

counsel in a few lines of poetry, and be brief!' I recited to him:

Do not feel secure from death at any time:
Even if you seek protection
in your advisers and your guards,
know that the arrows of death
are always pointing in our direction,
whatever armour and shields we may have.
Do you hope for forgiveness
when you have not trodden its paths?
A ship does not sail on dry land."

NINETEEN

FEAR OF ALLAH

Fear is the spur with which Allah urges His servants towards knowledge and action so that they can draw nearer to Him. It is the pain and anguish of the heart when it senses that harm is imminent. Fear is what restrains the body from being disobedient and compels it to worship and service. When fear is lacking, this leads to negligence and boldness in committing sins, whereas too much fear results in a state of hopelessness and despair.

Fear of Allah, Exalted is He, sometimes springs from knowledge of Him, and of His Attributes – the knowledge that it would be of little concern to Him to obliterate the heavens and the earth, and that nothing can stop Him from doing so if He so wishes.

At other times it is caused by the enormity of the wrong actions which the servant commits.

At other times it is caused by a combination of all these things: the degree of a servant's fear depends on his awareness of his own faults, and on his awareness of Allah's Glory, Might and Self-Sufficiency – and of the fact that He is not accountable for what He does, while His servants are.

The person who fears His Lord most is the one who has most knowledge of Him and of himself. This is why the Prophet ﷺ said, "By Allah, of all people, I am the one with the most knowledge of Allah, and I fear Him the most." ¹

Imam ash-Sha'bi was once addressed as, "O knowledgeable one." He replied, "I am not – for the knowledgeable one is the one who fears Allah, as He, Mighty and Glorious is He, says:

◀ Surely those of His servants who know fear Allah.
(35:28) ▶ "

Those Who Fear Allah

The one who experiences fear is not the one who weeps and wipes his eyes, but the one who abandons whatever may bring punishment upon him. *Dhu'n-Nun al-Misri* was once asked, "When is a servant really afraid?" He replied, "When he is in the same state as a sick man who seeks protection in Allah out of fear that his sickness will be prolonged."

Abu'l-Qassim al-Hakeem said, "Whoever fears something runs away from it, while whoever fears Allah runs towards Him." *Al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyyad* said, "If you are asked whether you fear Allah, do not reply; for if you say 'Yes', you would be lying, and if you say 'No', it would mean that you do not believe in Him."

Fear burns up forbidden desires, and the wrong actions which can be so dear to a servant soon become distasteful, just as honey becomes repugnant to someone who desires it, if he discovers that it is poisoned. Fear tames the limbs and fills the heart with submission, humility and tranquility. Arrogance, hatred and envy depart from it, and it is filled with Him, through fear of Him and through contemplating the danger of His punishment – and so it becomes occupied with nothing other than Him, and has no concern other than contemplation, bringing itself to account and striving in the way of Allah.

A servant with such a heart becomes watchful over every breath and every moment, and constantly reprimands the self for its inner thoughts, its actions and its words. His state is like that of a person who is trapped in the claws of a lion, not knowing whether it will leave him alone and allow him to escape, or whether it will attack him and kill him. Thus he becomes both inwardly and outwardly occupied with what he fears. There is no room in him for anything other than what he fears. This is the state of a person who is overwhelmed by fear of Allah.

The Merits of Fear of Allah

Allah, Mighty and Glorious is He, grants guidance, mercy, knowledge and acceptance to those who fear Him:

◀ Guidance and mercy for those who fear their Lord.
(7:154) ▶

And also:

◀ Surely those of His servants who know fear Allah.
(35:28) ▶

And also:

◀ Their reward is with their Lord: Gardens of Eden underneath which rivers flow wherein they will dwell for ever; Allah is pleased with them, and they are pleased with Him; this is for whoever fears his Lord. (98:8) ▶

Allah has commanded His servants to fear Him and has made belief conditional upon fear. He, Glorious and Mighty is He, says:

◀ Fear Me if you are believers. (3:175) ▶

This is why it is inconceivable that a believer can be devoid of fear of Allah, however slight it may be. The weak-

ness of his fear is in proportion to the weakness of his knowledge and faith.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "No believer who has wept from fear of Allah, Exalted is He, will ever enter the Fire unless milk returns back into its udder." ²

Al-Fudayl ibn 'Iyyad said, "Whoever fears Allah will be guided by this fear to all good."

