

56 *The Purification of the Soul*

6. *Sahih*, Ibn Ma'jah, *Kitab al-Jana'iz*, 1/524; Abu Da'wud, *Kitab as-Salah*, 3/370; Ahmad, *al-Fath ar-Rabbani*, 6/9. Al-Hakim said, "It is *sahih*," in his *Kitab al-Jumu'a*, 1/278.

7. Muslim, *Kitab as-Salat*, 4/123.

TEN

PRAYING AT NIGHT

Allah says:

◀ Surely your Lord knows that you stand (in prayer) two thirds of the night, or a half of it, or a third of it. (73:20) ▶

And also:

◀ And those who spend the night before their Lord, in prostration and standing. (25:64) ▶

The Prophet ﷺ said, "The best prayer, after the obligatory prayers, is the night prayer." ¹

Aisha, may Allah be pleased with her, said, "Between the *'isha* prayer and the *fajr* prayer, the Prophet, may Allah bless him and grant him peace, used to pray eleven *rak'at*. He used to give the *taslim* after every two *rak'at* and then pray one *witr rak'a*." ²

Ibn Mas'ud related that mention was made before the Prophet ﷺ, of someone who sleeps throughout the night until dawn (without praying). The Prophet ﷺ said, "That is a man in whose ears *shaytan* urinates." ³

The Prophet ﷺ said, "When any one of you sleeps, *shaytan* ties three knots at the back of your head. On each knot he repeats and exhales the following words, 'The night is long, so stay asleep'. If you wake up and remember Allah, one knot is undone; and if you do *wudu*, the second knot is

undone; and if you pray, the third knot is undone, and you get up in the morning full of energy and with a clear heart. Otherwise, you get up feeling lazy and with a muddled heart.”⁴

Ibn Mas’ud used to get up when other people were asleep, and a continuous humming, like the humming of bees, could be heard coming from him until daybreak.

Al-Hasan was once asked, “How is it that those who stay up at night have the most attractive faces?” He replied, “Because they are on intimate terms with the Merciful, and He robes them in some of His light.”

He also said, “A man commits a sin and so (because of it) he is deprived of staying up at night.”

A man once said to a righteous man, “I am unable to keep on staying up at night; give me a remedy.” The righteous man said, “Do not disobey Him during the day and He will keep you up, between His hands, at night.”

It has been transmitted that Suffian ath-Thawri said, “I was once deprived of staying up at night for five months because of a sin that I had committed.”

Ibn al-Mubarak said:

When the night is completely dark,
it finds them staying up in the night.

Fear has chased away their sleep so they stay up,
while those who feel secure in this life quietly sleep on.

Abu Sulaiman said, “The people of the night are more content with their staying up at night than the people who play are with their play. Were it not for the night, I would not have liked to continue living in this world.”

Ibn Al-Munkadir said, “Only three pleasures remain in this life: staying up at night, meeting one’s brothers, and doing the obligatory prayers in *jama’a*.”

Notes

1. Muslim, 8/54.
2. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab al-Witr*, 2/478; Muslim, *Kitab al-Musafirin*, 6/16.
3. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab at-Tahajjud*, 3/28; Muslim, *Kitab al-Musafirin*, 6/63.
4. Al-Bukhari, *Kitab at-Tahajjud*, 3/24; Muslim, *Kitab al-Musafirin*, 6/65.

ELEVEN

DOING WITHOUT THE PLEASURES OF THIS WORLD

Abu'l-Abbas as-Sa'idi said, "A man came to the Prophet ﷺ and said, 'O Messenger of Allah! Guide me to such an action that when I do it, Allah will love me and the people will also love me.' He said, 'Be detached from this world and then Allah will love you, and do not be attached to what people have and then the people will love you.'"¹

This *hadith* shows that Allah loves those who live simply in this life. It has been said that if having love for Allah is the best state to be in, then living simply is the best condition to be in.

Living simply means that you should restrain your desire for worldly things in the hope of receiving something better instead. In order to achieve this more easily you should first realise that the things which people yearn for in this world are in fact worthless when compared with what we hope for in the next world.

If we know that what Allah has will remain and that the life to come is better and more lasting, then we realise that the life of this world is really like a piece of ice left out in the sun – it soon melts and vanishes. The *akhira*, however, essentially never vanishes. The desire one has to exchange this life for the one to come is strengthened by the certainty that there is no comparison between this life and the next.

