



## TWENTY

### THE LIFE OF THIS WORLD

The disapproval of this world that appears in the Book and the Hadith is not directed at its time aspect, which is the alternation of night and day until the Day of Judgement. Allah, the Mighty and Glorious, has provided them so that people who wish to do so can invoke His Name and be thankful during them.

It was once said, "The night and the day are like two treasure-chests, so be careful of what you do in them." Mujahid said, "Not a day passes which does not say, 'O son of Adam, I have come to you today and I will never come again, so be careful of what you do during my stay.' When the day has passed, it is folded up and sealed, never to be reopened by anyone until Allah reopens it on the Day of Judgement." There is a poem that goes:

Life is nothing other than a road  
that leads to the Garden,  
or to the Fire.

Its nights are a man's workshop,  
and its days are his market place.

So time is the servant's capital.

The Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever says, 'Exalted is Allah and His are the Blessings', will have a palm tree planted for him in the Garden." <sup>1</sup>

Consider how many palm trees a time waster misses the opportunity of planting. A righteous man used to say to his guests who stayed too long, "Don't you want to leave? The angel of the sun never tires of pulling it." A man once told an *'alim*, "Stop, so that I can talk to you!" The *'alim* replied, "First stop the sun!"

The disapproval of this world that appears in the Book and the Hadith is not directed at its space aspect either, which is the earth and all its mountains, and seas, and rivers, and the treasures within it. All these are Allah's blessings for His servants, so that they can make use of them, and contemplate them and thereby recognise the Oneness and Greatness of their Maker, Exalted is He. The disapproval is directed at the actions of the sons of Adam in this world, most of which do not have any good consequences; for as the Glorious and Exalted says:

◀ Know that the life of this world is only playing about and idle talk and showing off and boasting amongst yourselves, and competing in wealth and children. It is like a crop after rain whose growth pleases the farmer – but then it dries up, and you see it turn yellow, and then it becomes straw. (57:20) ▶

In this life, the sons of Adam' are divided into two types: The first type denies the existence of an abode which awaits Allah's servants after this life is over, where reward and punishment are experienced. These are the ones about whom Allah says:

◀ Surely those who do not look forward to their meeting with Us, but are pleased with the life of this world and feel secure in it, and those who do not pay attention to Our signs – their abode will be the Fire, because of what they used to earn. (10:7-8) ▶

Such people have only one concern, which is to enjoy life and pursue all its pleasures – and the Exalted says:

◀ And those who reject take it easy and eat like cattle eat – and the Fire will be their abode. (47:12) ▶

The second type are those who accept that there is an abode after death, where there is both reward and punishment. These are the ones who follow the Messengers. They fall into three categories: those who are unjust to themselves, those who are mean to themselves, and those who are swift in doing good deeds, by the will of Allah.

**First**, those who are unjust to themselves form the majority. Most of them are content with the blossoms of this life and its pleasures, helping themselves to them and using them in ways which Allah has not commanded. The world appears to them to be their greatest concern, and with it they are satisfied; they only love and hate for its sake.

These are the people who play about and chatter and are diverted by the attractions of this world. Although they may believe in the *akhira* in a general way, they have not discovered what this life is meant for, nor are they aware that it is only a stopping place where provisions for the final journey can be acquired.

**Second**, those who are mean to themselves are those who take what is permitted from this world and fulfil their duties in it, but who then pursue what lies beyond these duties for the sake of their own pleasure and in order to enjoy the delights of this world.

Such people will not be punished for doing so, but their pleasure seeking will result in their rank being diminished.