Ash-Shibli said, "There was never a time that I feared Allah without my finding a door of wisdom and guidance opening up to Him." Yahya ibn Mu'adh said, "Any wrong action committed by a believer is followed by two consequences: fear of punishment and hope for forgiveness." Allah, the Exalted, says in the Qur'an:

◀ Surely those who live in awe out of fear of their Lord, and those who believe in the signs of their Lord, and those who do not associate partners with their Lord in their worship, and those who give what they give with fear in their hearts because they are returning to their Lord – it is these who hasten to do good, and in this they are foremost. (23:57-61) ▶

It has been reported by Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, that she said, "I asked the Messenger of Allah ﷺ about these *ayah*, saying, 'Are they those who drink intoxicants, and commit adultery and steal?' He, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, said, 'No, O daughter of as-Sideeq,³ it is those who regularly fast and pray and give *zakat* and fear that their good deeds may not be accepted: ◀ it is these who hasten to do good. ▶'" ⁴

It has been related on the authority of Abu Dharr, may Allah be pleased with him, that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ recited the *surah* from the Qur'an beginning with the *ayah*:

◀ Has there ever been any period of time for man in which he was something not remembered? (76:1) ▶

Then he ﷺ said, "I see what you do not see and I hear what you do not hear. Heaven has groaned and it has a right to groan. By Him in Whose hand my soul is, there is not a space of even four fingers width in which there is not an angel who prostrates his forehead before Allah. I swear by Allah that if you knew what I know, you would laugh little and weep much, and you would not take delight in women, but you would go out to an open space and call on Allah for help. I wish I were a tree that could be cut down and cease to exist." ⁵

This *hadith* indicates that if we knew as much as the Prophet ﷺ knew about the Might of Allah, and His retribution for whoever disobeys Him, then our weeping and grief and fear for what might await us would be long lasting. We might never laugh at all.

Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, reported that whenever the wind changed and storms blew, the Prophet's ﷺ demeanour would change and he would walk to and fro in the room in agitation, going out and then coming back in again. All of this was out of fear of Allah's punishment. ⁶

Abdullah ibn ash-Shukhair related that whenever the Messenger of Allah ﷺ started doing the prayer, a sound like a bubbling cauldron could be heard coming from his chest. ⁷

If you consider the state of the companions of the Holy Prophet ﷺ, and the righteous men of this *Ummah* who succeeded them, may Allah be pleased with all of them, you will find that they were fully involved in doing the best of

deeds while, at the same time, they were full of fear of Allah. We, on the other hand, all do things which fall far short of this example, and yet feel quite secure.

Abu Bakr as-Siddiq, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "I wish I were no more than a hair on the side of a believing servant." Whenever he got up to do the prayer, he would be trembling like a leaf out of fear of Allah.

Umar ibn al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, was once reading *Surat at-Tur* and when he came to the *ayah*:

◀ Surely the doom of your Lord will indeed
come to pass. (52:7) ▶,

and he wept so intensely that he fell ill, so that people came to see how he was.

When he was on his death bed he told his son, "Put my cheek next to the earth so that Allah may forgive me." Then he said, "I am doomed if He does not forgive me." He repeated the same words three times and then he died.

When he used to recite the Qur'an at night and read an *ayah* that filled him with fear, he would stay indoors for days on end so that people would come to visit him, thinking that he was ill. His frequent weeping etched two dark lines on his face.

Ibn Abbas once told him, "Allah has brought many countries into the Muslim *Ummah* through you, and through you many a victory has been won." Umar replied, "All I hope for is to be saved. I desire neither reward nor punishment."

