to his servants one day: “I have not passed one single day, from morning to night, in a state of happiness. Tomorrow I shall enter my palace, climb onto its roof and view my subjects. Do not permit anyone to approach me lest my happiness should turn into sadness.”

The next morning, taking hold of his staff, he climbed to the uppermost portion of his palace and stood there, leaning upon his staff, observing his kingdom and subjects, and experiencing joy over what Allah had granted to him. As he was looking around, he suddenly noticed a good-looking youth, dressed in clean clothes, appearing from one corner of his palace.

“Who granted you permission to enter the palace?” he asked the youth.

“The Lord,” replied the youth.

“Who are you?” asked Sulaiman (as).

“Izra`il.”

“Why have you come?”

“To seize your soul, Sulaiman.”

“I had wanted today to be my day of happiness but Allah desired otherwise; comply with the orders given to you,” said Sulaiman (as).

Izra`il seized his soul while he stood leaning on his staff while the people, looking at him from afar, thought him to be alive.

When time passed, there arose a controversy amongst the people. Some said, “It has been several days that he has not eaten or drunk anything and so he is our Allah.” Another group said, “He is a sorcerer; he has made it to appear to us that he stands, whereas, in reality, it is not so.” A third group said, “He is a Prophet of Allah.”

Allah sent an army of ants to eat through his staff as a result of which, the staff broke and Sulaiman collapsed. It was then that the people realized that he had passed away several days before.⁷

4) Talhah And Zubair’s Love for the World

Talhah and Zubair had been of the elders during the initial phase of Islam and had extended fitting contributions in the battles. After the death of the Noble Prophet (S), both of them, and Zubair in particular, vehemently supported Amirul Mo`minin (as) and never hesitated in offering their assistance to him.

Their support continued till ‘Uthman was murdered and the people selected Imam ‘Ali (as) as their leader. When this happened, these two approached Imam (as) and formally requested him to appoint them as governors of some cities.

However, when they encountered a negative reply from Imam ‘Ali (as), they conveyed a harsh message to him through Muhammad Ibn Talhah, which said: “We have had to make a lot of sacrifices for the sake of your Caliphate and now that you have the reins of power in your hand, you act as a dictator, bringing to the fore the likes of Malik Ashtar and pushing us into the background?!”

Imam ‘Ali (as) sent a message through Muhammad Ibn Talhah saying: “What should I do in order that

you may be pleased?”

“Appoint one of us as the governor of Basrah and the other as the governor of Kufah,” they replied.

“By Allah! When I do not consider them to be trustworthy here in this place (Madinah), how can I place them over the people of Basrah and Kufah?” asked Imam ‘Ali (as).

He then instructed Muhammad Ibn Talhah to go and tell them: “O’ Sheikhs! Fear Allah and His Prophet with respect to the ummah of the Noble Prophet (S) and do not oppress the Muslims; have you not heard Allah say: “(As for) that future abode, We assign it to those who have no desire to exalt themselves in the earth nor to make mischief and the good end is for those who guard (against evil).”⁸

Having failed to realize their ambitions of power and riches, Talhah and Zubair decided to go to Makkah. They approached Imam ‘Ali (as) to seek his permission to go to Makkah for performing the ‘Umrah. The Imam (as) told them that they did not really intend to perform the ‘Umrah, but they swore that they had no other motive and were firm and faithful in their pledge of allegiance.

Upon the Imam’s orders, they renewed their pledge with him and then set out for Makkah. There, they broke their pledge, raised an army and in the company of ‘Aishah, set out towards Basrah for the Battle of the Camel! On the way, they met Ya’li Ibn Munabbah, who carried with him approximately four hundred thousand dinars for Imam ‘Ali (as) from Yemen.

The two men forcefully took away the money from him and utilized it for fighting the Imam (as).