Umar ibn Al-Khattab, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "If it had not been for the fact that my station in the

Garden might be diminished, I would have imitated you in your life of ease; but Allah has warned some people by saying:

◀ You squandered the good things that you had in the life of the world, and you sought contentment in them. (46:20) ▶”

Third, those who are swift in doing good deeds are the ones who understand what this world is meant for, and they act accordingly. They know that Allah has only put His servants in this world in order to see which of them have the best actions:

◀ Surely We have put what is on the earth as a glittering show so that We may test them, as to which of them have the best actions. (18:7) ▶

This means that Allah has put what is on the earth in order to test us, to see who is going to avoid the pleasures of this world and look for success in the next world, for:

◀ And surely We shall turn what is on it into a heap of dust. (18:8) ▶

Those who race to do good deeds only take from this world whatever provisions are necessary for the journey. The Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, “What have I to do with this world? As regards this world, I am like a rider who rests under the shade of a tree, and then continues his journey and leaves it.”<sup>2</sup>

The Prophet ﷺ also told ibn Umar, “Be in this life as if you were a stranger or a wayfarer.”<sup>3</sup>

Whenever the intention behind taking pleasure in what is *halal* is the obedience and worship of Allah, then the enjoyment of such pleasures is regarded as an act of obedience for which the servant is rewarded.

As Mu'adh ibn Jabal, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "I look forward to Allah's reward for the time which I spend asleep, just as I look forward to it for the time which I spend awake." 4

Sa'id ibn Jubair said, "The provisions of arrogance and pride are what distract you from the *akhirah*. The provisions that do not distract you are the ones which you need – in order to reach what is better than the provisions themselves."

Yahya ibn Mu'adh said, "How can I not love this world in which I have been blessed with sustenance that gives me life, when I use this life for worship by means of which I can earn the reward of the Garden?"

Abu Safwan ar-Ra'ini was once asked, "What is the life of this world which is criticised in the Qur'an, and which those who are prudent should avoid?" He replied, "Everything that you do in this world with the intention of making a profit in this world is blameworthy, and everything that you do in order to profit in the next world has nothing to do with this world."

Al-Hasan said, "How sweet and good the life of this world is for the *mumin* – for without having to make too much effort, he takes his provision from it for the Garden; and how awful the life of this world is for the *kafir* and the *munafiq* – for they waste their nights and they take their provision from it for the Fire!"

Abu Musa related that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Whoever is in love with his life in this world damages his life in the next world, and whoever is in love with his life in the next world damages his life in this world – and you should prefer what lasts for ever to what is destined to vanish." 5

Awn ibn Abdullah said, "This life and the next life hang in the balance in the heart as if on scales. Whichever

one predominates, the other becomes lighter and less significant." Wahab said, "This life and the next life are like a man with two wives. If he pleases one he incurs the wrath of the other."

Abu'd-Darda said, "If you swear to me that a certain man is the most God-fearing amongst you, I will swear to you that he is the best amongst you."

Abdullah ibn Mas'ud addressed some people saying, "You have undertaken more good actions than the companions of the Messenger of Allah ﷺ ever did, but they are still better than you are because they turned away from worldly pleasures and gains." <sup>6</sup>

### *The Harm in Love for this World*

Imam Ahmad wrote, on the authority of Suffian, that Jesus the son of Mary, peace be on them, used to say, "Love for this world is the root of all evil, and having money is a serious illness." He was asked, "What ill effects does it have?" He replied, "Whoever has it is never safe from pride and self-delusion." They said, "What if someone is safe from these defects?" He said, "His being preoccupied with doing good will distract him from the remembrance of Allah, Glorious and Mighty is He." <sup>7</sup>

Love for this world is what fills the Fire, while doing without the pleasures of this world is what fills the Garden. Being intoxicated with love for this world is more disastrous than being intoxicated by alcohol, because a person who is drunk with this world only finally comes to his senses in the darkness of his grave.

Yahya ibn Muadh said, "The life of this world is the wine of *shaytan*, and whoever is intoxicated by it only wakes up once he is amongst the hordes of the dead, lamenting among the losers."

The least of its evils is that it distracts man from the remembrance and love of Allah. Whoever is distracted by his wealth is a loser. If the heart is distracted from the remembrance of Allah, then *shaytan* takes up residence in it and directs it towards whatever he wishes. When *shaytan* makes a heart familiar with the ways of evil, he prompts it to do a few good deeds in order to delude its owner into thinking that he is, on the whole, a doer of good.