Uthman ibn Affan, may Allah be pleased with him, used to cry until his beard was soaked each time that he stood at a grave. He used to say, "If I were standing between the Garden and the Fire, not knowing in which one

of the two I would end up, I would rather be turned into ashes before I learned of my fate.”

Abu'd-Darda' used to say, “If you knew what you will encounter after your death, you would never eat with any appetite, nor drink thirstily, nor enter houses to shelter, but you would go out into open spaces and beat your breast and weep at your lot. I wish I were a tree to be cut up and destroyed.”⁸

Ibn Abbas had skin under his eyes which looked like worn out sandal leather, due to his frequent weeping.

Ali ibn Abi Talib, may Allah honour him, was once overwhelmed with sadness after completing the dawn prayer; he said, “Never before did I see anything like the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ. Their hair was dishevelled, their faces were pale, they were covered in dust, and the space between their eyes looked like the knees of goats. They had spent the night in prayer and recitation of the Qur'an, either on their feet or in prostration. When the dawn came, they would spend it in remembrance of Allah, swaying like trees on a stormy day, with tears streaming from their eyes until their clothes were soaked. By Allah, it seems to me that the people who are around me now have passed the night fast asleep.” Then he got up and was never seen laughing again, until he was stabbed to death by Ibn Muljim.

Musa ibn Mas'ud said, “Whenever we sat in the company of Suffian, we would feel as if the Fire had surrounded us because of the fear and panic we could see in his eyes.” Al-Hasan was once described as follows: “Whenever he approached us, it would seem as if he had only just returned from the burial of his best friend; whenever he sat in a company, he would be like a prisoner who has just been sentenced to death by having his head cut off;

and whenever the Fire was mentioned, it would be as if it had been created especially for him.”

It has been related that Zurarah ibn Abu Awfa led some people in the dawn prayer and recited *Surat al-Mudathir* from the Qur'an. When he reached the words:

◀ For when the trumpet shall sound, that will be –
that Day – a Day of Distress, (74:8-9) ▶,

he gasped and fell down dead.⁹

Abdullah ibn Amr ibn al-As is reported to have said, “Weep, and if you cannot weep, then pretend to weep! I swear by Him in Whose hand my life is that if any of you really knew, you would plead until your voice went, and pray until your back was broken.”¹⁰

Notes

1. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Adab*, 10/513; Muslim, *Kitab al-Fadha'il*, 15/106; on the authority of Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her.
2. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab Fadha'il al-Jihad*, 5/260 and *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 6/600; classified as a *sahih hadith*.
3. 'As-Sideeq' – meaning 'the truthful one' – is a name that was given to Aisha's father, Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with both of them, because of his honesty, truthfulness and going straight – and because he always confirmed the truth of the Prophet's message and of his words and actions, may Allah bless him and grant him peace.
4. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab at-Tafsir*, 9/19; al-Hakim, *Kitab at-Tafsir*, 2/393.
5. *Sahih*, al-Bukhari, *Kitab ar-Riqaq*, 11/319; at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab az-Zuhud*, 6/601.

6. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab Bad' al-Khalq*, 6/300; Muslim, *Kitab al-Istisqa'*, 6/196.
7. *Sahih*, at-Tirmidhi, *Kitab ash-Shama'il*, p.337; an-Nisa'i, *Kitab as-Sahw*, 3/13; Abu Daw'ud, *Kitab as-Salah*, 3/172.
8. *Da'if*; this *hadith* is not only ascribed to Abu'd-Darda', but is also recorded by as-Suyuti, *al-Jami' as-Saghir*, 3/318, as a *hadith* related by Ibn 'Asakir. Al-Hakim records a similar *hadith* but with different wording in *al-Mustadrak*, 4/579, and ascribes it to Abu'd-Darda'.
9. Ad-Dhahabi, *Kitab al-'Ibar*, 1/109.
10. *Sahih*, al-Hakim, *Kitab al-Ahwaal*, 4/578.