

THE PROPHET AND THE ALCOHOLIC

Rating: 4.8

Description: Prophet Muhammad did not marginalize the sinful members of society and this makes it easier for the sinful to overcome their mistakes.

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There was a man named Abd Allah who  loved God and His Messenger so much that the Prophet, may the mercy and blessings of God be upon him, had to declare about him: **"Indeed, he loves God and His Messenger."**^[1]

This man named Abd Allah so loved the Prophet that he used to enjoy presenting the Prophet with any delicacy that came to Medina, so when any merchant caravan arrived with something like butter or honey, he would take it for him as a gift. Later, when the seller demanded payment, Abd Allah would bring the seller to the Prophet and say: "Give this man its price."

The Prophet would then say: "Didn't you give it to me as a gift?"

Abd Allah would say: "Yes, O Messenger of God; however I cannot afford to pay for it!"

The two of them would laugh together and then the Prophet would have the merchant paid.

This was the type of close and jovial relationship that Abd Allah and the Prophet had with each other.

It remains to be said that Abd Allah was an alcoholic. He would often become so drunk that he would be found staggering in the streets of Madinah; he would be brought in that condition before the Prophet to be sentenced for public drunkenness, and each time, the Prophet would prescribe that the set punishment be carried out. This was a common occurrence.

After Abd Allah had departed from one of these all too frequent punishments, one of the Companion's said in disdain: "May God curse him! How often he is summoned for this!"

The Prophet rebuked that Companion, saying: "Do not curse him, for I swear by God, he loves God and His Messenger."^[2] He then added: "Do not help Satan against your brother."

We can learn a lot from the Prophet's attitude.

We should reflect first upon the close and affectionate relationship this Companion enjoyed with the Prophet, in spite of this Companion's shameful fault. Though the Prophet was who he was, it did not prevent him from relating to Abd Allah in a familiar manner, of being his friend, and joking with him.

This shows us that in the society envisioned by the Prophet people were not segregated into the pious and the sinners, with social interactions debarred between the two groups. Rather, it was a unified, inclusive society, where each person could be at a different level of piety. Some were at the forefront of righteousness, some were moderately pious, while others were prone to fall into sin. However, no one lived aloof from society, nor was anyone shunned. Everyone remained part of society.

This inclusiveness meant that when some members of society fell into error, the effects of their mistakes were limited and short-lived. No one was marginalized, so there was no chance for sin to grow in society. When anyone made a mistake, there was no end of brotherly support from others in society who were more than willing to lend a helping hand and get that person back on track.

Another lesson the Prophet's conduct shows us is the importance of maintaining a positive outlook. In spite of the fact that Abd Allah was frequently being summoned before the Prophet for public drunkenness, the Prophet drew everyone's attention to one of Abd Allah's positive qualities – that he loved God and His Messenger. Yet, when we think about this particular quality, we find that it was not something unique for Abd Allah, but a quality that all believers have in common. Nevertheless, the Prophet chose to praise Abd Allah for this reason. In doing so, the Prophet could cultivate, encourage, and strengthen this quality in everyone. He also reminded them that if someone slips up, that person's faith and love of God is still intact.

We can imagine how Abd Allah must have felt when he learned that the Prophet said this about him. He must certainly felt it as an immense honor to have God's Messenger declare this about him. It served to help him overcome his bad habit and gave him hope, by confirming that his essential being was not permanently marred by the mistakes.

It was the Prophet's way to point out the good qualities of those who sinned and fell into error. We sometimes forget this, and treat past sins as impenetrable barriers to future good. A person who commits a shameful deed is never allowed to live it down, but is instead often remembered only for that sin. We need to realize that this helps Satan to overpower the sinner and drive that person to sin again. The Prophet's approach, by contrast, inspires virtue. When reminded of Abd Allah's frequent drunkenness, he reminded his Companions of the person's great love for God and His Messenger.

Finally, Abd Allah had done something that was clearly wrong. There can be no doubt that Abd Allah committed a sin. Consuming intoxicants is a major sin, and the Prophet cursed intoxicants. Nevertheless, after the Prophet had the prescribed sentence carried

out upon Abd Allah for his public drunkenness, he did not seek anything further against him. He saw any further reprimand to be helping Satan against the man. Rather, he turned everyone's attention to his merits that compensate for his shortcomings.

This story should guide us to reflect upon our own condition, when we consider how harshly we sometimes behave in our disagreements with others whose transgressions are far less serious or certain than Abd Allah's were. Sometimes, it is merely our opinion that someone has done something wrong and the matter is really open to other points of view, but we still have no hesitations about railing against our opponents with everything in our verbal arsenal. How far this is from the example set by the Prophet, who when faced with a person committing an obvious sin, still found it better to speak good about that person. He still kept up his good relationship with that person, despite his shortcomings.

The Prophet's conduct with Abd Allah is an excellent example for us, full of valuable lessons regarding not only how we should treat one another, but how society can foster social bonds that are strong, wholesome, and nurturing, bonds which can serve to dissuade people from falling into sin.

Footnotes:

[1]

Saheeh Al-Bukhari

[2] *Saheeh Al-Bukhari*

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