Ibn Mas'ud said, "Each and every person in this world is like a guest and his wealth is only on loan. The guest leaves and the loan is eventually repaid." <sup>8</sup>

It has been said that love for the life of this world is the root of all evils, for it ruins people's faith in so many ways:

**First**, love for it leads to over-emphasising its importance – when it is insignificant in the sight of Allah. It is one of the greatest wrong actions to attach importance to what Allah considers trivial.

**Second**, Allah has condemned it. He dislikes and disapproves of it, except for whatever it contains that is duly His. Whoever loves what Allah condemns, dislikes and disapproves of, has left himself open to confusion and temptation, as well as to His disapproval and anger.

**Third**, a person who loves this world makes the pleasures and achievements of this life his goal. In order to acquire them he will utilise the very ways and means which in fact Allah has provided for him in order to lead to Him and to the *akhirah*. Such a person rebels against what Allah intended him to strive to achieve: he makes the means an end in itself, and uses the means that should lead to the *akhirah* to acquire the pleasures of this world.

This is a complete perversion of what these means were intended for, which indicates a most perverted heart. Allah, the Most Exalted, says:



◆ As for whoever desires the life of this world and its glitter, We shall repay them for what they did in it, and in this they will not be wronged. These are the ones for whom there is nothing in the next world but the Fire; whatever they attempt in it is in vain, and everything they used to do is wasted. (11:15-17) ▶

There are many *ahadith* to this effect. One of them was transmitted by Abu Huraira who said, "I heard the Messenger of Allah, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, say, 'The first of men to be judged on the Day of Judgement will be a man who died as a martyr. He will be brought forward and Allah will ask him to recount His blessings, and so he will recount them. Allah will say, "What did you used to do?" The man will say, "I fought for You until I died a martyr." Allah will say, "You have told a lie. You fought so that you would be called a brave warrior, and so you were called." Orders will be given against him and he will be dragged face downwards and thrown into the Fire.

'Then a man will be brought forward who acquired knowledge and passed it on, and who recited the Qur'an. He will be brought before Allah Who will ask him to recount His blessings, and so he will recount them. Then Allah will ask, "What did you used to do?" He will say, "I acquired knowledge and passed it on, and I recited the Qur'an, seeking Your pleasure." Allah will say, "You have told a lie. You acquired knowledge so that you would be called a scholar, and you recited the Qur'an so that it might be said that you were a *qari*, and so you were called." Then orders will be given against him and he will be dragged face downwards and thrown into the Fire.

'Then a man will be brought forward whom Allah had made abundantly rich and to whom He had granted every kind of wealth. He will be brought forward and Allah will ask him to recount his blessings, and so he will recount them. Then Allah will ask, "What did you used to do?" He will say, "I spent money in every way in which You wished it to be spent." Allah will say, "You are lying. You did this so that it might be said that you were a generous man, and so it was said." Then Allah will give the order and he will be dragged face downwards and thrown into the Fire.'" 9

In this *hadith* we can see how it was love for the life of this world that deprived these three people of reward and rendered their actions worthless, making them the first to enter the Fire.

Fourth, love for the life of this world also makes the servant become preoccupied with it and prevents him from undertaking actions which would benefit him in the next world. There are many different kinds of people in this category: there are those whose preoccupation with this life distracts them from Islam and its laws altogether; those who are distracted from many of their religious duties; those who are distracted from any duty that hinders their plans and schemes to acquire it; those who are distracted from fulfilling their religious obligations at the right times and in the right manner, thereby wasting their time and neglecting their duties; those whose hearts are too preoccupied with this life to be able to give their full attention to their worship when they fulfil their religious duties; and those whose hearts are not devoted to Allah, so that their fulfilling these duties is only an outward show without any inward sincerity – and these are the least common type from amongst the lovers of this life.