In the Qur'an we find this world and the next world described in the following terms:

◀ Yes, you prefer the life of this world, but the next world is better and more lasting. (87:16-17) ▶

And also:

◀ You desire the attractions of this world, but Allah desires the next world for you. (8:67) ▶

And also:

◀ And they are happy with the life of this world, but the life of this world is small comfort compared to the next world. (13:26) ▶

The *ahadith* which scorn worldly goods and describe how worthless they are in the sight of Allah are many:

Jabir ibn Abdullah reported that the Messenger of Allah ﷺ happened to walk through the market place. Some people were gathered on either side of him. There he came across a dead goat with very short ears, of which he took hold, saying, "Who among you would like to have this for a *dirham*?" They said, "We would not even like to have it for nothing, for it is of no use to us." He said, "Would you like to have it for free?" They said, "By Allah, not even if it were alive, because its ears are so short; and now it is also dead." Thereupon the Messenger of Allah ﷺ said, "By Allah, this world is more insignificant in the sight of Allah than this is in your eyes." ²

It has been related by Ibn Shaddad al-Fahri that the Prophet ﷺ said, "This world, in comparison with the world to come, is the same as if one of you were to put his finger in the ocean. Consider how much you would have when you pulled it out." ³

It has been related by Ibn Sahl ibn Sa'ad that the Prophet ﷺ said, "Had the world been worth even the wing of a gnat to Allah, He would not have even given a drink of water from it to a *kafir*." ⁴

Living simply means turning away from the things of this world because they are so worthless. You do not bother with them and remain detached from them.

Yunus ibn Maisarah said, "Being detached from this world does not mean that you should forbid what Allah has permitted, nor that you should squander money. Rather, it is a state in which you are more certain of what is in the hand of Allah than you are of what is in your own hands: your state in misfortune is the same as your state at other times; your attitude towards those who quite rightly criticise you and those who quite rightly praise you is the same."

He has explained this in terms of three stages, or stations, all of which are concerned with the heart rather than with physical action. This is why Abu Sulaiman used to say that you should not call anyone a *zahid*.

The **first** station is that of a servant who is more certain of what is in the hand of Allah than he is of what is in his own hands. This station arises from a healthy and strong conviction.

Abu Hazim az-Zahid was asked, "What is your wealth?" He said, "Two kinds of wealth dispel all fear of poverty: trust in Allah and not being attached to what people have." He was asked, "Don't you fear poverty?" He said, "How can I fear poverty when my Lord owns all that is in the heavens and on the earth and all that is between them and all that is beneath the ground?"

Al-Fudayl said, "The essence of living simply is being content with Allah, Mighty and Exalted is He."

He also said, "The one who is content is the one who lives simply, and it is he who is rich. The one who has attained real faith, who trusts in Allah in all his affairs, and is content with what He provides for him, and remains unattached to the creation, out of fear and hope – and by so doing finds that pursuing worldly gains is not worthwhile – has attained the benefits of simplicity. He is the richest of people, even though he may not possess a thing in the world."

As Ammar said, "Death is teacher enough, true faith is wealth enough, and worship is action enough."

Ibn Mas'ud said, "True belief is not trying to please people by doing things which would bring Allah's displeasure on you; and not envying anyone for what Allah has given him; and not blaming anyone for what Allah has not given you. For Allah's provision is not attracted simply by a man's being careful, nor is it deflected by another man's malice. Allah, with His Justice, Omniscience and Wisdom, has made delight and joy the companions of faith and contentment, and despair and sorrow the companions of distrust and dissatisfaction."

The **second** station is that of a servant who, if he is afflicted by some misfortune – like the death of a child, or the loss of wealth or goods – desires the reward for his accepting the loss more than his recovering what has been lost. This is also a consequence of having complete trust. Ali, may Allah be pleased with him, said, "Whoever lives simply in this world finds misfortunes easy to endure." Some of our predecessors used to say, "If it were not for the misfortunes of this world, we would arrive in the next world completely destitute."

The **third** station is that of a servant who regards praise and criticism equally. If the world occupies a place of im-

portance in his heart, then he would prefer praise to blame, which in turn might make him abandon much good for fear of being censured, and do many bad things in his quest for praise. This means that in his heart other people's opinions about him are of no importance to him – indeed what is important to him is his love of the Truth and his earning Allah's good pleasure.

Ibn Mas'ud said, "True faith is not trying to please other people by doing things which are displeasing to Allah." Allah has praised those who fight in His way, without worrying about the opinions of others. Al-Hasan said, "The person who lives simply is the one who finds it in his heart to say that someone else has surpassed him in it." *Imam Ahmad*, I believe, was once asked whether a wealthy man could live simply. He said, "Yes, if he is not pleased when his wealth increases, nor sad when it decreases, then he can."

Ibrahim ibn Adham said, "There are three types of *zuhud*, or doing without: the first is as a result of having to do so, the second of praiseworthy action, and the third of being careful. Avoiding *haram* things is obligatory, avoiding things which are *halal* may be praiseworthy, and avoiding things which are doubtful is prudent."

Any person who exchanges the things of this world for the next world is doing without something in this life and so we can call him a *zahid*, but doing without can also involve enjoying something in this world at the expense of the next world; in this case it is something in the *akhira* with which one is doing without.

A righteous man was once told, "You do without much more than I do." The man replied, "It is you who are more extreme in this, for I deny myself things in a life which will not last and whose rewards are uncertain, while you have