In this battle (36 ah), thirteen thousand soldiers from the army of Talhah and Zubair and five thousand soldiers from Imam ‘Ali’s (as) army were killed. Talhah was eventually killed by an arrow shot by Marwan, who belonged to his own army. After killing him, Marwan declared: “I have extracted revenge of ‘Uthman’s blood from Talhah.”

Zubair withdrew from the battle and was murdered on the way by Ibn Jurmuz. The consequence of their penchant for power and proclivity towards worldly desires was nothing but an ignominious death.⁹

5) What he Desired and What Eventually Happened!

On the 23rd of Muharram, 169 ah, Mahdi ‘Abbasi died in Masabdhan and the caliphate passed on to his son Musa, titled Hadi ‘Abbasi, who at that time, had gone to Jorjan to fight the people of Tabaristan.¹⁰

Harun Rashid, his brother, took the pledge of allegiance for him from the people of Masabdhan and Baghdad and sent a message to inform him of the situation. Hadi quickly returned to the capital.

Harthamah Ibn A’ayun recounts: “One night, Hadi ‘Abbasi summoned me to a private meeting with him.

“Do you know how disturbed I am because of this infidel dog Yahya Ibn Khalid? He has turned the

people against me and is coaxing them to support Harun. You must go to the prison immediately and behead him,” he said. “Then proceed to the house of Harun and murder him. After this, survey the prison and kill every person from the progeny of Abu Talib. When you have executed these instructions, prepare the army and proceed towards Kufah; once there, drive out all the descendants of ‘Abbas from their houses and set their houses on fire.”

Hearing these instructions, a shiver ran through me.

“I do not have the strength to carry out these great and difficult tasks,” I pleaded.

“If you exhibit negligence in obeying my orders, I shall kill you,” he said, and ordered me to stand where I was whilst he went into the women’s quarters.

I thought that since I had exhibited aversion towards these acts, he would assign them to someone else and then have me killed. I promised to myself that if I were delivered from this predicament, I would set off for a place where nobody would recognize me. Suddenly, a slave appeared and informed me that Hadi ‘Abbasi had summoned me. Anticipating death, I testified to the Unity of Allah and the Prophethood of the Noble Prophet (S) and advanced forward. Midway, I heard a lady speak out: “O’ Harthamah! I am Khaizran, Hadi’s mother. Come and see what calamity has befallen us.”

As I entered the room, Khaizran, who was behind the curtains, said: “When Hadi entered the house, I moved aside the covering from my head and begged pardon for Harun, but he refused. At that moment he was suddenly overcome by a fit of severe coughing. He drank some water but it did not help and he died there and then (18 Rabi’ al-Awwal, 170 ah). Now go and inform Yahya Ibn Khalid of his death so that he can take the pledge of allegiance for my son Harun.”

Harthamah continues: “I informed Yahya of Hadi’s death and then proceeded towards Harun’s house, where I found him reciting the Noble Qur’an. I informed him that he had become the Caliph but he refused to believe it and so I narrated the entire incident to him. That very night, Harun was informed of the birth of his son, Mamun.”¹¹

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1. Noble Qur’an, Suratul An’am (6), Verse 32
 2. Jame’ al-Sa’adat, Volume 2, Page 24
 3. Tadhkeratul Haqaiq, Page 35
 4. Tatimmah al-Muntaha, Page 181
 5. Al-Gharat, Volume 1, Page 55; Dastan-hai Az Zindagi ‘Ali ؑ, Page 114
 6. Dastan-hai Az Zindagi ‘Ali ؑ, Page 128; Nahjul Balagha (Ibn Abil Hadid), Volume 8, Page 181
 7. Hayat al-Qulub, Volume 1, Page 370
 8. Noble Qur’an, Suratul Qasas (28), Verse 83
 9. Hikayat-ha-e-Shanidani, Volume 3, Page 20; Tarikh-e-Ya’qubi, Volume 2, Page 169
 10. Modern day Mazandaran (Tr.)
 11. Rangarang, Volume 1, Page 24

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